

# **Setting the Agenda through Twitter: Assessing News Framing of Events in Nigeria's 2019 Electioneering**

**Ahmad Muhammad Auwal**

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Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

---

Prof. Dr. Ali Hakan Ulusoy  
Acting Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication and Media Studies.

---

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Agah Gümüř  
Chair, Department of Communication  
and Media Studies

We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication and Media Studies.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Metin Ersoy  
Supervisor

---

Examining Committee

1. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Metin Ersoy

---

2. Assoc. Prof. Tutku Akter Gökafan

---

3. Asst. Prof. Dr. Aysu Arsoy

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## ABSTRACT

Whereas the evolution of interactive media facilitates the rise of user-generated content thus introducing changes into the practices of political communication and journalism at large, only a few studies were conducted to uncover how these developments increasingly influence the news practices of mainstream media. However, little or none of the studies were conducted in the Nigerian context. Accordingly, this study based its construct on the agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing hypotheses to examine how political messages with built-in frames from the Twitter handles of two presidential candidates: Muhamadu Buhari of the APC and Atiku Abubakar of PDP set the news agenda for mainstream media thereby influencing public perceptions about issues in the period of 2019 electioneering in Nigeria. Based on a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative content analysis of *n*300 tweets from these candidates and *n*300 news content published via the handles of *Daily Trust*, *Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers, the study reveals that the mainstream media relied on the tweets as one of their major sources of information about the electioneering activities of the candidates, thus making similar issues become dominant in both the politicians' agendas and the news agenda of the mainstream media during the period. Besides, the mainstream media contributed meaningfully in emphasizing the narrative frames in the candidates' agenda through the style of presentation of candidates' tweets in the news. The study concludes by recommending the need for improved professionalism on the part of journalists and the media, and increased media literacy skills on the part of Nigerian audiences.

**Keywords:** Agenda-building, Agenda-setting, Framing, Mainstream media, Nigeria, Participatory media, Political news, Twitter.

## ÖZ

Katılımcı platformların evrimi, kullanıcı katkılı içeriğin artmasını kolaylaştırmakta, böylece genel olarak siyasal iletişimin ve gazeteciliğin uygulamasında değişiklikler ortaya koymasına rağmen, söz konusu gelişmelerin ana akım medyadaki haber uygulamaları üzerindeki etkisinin nasıl artış gösterdiği konusuna ışık tutan sadece sayılı miktarda çalışma mevcuttur. Var olan çalışmaların ise çok azı veya hiçbiri, Nijerya bağlamında yer almaktadır. Dolayısıyla söz konusu çalışma, iki başkan adayının (APC'den Muhamadu Buhari ve PDP'den Atiku Abubakar) Twitter üzerindeki siyasi mesajlarının, yaygın medyadaki haber gündemini nasıl belirlediklerini, gündem belirleme, gündem yaratma ve hipotez çerçeveleri kullanarak incelendi. Buna ek olarak, toplumun Nijerya 2019 Seçim Kampanyası sürecindeki siyasi konular hakkındaki algısının söz konusu süreçte nasıl etkilendiği incelenmektedir. Adı geçen adayların Twitter'da paylaştığı *n*300 tweet ve *Daily Trust*, *Punch* ve *Vanguard* Gazeteleri'nin paylaştığı *n*300 haber içerikli Twitter paylaşımı hem nicel hem de nitel çözümleme metotları ile incelenmektedir. Söz konusu çalışma, adayların seçim kampanyaları kapsamında gerçekleştirdikleri etkinlikler içerisinde en başta yer alan kaynaklardan birinin Twitter paylaşımları olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla, her iki politikacının gündemlerinde ve seçim süreci boyunca yaygın medyanın haber gündemlerinde benzer yöntemlerle paylaşımlar yapma eğiliminin baskın olduğu bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, adayların haberlerdeki Twitter paylaşımlarının sunulma şeklinin, adayların gündemlerinin anlaşılması konusunda olumlu yönde bir vurgu yarattığı gözlemlenmektedir. Söz konusu çalışma, gazeteciler ve medya açısından gelişmiş profesyonellik ihtiyacının

var olduđunu ve Nijeryalı kitlenin medya okuryazarlıđı becerilerinin geliřtirilmesi gerektiđi gerçeđini de ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Gündem yaratma, gündem belirleme, haber çerçevesi, ana akım medya, Nijerya, katılımcı medya, siyasi haberler, Twitter.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents: Ahmad Iro Umar and Hafsat Ahmad. I hope that this achievement is on the way to fulfilling the dreams that you had for me all those years when you chose to give me the best education you could.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Atiku Abubakar
ACN	Action Congress of Nigeria
AE	Anticorruption/Electoral Matters
AIT	Africa Independent Television
ANPP	All Nigeria People's Party
AP	Appraise narrative frame
APC	All Progressives Congress
APGA	All Progressive Grand Alliance
API	Application Programming Interface
AT	Attack narrative frame
CNN	Cable News Network
CPC	Congress for Progressive Change
DI	Direct presentation style
DT	<i>Daily Trust</i> newspaper
EP	Electioneering Period
ER	Economic Recovery/Diversification
IN	Indirect presentation style
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
MB	Muhammadu Buhari
$n$	Number of units in population subset
$N$	Sample in each population subset
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons
NPC	Nigerian Press Council

NPC	Northern People’s Congress
NTA	Nigerian Television Authority
PA	Partial presentation style
PDP	People’s Democratic Party
PE	Postelection Period
PP	Polling Period
PU	<i>Punch</i> newspaper
SE	Security issues
STV	Silverbird Television
UGC	User-Generated Content
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VG	<i>Vanguard</i> newspaper
VOA	Voice of America

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by contextualizing some of the changes presented to the practice of journalism by new media technologies and outlining the concerns that motivate the study. The chapter defines the research objectives and the questions to be addressed. It also outlines the limitations to the research and the important contributions made to the body of knowledge.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Explosion in the volume of user-generated content is one of the many advances brought by new media technologies that present both opportunities and challenges to the contemporary practice of journalism. The evolution of interactive media redefines journalism from the conventional and/or professional practice in the news room into a free-for-all practice that anyone may engage in. In other words, the presence of these emerging media technologies in the contemporary communication space has made members of the public actively involved in generating and spreading media content across a network of global users. This trend continuously impact on the style of presentation and quality of information content produced and disseminated at present which influence public perceptions and shape human emotions.

In a nutshell, interactive media platforms provide copious avenues for the audiences to contribute actively in producing and sharing different forms of media content

often referred to as “user-generated” which has the potential either consciously or unconsciously to shape the direction of public discourse on the cyberspace and the level of importance given to issues in the news coverage of mainstream media. A major research finding reveals that interactive media contribute enormously in generating traffic and attention to user-generated content which sometimes end up as misinformation (Nelson & Taneja, 2018). The sequence by which the comparative frequency of coverage given to subjects in the media determines the ordering of public awareness and ascription of importance to issues, is termed “agenda-setting” (McQuail, 2010). The agenda-setting is, however, not solely a function of the multiplicity of information and ideas spread through the media and the level of attention generated afterwards, but of the selection process and manner of presentation of issues to the audience which on the other hand shape their knowledge, opinions and attitudes about social realities. However, the process of picking certain features of a perceived truth to amplify and make them noticeable to encourage a specific problem description, underlying interpretation, moral assessment and solution recommendations through the media, is known as “framing” (Entman, 1993). Besides, what is learnt from the media is shaped by certain choices in the selection, emphasis and styles of presentation and representation of substances in the content disseminated (Findahl, 1998).

To this end, it is noteworthy that some of the effects created by framing and agenda-setting are predetermined in certain cases (such as election campaigns and propaganda), but are unnecessarily so in other cases (i.e. general news, etc.). However, the line between the two is very blurred (McQuail, 2007). Politicians, bloggers, political satirists and critics engage in message framing to strategically influence public perceptions and induce sympathy or hostility for or against some



individuals, political or social groups. This often leads to information distortion which also has some negative effects. For a political theory of framing, the more important point is that framing effects can have outsized political consequences as is the case with Nigeria and other diverse societies around the world (Entman, Matthes & Pellicano, 2009).

With the expansion of interactive media tools capable of reaching out to a worldwide audience, modern societies are experiencing power shift from a handful of media producers and operators to an era where almost half of all news consumers play an active role not only in gathering and analysing (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2018), but in sharing news about dramatic events in frames that favour their sensitivities. The growing phenomenon of a kind of practice known as “participatory journalism” and the presence of amateur content known as “user-generated” in news discourses prevailing within a functioning social setting, have been the essential trait of modern political and media cultures that are reshaping the profession of journalism and public expectations (McNair, 2009).

Cautious of the power of participatory media, actors in political communication utilize the platforms to influence public perceptions about themselves and policy issues thereby setting the news agenda for the mainstream media on the one hand, and shaping the direction of public debates on the other. In the United States of America for example, whatever President Donald Trump tweets on his Twitter handle becomes a topic of debate among citizens as well as topping the list of subjects featuring in the news by CNN, VOA, *New York Times*, etc. (Cillizza, 2019). Thus, leaders around the world are now embracing different interactive media platforms as viable tools to openly engage their citizens and mobilize support for

political ambitions and ideologies. A ranking report by the Digital Policy Council (2013) reveals that about 80% of world leaders have active social media presence predominantly on Twitter. This ratio is expected to have increased over the years.

Previous researches explore how young people become knowledgeable about contending issues via interactive media and why they prefer opinionated news formats on these platforms to news formats presented with journalistic objectivity (Marchi, 2012); how social networks were successfully used to spread misinformation, particularly in the U.S. 2016 presidential elections (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2017); how misinformation and satire websites add magnitude to an already volatile news atmosphere, and how online platforms play an agenda-setting role that is unique to the emerging media ecosystem (Guo & Vargo, 2018); and how participatory media are also responsive to the agendas of misinformation, but to a lesser degree (Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2018). However, studies on political communication in Nigeria mostly focus on evaluating the performance of media in the country's electoral process (Aghamelu, 2013); utilization of media machineries to influence voting choices during an election year (Olowojolu, 2016); the disequilibrium in frequency and direction of coverage given to contending political parties during electioneering (Jamila & Yakubu, 2018); and the utilization of new communication technologies in enhancing political awareness and participation on one hand, and the misuse of same to spitefully criticize, intimidate or discredit opposing groups thereby triggering ill feelings among the electorate on the other hand (Olabamiji, 2014).

In contrast, very few studies exist in Nigeria that examine how political actors use interactive media for strategic framing of messages to shape political narratives, thus

influencing public perceptions and the direction of political news coverage in the mainstream media especially during electioneering. In view of the need to understand how such trends are reshaping the practice of journalism and the implications of same on the democratic political and media cultures, the current study sets out to assess how the presidential candidates of two notable political parties in Nigeria: the All Progressives Congress, APC (ruling party) and the People's Democratic Party, PDP (leading opposition party) copiously utilized Twitter as a participatory platform to frame certain issues in the polity and lure public support or discredit political opponents, thereby influencing the news agenda of mainstream media during the period of 2019 election campaigns.

## **1.2 Motivation for the Study and Problem Statement**

Currently, a range of factors emanating from the expansion in media technologies are transforming the contemporary communications landscape. This development is increasingly raising questions about the credibility of journalism and the quality of content disseminated through various media platforms including the mainstream and emerging media. More worrisome is the "open-ended" character (McQuail, 2010) of participatory media which facilitates the rise of unprofessional news and information sources with no mechanisms to check the excesses of shared content. The interactive media does not only allows the sharing of user-generated content among like-minded users but with mainstream media outlets which are zealously incorporating message posts and tweets from diverse sources into professionally produced news, paving the way for the continuous flow of distorted information in the current news practice. Amidst the evolving technological changes, political actors continue to take advantage of the participatory media to influence public perceptions about policy issues by sharing messages embedded within frames that suit their individual

interests which could sometimes be misleading. In doing so, political actors contribute in building the agenda for mainstream media in terms of news coverage which in turn set the agenda for public debate and understanding of issues as framed in the news. As Demirsoy & Karakoç (2016) fittingly asserts, the agenda set by actors through participatory platforms can easily spread to different parts of the world with numerous users making extra contributions to reinforce the computer-generated agenda. This often leads to information distortion.

Misinformation, which occurs often in the process of message framing, has long existed in the practice of journalism but in a form different from what obtains in the present age of interactive communication technologies. Previously, the practice was embedded in biased reportage on the part of media which occurs when the account of facts gets distorted in the process of transmission, especially when news reporters and editors deal with influential news sources (e.g., political leaders) who try to dictate the tune of what reporters write (Hackett, 1984). In the conventional media setting, the presence of gatekeepers and other journalistic professional values play significant role in moderating the effects of misinformation on the profession and society at large. Today, misinformation has taken a more frightening dimension with individuals and political actors exploiting the excesses of interactive media to easily frame and spread messages than before. This has become problematic especially as individually-framed messages continue to find their ways into the news. In contributing to the numerous solutions to this problem, the current study advocates the need for improved professionalism through prudent adherence to socially responsible journalism on the part of practitioners, and the necessity of media literacy that enables the public to build the essential skills of inquiring and

contributing to the overall content of the media as a marketplace for the exchange of ideas.

During the period of 2019 electioneering in Nigeria, politicians utilized the participatory media, particularly Twitter to canvass for votes by showcasing their plans on how to address the key issues of security, anticorruption, electoral reform and economic recovery which dominated the public and political discourses. Two major contenders in the presidential race: Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were notable for tweeting political messages via their Twitter handles. Each time these candidates tweet a message about an issue in the polity, the issue becomes the trending topic of debate among Nigerians, taking equal magnitudes of featuring in the news. Accordingly, the concerns about politicians' tweets – which would inevitably contain in-built frames that suit the needs of sources – having the ability to set the agenda for news coverage about political events arise concurrently with questions about the credibility of news content published by mainstream media particularly via their social media handles. Few researches have been conducted with the view to understand the implications of the use of participatory media in spreading political messages and the incorporation of politicians' tweets into the mainstream news. Unfortunately, these studies concentrate on examining the influence of media coverage on the voting choices of Nigerians. The need to contribute towards resolving the identified problems by offering valuable recommendations to the industry practitioners and stakeholders in developing better practices motivate this study.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

The goal of this study is to improve the understanding of various changes introduced to news industry in the age of emerging media, basing in the context of agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing. The study builds on prior researches by extending attention to examining how tweets from political actors build the news agenda for mainstream media in addition to influencing public debates on the cyberspace. Precisely, the study has the following sub-objectives:

1. To examine whether tweets from the two major presidential candidates in Nigeria's 2019 electioneering coincide with the news content published via the Twitter handles of the selected news media.
2. To ascertain the dominant issues that featured in the candidates' tweets and news content published via the handles of the selected news media.
3. To understand the style of presentation of candidates' tweets in news content published via the handles of the selected news media.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

In accomplishing the objectives of this study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. In the period of 2019 electioneering, what is the relationship between tweets from the contenders and the news content published via the Twitter handles of selected news media?
2. Among the issues that featured in the candidates' tweets and news content published via the handles of the selected news media, which is the dominant?
3. What are the dominant narrative frames in candidates' tweets about contending issues during the 2019 electioneering?

4. Within the period under review, what is the style of presentation of candidates' tweets in the news published via the Twitter handles of the selected news media?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of research on the novel changes introduced by new media technologies into the practice of journalism and political communication in particular. It will also provide insights for further research on how the explosion in the volume of user-generated content build and set the news agenda for mainstream media, in addition to shaping public perception about issues through framing. The findings from this study will be valuable to practicing journalists as well as stakeholders in the media regulatory sector in developing better practices and tools for constraint management.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

It will be a futile effort to study the many news media in Nigeria that reported the events of the 2019 electioneering among the seventy-three presidential candidates who participated in the process, especially where time, cost and energy are considered as constraints. Consequently, this study is limited to the analysis of issues that featured in the tweets from the Twitter handles of Muhammadu Buhari as presidential candidate of APC and Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, in addition to the coverage of same in the news content published via the Twitter handles of *Daily Trust*, *Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The period spans from November 18, 2018 to February 28, 2019, covering the official date for commencement of campaigns, the election and post-election periods. Findings from the study may be generalized in Nigeria, but may not be in other parts of the world because there are different models

of journalism practice that are shaped by societal values and other sociopolitical factors.

## **1.7 Operational Definition of Terms**

To put the study in proper perspective, it is necessary to define terms that are central to the subject matter. The aim is to operationalize the usage of terms in this study.

### **Agenda-setting**

The notion of ‘agenda-setting’ originated from McCombs and Shaw (1972) who coined it to describe a phenomenon where the media, through their news content, dictate to the audience what issues are foremost in the day and what aspects of such issues should be perceived as the most important. This process, according to McQuail (2010) involves much of the devoted efforts and strategies employed in media production to grasp and retain audiences’ attention by stimulating their interest to specific issues. In this study, agenda-setting denotes the magnitude of attention given to issues in a candidate’s tweets through the style of presentation and frequency of coverage in the news.

### **Electioneering**

The term ‘electioneering’ denotes the activities that politicians and their supporters carryout in order to persuade people to vote for them or their political party in an election (Collins English Dictionary, 2019). This study adopts same definition with slight modifications, to reflect the activities that political actors undertake to attract public support or shape perceptions about themselves, their political parties and ideologies especially through communication platforms that enable the candidates and electorate to interact directly.



## **Framing**

In journalism, events are assigned significance by reference to specific news values connecting an incident to others with similar magnitude (McQuail, 2010). Technically referred to as ‘framing,’ this process involves selection and salience to delineate problems, identify causes, make ethical verdicts and recommend solutions through the use of textual devices such as words, background information, selecting specific visuals, referring to certain sources, etc. to emphasize an issue (Entman, 1993). The aim of framing is to give some perspective to predetermined substances of facts to meet the specific needs of sources as well as shaping the reality. This study contextualizes framing as the strategies employed by political actors and the media in presenting or shaping the reality about issues presented in the said tweets or news.

## **Participatory media**

The term ‘participatory media’ has been adopted in this work to refer to interactive media tools such as blogs, microblogs and online forums that support social interactions and allow audiences’ participation in news discussions and content production (Rheingold, 2008; Seth, 2008). This conceptualization is guided by the notion that the form of media being referred to in this context enable the active participation of the audience (political actors and the citizenry) in political dialogues, media content production and distribution. These are platforms that operate on web-based communication technologies that enable users to contribute actively in collecting, analysing and disseminating content, as well as interacting with others. The forms of content produced by different users of these platforms are known as user-generated content. However, the operational patterns of citizen or participatory journalism, citizen media and democratic media have been adjudged to share

similarities with the forms of media referred to as participatory in this study (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Knight & Gandomi, 2010). Thus, the usage of the term participatory media here denotes forms of interactive media such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, etc. that facilitate open dialogue among users, in addition to enabling the creation and distribution of different content including text, graphics and audiovisual materials in the form of posts, comments, tweets, etc. (Obar & Wildman, 2015; Zeitzoff, 2017). In the course of discussion, the terms: ‘alternative media,’ ‘digital media,’ ‘emerging media,’ ‘interactive media,’ ‘new media’ ‘online media’ and ‘social media’ will be used interchangeable in this study due to lack of consistency in the usage of the term ‘participatory media’ in the available literature.

### **User-generated content**

The term ‘user-generated’ or ‘user-created’ content denotes forms of media material: textual, visual or audiovisual created by unpaid contributors or amateur users of an online community and made accessible via interactive media platforms (Gallegos, 2016; Pixlee, 2019). User-generated content often has the potential to stimulate dialogue on numerous subjects among folks (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2015). In this study, user-generated content (UGC) is operationalized to imply such content as posts or tweets, re-tweets, comments or reactions emanating from political actors and other nonprofessional users of participatory or alternative media platforms.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the political history of Nigeria from the angle of political communication, reviews concepts and previous studies that are relevant to the subject matter. Moreover, agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing provide the theoretical grounding for placing the reviewed literature in the context of this study.

#### **2.1 Political History of Nigeria: A Look through the Lens of Political Communication**

There are many dimensions to reviewing the political history of Nigeria as a nation. First, it is important to note that Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa with a population of over 191 million (projected to increase to about 410 million by 2050) belonging to more than 250 ethnic groups who speak over 450 different languages (United Nations, 2017). Since the 2006 national census, the population has been growing by nearly 3 million persons yearly (Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013; National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2007).

Prior to the British conquest and colonization which lasted between 1901 and 1960, Nigeria was split into three independent regions and kingdoms (later amalgamated by the British in 1914) that were administrated by monarchs called *Sarkis* (emirs) in the north, *Obas* (kings) in the southwest, and *Ezes/Obis* (chiefs) in the southeast. Until now these regions are basically inhabited by the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo – politically designated as “major” ethnic groups in the country – who practice Islam,

Christianity and African traditional religions (Adegbija, 1997). Nigeria is a federation of thirty-seven states spread across six geopolitical zones comprising the North-central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, South-south and Southwest with Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory. The quest for political power especially at the federal level has always been a tussle among these ethnic groups and regions.

Nigeria is a nation rich in tradition and history of political leadership ranging from civil to many years of military regimes. However, this history would be deemed incomplete without the mentioning of contributing factors to the growth of media in the country's political development from independence to date. The expansion of modern means of communication in Nigeria is traceable to the publishing of the country's first newspaper, *Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba* in 1859 by a Presbyterian Church missionary, Rev. Henry Townsend. Although diverse perceptions exist about the purpose of establishing *Iwe Irohin*, Townsend's objective was to foster the outreach of Christianity at that time. It is unarguable that *Iwe Irohin* did not only play an important part in enlightening Nigerians about the ills of colonial administration but also in reawakening their political consciousness to resist colonial subjugations.

In Nigeria, political communication evolved in two phases: the colonial or nationalist era and the post-colonial or independence era. In the colonial or nationalist period, the media served as instruments in the national liberation effort to mobilize the people against colonial authorities. The press was more or less a protest and oppositional press in the hands of nationalists (Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011). This period also saw the evolution of political parties that later established different means of communication with regional and national outreach. Examples include the *West*

*African Pilot* founded in 1937 as the mouthpiece of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), the *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* established in 1939 for the Northern People's Congress (NPC), and the *Nigerian Tribune* established in 1949 for the Action Group. From the 1960 independence, political communication took a different dimension as political actors resort to using the media for self-aggrandizement and to propagate the ethnic resentment which later sowed seeds of discord and disintegration among the populace, leading to the politics of identity contestations (Ngoa, 2012). The rise of Internet and new media technologies later transformed the trends in political communication as different interactive media platforms are currently being utilized as democracy-enhancing and democracy-threatening communication tools.

For the purpose of this research, it is crucial to note that Nigeria has been a multiparty state since the return to democracy in 1999. There are 91 political parties currently registered in the country (INEC, 2019). Of all the parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) reigned longer at the federal and state levels between 1999 and 2015. In the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections for example, the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) was the foremost opposition party. By 2011, the opposition forces build up to include the ANPP, Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), etc. that secured few positions at the state and federal levels in the 2011 general elections. In 2013, the ACN, ANPP, CPC and factions from APGA and the PDP merged to form the All Progressives Congress (APC) – the biggest opposition party that won majority votes at the federal and state levels to unseat the PDP in the 2015 general elections. In the 2019 general elections contested by more than seventy political

parties, the APC retained the presidential office and lose some legislative and gubernatorial offices to the PDP and other opposition parties.

### **2.1.1 Structure of the Media in Nigeria**

Prior to discussing the sociopolitical role of the media in Nigeria, it is important to understand the structure of the media in terms of ownership and editorial policy. The development and operation of mass media in Nigeria cannot be understood outside the country's political and economic environment. Two major sectors exist in the media industry: print and broadcast. From inception to date, the ownership structure has also been between public and private.

In the early days of development of media in Nigeria the ownership was liberal in the print sector, as history has shown that the first newspaper to be published in the country was established by a missionary who utilized it to foster the outreach of Christianity, followed by nationalists who established different newspapers used in fighting against colonial subjugations. In contrast, the broadcast sector was under the total control and ownership of regional and national governments until 1992 when the sector was deregulated to allow private ownership. Until now, the ownership structure in both sectors is open to government and private investors. Even so, the print sector is still dominated by private/commercial ownership, and the opposite in the broadcast sector. However, the deregulation of broadcast sector in 1992 and the later transition to democratic rule in 1999 contributed greatly in fast-tracking the giant strides achieved by the media in terms of strengthening democracy in the country.

With specific reference to this study, it is apt to note that in 2015, Nigeria's Ministry of Information confirmed that there were over 294 newspaper publications operating

in Nigeria, most of which are small state or regional-based media companies owned by private individuals. Also, there are no reliable daily circulation figures, but it is glaring that the following 10 national dailies account for over 95 percent of daily circulation: *ThisDay*, *Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *Guardian*, *The Nation*, *BusinessDay*, *Nigerian Compass*, *The Sun* and *Nigerian Tribune* (OCLC Leadership, 2019).

The three newspapers used as sample for this study: *Daily Trust*, *Punch* and *Vanguard* have the same ownership structure as privately-owned newspapers. The *Punch* was founded in 1971 by two friends, James Aboderin from western Nigeria and Sam Amuka from the south. While the newspaper exists “to make profit and by doing so, seek to improve the lot of its owners and employees and also contribute its quota to the country’s economic development” (*Punch*, 2019), its editorial policy could also not be alienated from advancing the south/west ideology. The *Vanguard*, however, was established in 1984 by a veteran journalist, Mr. Sam Amuka from southern Nigeria. The aim of establishing *Vanguard* was to serve the people through unflinching commitment to free enterprise, the rule of law and good governance (*Vanguard*, 2019). The *Daily Trust* was established in 1998 as a national newspaper with wide readership across the country. Its management and editorial team consists of prominent individuals from northern Nigeria (*Daily Trust*, 2019). Even though it was not explicitly stated in its mission/vision, the editorial policy of the newspaper is likely to be in consonance with the ideology of northern Nigeria in terms of values.

As privately-owned, the three newspapers are commercially-oriented but a fundamental fact that must be put into consideration in understanding the structure of media in Nigeria particularly the print sector, is that most publications are owned by

group of companies and individuals from the south, and the publishing houses are mainly located in the southern part of the country. According to Jibo and Okoosi-Simbine (2003) this has influenced the nature of discourse in newspapers, noting that the Nigerian media often take a “North-versus-South position” when matters are being contested in the public arena (p.183) with the southerners more represented than the north. One reason for the locational skew is because the southern part of the country has more liberal laws compared to the northern part, which is under conservative sharia laws. Also, southerners are more educated than northerners (Jibo & Okoosi-Simbine, 2003).

## **2.2 Media as Sources of Information on Sociopolitical Issues**

Part of the general notions regarding the primary responsibilities of the media is to serve the populace with information about political, socioeconomic and other societal issues. The media, whether mainstream or participatory, serve the society in various ways. In fact, the development of the media has been affirmed to be an essential component in the formation of modern society (Thompson, 1995). The role of media has equally been argued to extend beyond the basic responsibilities of informing, educating and entertaining the populace, to include the efforts of sustaining democratic ethos by constantly defending human freedom as well as freedom of the press (Olusola, 2008).

In line with democratic ideals, the role of media as sources of knowledge is tied to the twin notions of “public’s right to know” and the famous status of media as “fourth estate of the realm” in a democratic setting (UNESCO, 1991). The status assigned to media as fourth estate of the realm is to strengthen the public’s right to know especially in connection with issues of governance and development of the



society. However, different constitutional provisions and statutory laws around the world recognize the fourth estate status within the power of the media to carry out the watchdog role of monitoring political elites and aspirants, exposing their limitations, and providing checks and balances to the other three estates or arms of government: the executive, judiciary and legislature (Akinwale, 2010). The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) is not an exception in recognizing this status for the media. It specifically stipulates that the agencies of mass media, including radio, televisions, the press, etc. shall at all times be free to uphold the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy as contained in Chapter II, Section 22 and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government including the executive, the legislature and judiciary to the people. Thus, UNESCO (2012) reaffirms that the media transform societies by empowering individuals with the information that enlighten their decisions to take charge of their destinies. Information is therefore crucial in the transformation of society by determining the path of its sociopolitical and economic endeavours. Aghamelu (2013) equally notes that any discourse about democracy without the right to exchange ideas is therefore empty.

One of the concerns that remain pertinent in studies about the fourth estate status or democratic role of media is how the media tend to balance the power struggle with other actors in the political process who would obviously want their individual interests to prevail over that of the social obligations of the media, and the effects of this process on the society. Gulati, Just and Crigler (2004) perhaps, clarify that in reviewing any study on media coverage of political events, it is apt to begin with the basic understanding that news is a construction of reality which signifies a continuing negotiation amongst actors in the political process. On the one side are

such actors as journalists, editors, and media owners; and contenders, campaign staffers, and party activists on the other side. To a lesser degree, the audience, public officeholders, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, interest groups, etc. also play an influential role in the news-making process (Gulati et al., 2004). As major stakeholders in the process, the media often “add something to every story they run in an attempt to amplify it” (Schudson, 2003, p.29). In the process of adding something or “bending the truth rather than breaking it” simply to amplify the news (Parenti, 1993, p.200), occasional bias, sensationalism, or inaccuracy which possibly will misinform the reading public occur. It is fitting, however, to understanding the pattern of media coverage of electioneering and other sociopolitical activities which is obviously part of the social responsibilities of the media as fourth estate of the realm in Nigeria.

### **2.2.1 Media Coverage of Electioneering in Nigeria**

Elections and electioneering activities as Pate (2015) succinctly explains, are interesting social events that the media cannot simply ignore, owing to their conventional obligation of informing, educating and mobilizing the populace for sustainable democracy and development. The controversies, conflicts, disagreements and tensions involved in these events which result in the power struggle among different actors (Pate, 2015), make them newsworthy and of significant interest to the media. Every election year in Nigeria is characterized by sequence of activities that required attention from the media in terms of coverage and advertising of the aspirants, their political parties and programmes. Moreover, the reporting of elections is one of the surveillance functions of the media through which the electorate are enlightened on the competence of the individual candidates vying for elective offices. In doing so, the media also warn the society of any looming danger regarding

the process of electing its leaders. The media, as always has been an important element in the organization and holding of all elections in Nigeria (Pate, 2015).

The dissemination of information about governance and political activities has been observed to be a major media event deliberately planned not only to attract the attention of voters to certain issues, but to also get their ballots (Okigbo, 1990). Because of the understanding that media messages can make or mar political careers and programmes by significantly influencing public opinion, political actors willingly invest huge sums in utilizing various media channels to provide the electorate with information about themselves and their programmes. On account of the saying that “he who pays the piper calls the tune,” politicians often make attempts to distort or meddle with the factual flow of information to get favorable coverage in the news (Ristow, 2010), thus stimulating the practice of biased, fictional or false news reporting which threaten the credibility and objectivity of journalism (Spence, 2008).

Earlier studies that examine the power of media to construct reality about political issues (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) and provide information to influence public perceptions were conducted in the context of election campaigns (McQuail, 2010). This produced the numerous ideas about communication effects, particularly through agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing processes. Lately, studies conducted in Nigeria pay attention to exploring the impact of political communication in the country’s electoral process with specific reference to media as sources of information that significantly influence the sociopolitical choices people make daily. While some of these studies devote too much attention to the influence of campaign messages on the audience which in most cases does not equate media

effects, they lack theoretical and empirical grounding in examining external forces that influence the news judgment of political activities by journalists, editors and the media. A review of some empirical and conceptual studies will aid the understanding of the identified literature gaps that motivate the current study.

As far back as 1990, a study by Okigbo (1990) argued that in any election year, the myriad of political messages that individual voters are daily exposed to provides a potentially bewildering competitive climate for opinion formation, attitude change and/or behaviour modification. Not only in news bulletins, but also through paid advertisements and interpersonal discussions, the individual voter seems to be drowning in a sea of political information, some of which must be structured in order to make sense of the usually highly inflationary election information (Okigbo, 1990).

Through a survey of 375 respondents chosen from a rural community in Nigeria and administered a 67-item questionnaire to discover their major sources of political information and influence, Okigbo (1990) reported that radio and relatives were the dominant sources of information on candidates and issues. Radio constituted the highest source (94.7%) for rural dwellers, because of its cheap price, portability and mode of presentation of programmes in vernacular languages easily understood by both the educated and illiterate. Interpersonal communication constitutes an important source of political information (84.7%) in rural communities. Next to these were political ads, candidates themselves, traditional rulers and newspapers. Other sources with less importance for the obvious reasons of unstable electricity, cost and low literacy level include television, telephones and magazines (Okigbo, 1990). If the era of 'new politics' in the United States is based on the power of television as a modern medium, Okigbo (1990) concluded, the Nigerian equivalence will be based

on the power of radio. With the influx of modern communication tools that facilitate the growth of new politics, however, the successful dissemination of political information subsequently relies on wide coverage by modern media, including television, magazines, Internet. Thus, modern political messages are deliberately planned not only to attract, but to ‘sell candidates’ to the electorate in manners not significantly different from positioning a new product through advertising (Okigbo, 1990).

A study which evaluates the performance of media in the Nigerian electoral process (Aghamelu, 2013) reaffirmed the rationality of assigning the fourth estate responsibility to the media, especially as the questions of educating, informing and mobilizing the populace have become central to realizing national objectives. The history of political developments in Nigeria generally affords the distinct opportunity for assessing the increasing roles of media in the political process.

Using a three-phase comparative phenomenological analysis, Aghamelu’s (2013) study first considered the statutory and moral foundation for the role assigned to media in politics and governance. It argued specifically that the environment within which the media operates in Nigeria signifies a background of liberalism, yet for a very long time, functioning within a regulated atmosphere. The many factors emanating from unfavourable regulatory policies since independence, through the years of military interregnum account for this style of performance (Aghamelu, 2013). Secondly, the study points out that since the attainment of independence, African societies followed the authoritarian path from regimes of eastern and central European societies in curtailing press freedom. Thus the denial of access to opposing voices in state-owned media and loyalty to the governments in control continue to

promote the inclinations which dragged the image of media through the mud. This decades-long scenario of unprofessionalism resulting from the practice of bias and sensationalism continue to bedevil the performance of Nigerian media. The widely held notion about journalism in Nigeria today is the “trend of distorting facts to meet the needs of those who own or control the media.” This therefore suggests “a verdict of irresponsible performance” on the part of the media (Aghamelu, 2013, pp.160-61).

In the third phase, as Aghamelu (2013) highlighted, the present status of the media as an “elitist media” (exclusively serving the needs of power elites and the harbingers of authority), does not augur well for the media, government and the Nigerian society. A number of factors both internal and external militate against the positive contributions of media through their reportage of electioneering activities. This has become “part of the problems of national integration,” as ethnic rivalry and the struggle to get big portion of the national cake are recurring political experiences in the country (Aghamelu, 2013, p.164-65). Vested interests of owners constitute great challenges to the media in keeping to the fundamental principles of balance and objectivity in their coverage of events. However, Aghamelu (2013) concluded that in a sense, it can be asserted that some improvements are noticeable in the performance of Nigerian media particularly in the coverage of electioneering activities since 1993. Yet, further improvement is needed.

In evaluating the extent of media’s performance as instruments for democratic consolidation or as tools for destabilizing the polity, Olowojolu’s (2016) study acknowledged that the media, as always, has been at the vanguard of agitation for electoral reforms in Nigeria. The role of the media stood vigorously against the dictatorial tendencies and inadequacies of the prolonged military juntas and even

after the return to democratic rule in 1999. The involvement of media has been remarkable in the electoral process by ensuring the continuous flow of information to sensitize the electorate about the impunities and abuses of power in successive democratic administrations through the 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections. The Nigerian media played this onerous role by beaming searchlights on the activities and policy implementation of the governments and subsequently informing the populace (Olowojolu, 2016).

Using the agenda-setting hypothesis to provide theoretical grounding for the study, Olowojolu (2016) observed that while the media remained dutiful in ensuring the successful transitions from one civil administration to another, some of the strategies adopted by contenders and certain media outlets particularly in the coverage of 2015 electioneering run contrary to the Electoral Act and portend the tendency of endangering societal peace. Television stations such as the AIT and STV aired some documentaries targeted at defaming the personalities of General Muhammadu Buhari (the leading opposition candidate at that time) and some ex-military leaders. In addition, the former governor of Ekiti State, Ayodele Fayose sponsored one of the most spiteful campaign advertisements on front pages of *The Sun*, *Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers on January 19, 2015 titled “Nigeria Be Warned.” These adverts contained images of three former Nigerian Heads of State from the North who died tragically in office while a question mark was placed on Buhari’s photograph as the next victim (Olowojolu, 2016, p.8). The study concluded that few months to the polls, the media gave daily reports of the activities of contending political parties which inspired keen interests in the minds of Nigerians at home and abroad about the outcome of the polls. The numerous events that became prominent in media coverage

as well as the topical issues discussed in the media influenced the voting behaviour of Nigerians to the advantage of the opposition candidate (Olowojolu, 2016).

Studies examining the frequency and tone of coverage given to the activities of contending political parties in Nigeria for example (Jamila & Yakubu, 2018) confirm that the pluralist theory of media ownership suggests that content are largely influenced by audiences' demands in the marketplace, providing them with what they want on the one hand, and journalists, editors, producers have a sense of professionalism which serves as a control mechanism against the potential abuse of the media on the other hand. Based on a content analysis of 60 news transcripts conducted between May 6, 2014 and April 10, 2015 from NTA's coverage of the 2015 presidential campaigns, Jamila and Yakubu (2018) found evidence of disequilibrium in the frequency of news coverage of the contending political parties. The tone of coverage was also suggestive of relative content censorship of campaign broadcast in terms of favouring the contending political parties. It is of critical professional concern, according to Jamila and Yakubu (2018, p.85), that NTA was overly bent in support of PDP (the ruling party then), while portraying other parties in weaker directions and frequency, thus revealing that the affiliation of media proprietors (either public or privately-owned) to political parties still influences the editorial independence of the media particularly in covering political events. The study concluded that during the 2015 electioneering, there was no equal access to coverage of political activities in the Nigerian media and this challenges the pluralist perspective of independent media whose content are to be shaped by the consuming public (Jamila & Yakubu, 2018, p.86).



It is quite pertinent to note that some factors such as actors' interests and news values consideration influence the pattern of media coverage of electioneering and other political activities. The interaction between these factors equally has some level effects on the society.

### **2.3 Political Actors as “Manipulators”: Exploring the Media-to-Source Relationship and Effects on Society**

Research on the relationship between journalists, media and their sources of information draws its root from journalistic inquiries about bias, power and influence in the news-making process. Basically, this relationship has long been illustrated as a process of struggle for control over public understanding and consent on issues, especially in the context of political communication. To understand this, we need to examine how communicative flows involve an ongoing struggle between different groups of players. Journalists and the media end up in a role of holding political leaders accountable to the society while political actors strive at all cost in defense of their individual interests. The power struggle here involves the ability not only to have one's interests conquer other similar interests, but also to prevent opposing interests from emerging. The interaction between these parties exemplifies a lasting, yet changing influence on society – the ability to direct the common understanding of culture (Berkowitz, 2009; Louw, 2001; Carah & Louw, 2015). However, the effect of this relationship on the media is known as “agenda-building,” resulting from the influence of information sources (e.g. politicians, societal institutions, etc.) on media's priorities in the coverage of events and issues (Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2016). The agenda-building is an extension of agenda-setting process that emerged as a theory for explaining how the struggle (by information sources) to have control over public opinion shapes the media's agenda in terms of coverage. To delineate

between agenda-building and agenda-setting, Ohl, Pincus, Rimmer and Harrison (1995) explains that agenda-building denotes the sources' interactions with gatekeepers, a give-and-take process in which sources seek to get their information published and the press seeks to get that information from independent sources.

The understanding of how realities about daily events are constructed has largely been shaped by the sociological contributions of media in the formation of public consciousness. The outcome of this process often dished out to society as "news," is an end-product of the interaction amongst journalists and what Schudson (2003, p.3) describes as "parajournalists" (i.e. political spin-doctors, public relations and information officers), including especially what journalists themselves call "sources." Accordingly, the news or 'meaning-making' process is always embedded in a power relationship which Carah and Louw (2015) notes, simply end up sounding like a conspiracy theory wherein power elites are seen as occupying a position of manipulating media content for their personal benefits (Louw, 2001). Like bread or sausage, news is something people make, and the verification process of its containing facts is both a political and professional accomplishment (Schudson, 2003). Arguing further, Schudson (2003) notes that news, especially of political events, is not a true reflection of reality but a picture of the world which has been selectively determined using some criteria. This suggests that the selection is done based on human prejudices to decide on what should be contained in the picture (news) and how to present it. The selection process may also involve distortions that are motivated by personal interests, and the prevailing effect of this on the society is misinformation.

The phenomenon of misinformation has attracted considerable research attention. While its definition varies among scholars thus making it unrealistic to examine all in one study, the central idea about misinformation represents a material containing deceitful or distorted elements that are intentionally incorporated within its context. Misinformation is predominantly problematic owing to its potential to unduly influence people's perceptions and behaviour, leading them to think or act differently than they would if correctly informed (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Guo & Vargo, 2018; Swire & Ecker, 2018). This can emanate from different sources and spread in numerous ways. It is often spread with the interests of its sources imbedded within. According to Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz and Cook (2012), vested interests such as government, corporate and non-governmental groups have more than a decade-long and well-documented history of consistent attempts to shape public opinion by publicizing one-sided or incorrect information. Beside, public information officers and politicians can be potent sources of misinformation, advertently or by design. Nevertheless, there seems to be a lack of consensus about the underlying motives for the propagation of misinformation. It could for example, be for "financial gain" as evident with most web-based misinformation platforms, or to "maximize attention" and win public support as with state or industry-sponsored campaigns for political and other purposes (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2017; Silverman, 2017). It is interesting to also note that the key distinction between misinformation and other forms of distortions which may resemble credible journalism, is the source's intention (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018).

The political communication process has also been adjudged as having a long history of misinformation that creates widespread concerns about its frightening consequences on the society and democratic institutions (Allcott, Gentzkow & Yu,

2019). In his *Politics of Misinformation*, Murray Edelman explains that politics and governance consistently deal with the construction of beliefs than with the allocation of values. Although the duos shape perceptions about who are worthy and unworthy, about the consequences of governmental policies and actions, about what state of affairs are problematic, about the dominance or absence of good fortune and a number of other conditions. Thus, all administrative [and political] actions wittingly construct spectacles that distort the normal flow of events. And the contribution of institutions such as the media is central in promoting the said misinformation (Edelman, 2001). Evidently, public perception of issues and events is a “construction” of the media and of daily interactions influenced by vested interests of chief executives and other actors in government, the private sector and the media as well. Though media are the main sources of information, beliefs and people’s reactions to political events, they provide interpretations more powerfully than they try to create beliefs and impressions. What is regarded as “nonsense” and what is to be taken as “serious” are very relative and are constructed by the media, by public statements from representatives, and by knowledgeable public discussions (Edelman, 2001, pp.33-75).

Intentional distortions occur at different levels in the coverage of political events and construction of reality by the media. Also known as “calculated misinformation” or “institutionalized form of bias,” this occurs when the journalist, editor, or proprietor knows what an event looks like, but will attempt to color it with the intention of advancing an economic or ideological aim (Schudson, 2003). Intentional bias and sensationalism certainly exist in the news media and it is well ingrained, as the actual motive of the opinion columnist or editorial page is to provide a perspective on issues by interpretation and analyzing to persuade the audience (Schudson, 2003).

However, the influx of Internet and other interactive media platforms has transformed the various communication and attention negotiation strategies employed by individuals, political institutions, and how the media are sourcing and disseminating political information to the public. This development therefore ushered political communication research into a new era. The understanding of these changes requires a review of the notions and operational structure of participatory media platforms as frequently used in this study.

## **2.4 Participatory Media**

As we will see in the subsequent literature, several attempts have been made to define the concept and operational structure of participatory media. Yet there is no consensus on the usage of the term ‘participatory media’ in the literature. This resulted in the interchangeable use of phrases such as ‘alternative media,’ ‘citizen media,’ ‘cyber media,’ ‘digital media,’ ‘emerging media,’ ‘innovative media,’ ‘interactive media,’ ‘online media,’ ‘peer media,’ ‘new media,’ ‘social media,’ ‘virtual media,’ ‘web media,’ ‘web 2.0, etc. to refer to the new phenomenon that facilitate collaborative exchange of information and ideas in today’s world. Thus, McQuail (2010) and Nwabueze (2009) highlight that new media are very diverse and yet difficult to define the constituents of new media accurately. What exists in the literature is an attempt by researchers to provide a working definition of what could be categorized as alternative media, emerging media, participatory media, interactive media, online media or social media. In attempting to provide an all-encompassing description of this phenomenon, Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Kelly and Grant (2009) theorize that the unifying concept ‘new media’ incorporates diverse transformations in content production, distribution and use. This involves the ‘cutting edge,’ ‘the avant-garde,’ and the place for forward-thinking individuals (whether they are

content producers, end-users or media scholars). The ‘new’ in new media holds the ideological strength of ‘new equals better’ which stems from a modernist belief in the social progress that technology conveys. It also has a cluster of dazzling and thought-provoking meanings (Lister et al., 2009).

The term ‘participatory media’ was coined in describing the communication apparatuses that promote social interaction and the involvement of audience in content production and delivery, bearing in mind the democratic principles of liberalism, including freedom, equality and dignity of the individual (Rheingold, 2008a). These media tools include, but are not limited to computer-mediated communication technologies such as blogs, microblogs, virtual communities, social and business networking services, virtual environments, videoblogs, etc. that allow people to create and share information or career interests. These are communication platforms whose value and influence derive not merely from the size of users but from the ability to simultaneously link millions of users across the globe to form a community as well as a marketplace for the exchange of ideas on various subjects (Pibernik, 2015; Rheingold, 2008a). These technologies also provide alternative avenues for accessing news and facilitate dialogue among individuals by putting them at ‘zero-distance’ from one another with the opportunities to organize and interact in networked communities on the cyberspace (Gillespie, 2017). This, however, exemplifies how the Internet and emerging media technologies combine old-fashioned, face-to-face communication, and consequently allows individuals have more control over what they say, what they are told and whom they talk to (Williams, 2003).

To understand the usage of the concept of participatory media in this study, it fitting to consider Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's (2008) perspectives. In their *Understanding Alternative Media*, these authors consider participatory media as the 'alternative' communication platforms that are essential for everyday existence, for individual and collective politics and for our feelings of identity and belonging. According to them, this sense of belonging takes wide-ranging dimensions: involvement in real (more formal) politics and the banality of everyday existence aiding the expression of alternative views. At all levels, these platforms are all-embracing and surpass the political sphere to reach the routine life of folks and societies. Today, we live in an atmosphere of shared experience where the influence of mainstream media and a range of new areas of mediated communication are becoming important as means of representing formal and personal thoughts and actions (Bailey et al., 2008). This conceptualization of participatory media as 'alternative media' comprises a spectrum of media apparatus commonly operating to democratize access to information. However, Bailey et al. (2008, p.xii) explain further that:

This reconfiguration was brought by the confluence of several characteristics: novel technologies (the spread of cable television networks and the explosion of cyber communities); media space fragmentation and fracturing; media market liberalization; and opportunities opened up by reducing media production expenses. These changes have consequences for the practice of democracy, authority, integration and the freedom to interact and be featured in the media, civic engagement in the political and public spheres through involvement with the ongoing politics of acceptance of distinct social groups and/or the global social conflicts of extensive political causes.

The above reveals the elusiveness to demonstrate that the notion of alternative media are expressed in various aspects – not only in comparison to the conventional press, but also platforms providing additional possibilities for exchanging thoughts within a society. This debate is guided by the current democratic and political approaches that

theoretically sustain the identity of alternative media. It also examines the connection between authority and politics, and the role of civil society as an interplanetary of empowerment and citizenship practice, highlighting the significance of media and communication in democratic societies for the advancement of a civic culture (Bailey et al., 2008).

Put more succinctly, the alternative or participatory media has been described as the new generation mass tools that inherently connect people and information in spontaneous, interactive ways. These web-based communication tools and services enable users to create individual or group profiles and share content with peers in online communities and networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Flickr, SnapChat, Instagram, YouTube, etc. Besides, these platforms connect like-minded individuals or groups and enable them mobilize massive support for different goals. Users can, via these platforms, create different forms of content and share with a worldwide audience (Dale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lewis, 2010; Lindsay, 2011; Tavani, 2013). Of specific interest to this study is Twitter, a micro-blogging platform on which users can access news, react to trending issues, create and share multimedia content, and engage in interactive discussions with other users.

#### **2.4.1 Twitter**

Twitter is a multifaceted system for communication and exchange that combines social networking, blogging and texting characteristics. Twitter has developed rapidly to become one of the most famous participatory media tools since its first release in 2006. Its attraction to many individuals stems from the scan-friendly design that allows users to monitor hundreds of exciting textual and visual material. Importantly, users interact with 280-character length messages known as “tweets.” Users can exchange audiovisual material including texts in each tweet. In fact,



Twitter is not just a social site, but a medium for news sharing, a means to keeping up with other people's ideas, as well as a forum where surveys can be carried out to gauge common opinion on shared thoughts and problems. As one of the leading interactive media platforms, Twitter empowers individuals to become amateur producers of journalism content by gathering and sharing information and memories on spectacular occurrences in their everyday life with a global audience (Gil, 2018; Kesen, 2019; Pinegar, 2018). It is, according to Gil (2018, p.3), "a type of amateur journalism platform that offers a means to discover the world through another person's eyes." Twitter has thus become a storehouse for many drivel and useful news and knowledgeable content. It could so, be asserted that Twitter has acquired the magnitude and influence of carrying real agendas of society into cyber communities.

In comparison with other interactive media platforms (Gerwin, 2011), Twitter has a much higher degree of publicness which is indicated by a higher public interest orientation of the statuses and weaker ties between its users. This accounts for the multiple reasons (including the quest for attention, self and ideology promotion, business and career interactions, etc.) why chief executives in the public and private sectors, politicians, activists, celebrities, etc. utilize the platform to build personal connections with their followers and the general public.

#### **2.4.2 Operational Structure of Participatory Media**

In the past, the technical features, capabilities, the quality of content produced and the different systems and institutions that govern communication technologies are inherent in defining the operational structure of the media. Today, the emergence of innovative communication technologies has created different dimensions for understanding the operational framework of the media, particularly in terms of

possibilities for active participation of the audience. This development therefore blurs the lines between media producers and consumers, often combining both roles as users (Anttonen, 2015). Like the beginning of print, radio and television, the current system and framework of participatory platforms – the economic, political and cultural settings that restrict and empower the use of new communication tools and reinforce restrictions on information and capital flows – remains unsettled (Rheingold, 2008a). In a contrasted view, Bowman and Willis (2003) argue that the most obvious difference is in the structure and organization that produce the mainstream and participatory media. The mainstream is made of organizational hierarchies that are reliant on advertising and broadcasting as their business survival models as well as valuing rigorous editorial credibility and professionalism, while the participatory media is formed of cyber communities that value more of user participation, interaction, freedom and social equality over profitability.

Three common but interrelated characteristics (Rheingold, 2008a), define the operational structure of participatory media. These include: i) the technical-structure characteristic which defines the many-to-many media feature facilitating networked interactions and content sharing among folks; ii) the psychological and social characteristic which defines the participatory feature based on the effective involvement of many people; and iii) the economic and political characteristic which defines the feature enhanced by networks of data and communication allowing wider, quicker and lower cost of operations. These communication tools apparently rely on easy-to-use interfaces that stimulate user-generated and interest-based engagements. They are specifically distinctive for their participatory culture that enables the audience or users to contribute actively in the processes of gathering, processing, construing and distributing content (Halverson, Kallio, Hackett, &

Halverson, 2016; Pibernik, 2015). Unlike the mainstream media where letters to the editor (in newspaper and magazine), phone-in responses, vox pop interviews, opinion polls or talk shows (in radio and television) serve as the means allowing audiences' participation and feedback, the participatory media operate with high level of 'interconnectedness,' 'accessibility,' 'interactivity,' 'multiplicity of use' and 'open-endedness' to individual users who serve the twin-role of senders and receivers (McQuail, 2010). At least in theory (and in modern politics), what delineates participatory media from the mainstream is its communication network that provides folks with unrestricted exposure and the capacity to communicate their political agendas to a global public (Tedesco, 2004).

Like in the mainstream, content is the driving force sustaining the participatory media. This is why Feldman (1997) asserts that whatever the technological complexities underpinning many of the new platforms and channels of delivery, the information highways and byways will be silent and empty without content to suffuse them and bring them to life. Thus "content is the king" because without it, the media industry and the increasing digital infrastructure surrounding it would simply have no substance (Feldman, 1997, p.155). Contrary to the forms of content mostly produced by professionals in the mainstream, large chunk of content in participatory media are produced by users who simultaneously serve the roles of senders and receivers. To say that the growth of participatory media has democratized the process by which media content are produced and distributed is not an exaggeration (Jacob, 2018). This structure results in the rise of user-generation content, creating new possibilities for individuals to use their voices and be in charge of producing own content within and outside the traditional media systems (Anttonen, 2015).

## **2.5 User-Generated Content and the Changing News Practices**

The usage of this label, user-generated content (UGC) which became widespread in 2005 is generally applicable in describing the different types of content that users of participatory media platforms generate outside the professional routines of media production and made available on the cyberspace (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Many of the dramatic shifts in communication and news production processes have been linked to the rapid expansion of interactive media technologies and the rise of user-generated content. The once-stable system of content production in the mainstream media currently faces competition from a multiple and dynamic sources to which individuals connect via the Internet and emerging media technologies. In addition to supporting multiple forms of content, the new communication tools are networks in a shared sense of linking both individuals and institutionalized communicative agents. News products in participatory media for example, can comprise audiovisual or text material in different formats generated by users who were relatively passive consumers of journalistic outputs in the past. This shift impacts not merely the method in which journalists perform their routine jobs, but also the way they conceptualize those jobs in an ever-changing environment. In the wake of these changes, journalists are left with no better ways to create content than to migrate to the trendy practice of collecting and disseminating information from a content pool in a multitude of formats (Quandt & Singer, 2009). It is worth mentioning that today, content are not only produced by journalists but users also produce content for multiple platforms, including mainstream media outlets. As audiences have become 'users' and user-generated content steadily becoming a real

competitor to mainstream content, the impact of participatory media on mainstream outlets is building up to become even stronger (Lister et al., 2009).

Recurring changes in the mode of practice of journalism in the modern day are occasioned by among other factors, what Pew Research Center (2016) spelt out as the declining interest in mainstream media content or audiences' transition to reliance on interactive media sources to get their daily news than on traditional sources such as television and newspapers. Ardley (2010) emphasizes that as communication practices change from a standard model to a more networked setting, there is an increasing reliance on user input in content production. While there are obvious benefits to the new practices in enhancing participation, it is essential for the mainstream to define its goals and evaluation criteria for user involvement in the process. However, a major challenge for the mainstream is how user-generated material can be reconciled with the traditionally elevated editorial and production norms (Ardley, 2010).

The value of user-generated content can be inconsistent with the present surge of digital entrants who are neither skilled writers nor fact-checkers (Bowman & Willis, 2003). Unlike the mainstream which has an institutionalized pre-production and quality control process called 'gatekeeping,' every user on the network of participatory media can easily share a personalized information set obtained from numerous sources without the guarantee for quality. The traditional gatekeepers, media filters and guardians of the highly professional culture in media routines and productions all had to join the present realities of participatory culture (Lister et al., 2009). The prevalence of this practice allowing the participation of users in content creation and distribution, according to Quandt and Singer (2009), epitomizes a form

of convergence which is probable to be even more challenging for journalists and the media than the need to learn about new tools and methods in content production. For Williams (2003, p.119), this development is seen as a “direct threat” to the continued role of professional news providers.

Considerable attention has been focused to understanding how the incorporation of user-generated content into professionally produced news content affects journalistic norms and practices. What unites most scholarly accounts of this phenomenon, according to Williams, Wahl-Jorgensen and Wardle (2011) is the emphasis on explaining the enhanced audiences’ role in media production that was previously the sole task of skilled reporters. A study by Singer (2005) for example, demonstrates how the mainstream media move towards normalizing interactive media styles until they are incorporated into traditional journalistic standards and practices. In a similar study of local British newspaper journalists, Singer (2010) suggests that reporters and editors consider user-generated content from different perspectives in terms of the boundaries that distinguish them from outside contributors. While some perceive user-generated material from a traditional perspective by weighing its advantages and contributions to the journalism they produce, others think it can undermine journalistic standards and principles unless closely monitored, even though its presence on news websites builds traffic and serve as supplementary source of hyper-local information. Owing to the potential threat to ingrained professional norms posed by the increasing audiences’ participation, Deuze (2003) notes that research has shown that conventional media organizations tend to address the problems of participatory journalism in a conservative manner, often incorporating them within existing routines and practices. Likewise, Williams et al. (2011) maintain that many

of the new forms of journalism enabled by the rise of citizens' participation have been subsumed within traditional journalistic practices such as news gathering.

### **2.5.1 User-Generated and the Changing Political Practices**

Research has broadened our understanding of how political actors who would apparently want to keep as much control as necessary over public opinion and policy agendas (Louw, 2005), employ communication experts and spin-doctors to utilize their expertise in side-stepping institutionalized media to facilitate unmediated communication with the constituents. As modern political practices thrive with democracy evolving rapidly, the Internet and participatory media quickly transform the way individuals, organizations, political institutions and governments communicate and negotiate political information and roles. In fact, the Internet is seen as increasing the ability of individuals, governments and other social entities to strengthen their hold over the media (Tedesco, 2004; Williams, 2003).

Not only has the rise of participatory media demonstrated the role that new communication tools and audiences assume in decisions about what constitutes news (Domingo et al., 2008), but in the changing strategies adopted by political actors and the media in disseminating electioneering messages. Although a relatively new phenomenon, substantial inquiries into the political potential, limitations and impact of participatory media already exist. This growth, however, seems to have polarized researchers into groups of "optimists" who trust that the interactive media will bring about a paradigm shift by stimulating participatory democracy, and "skeptics" who ignore the participatory media as little more than an instrument to strengthen the old-fashioned system of political communication (Tedesco, 2004). For instance, Berthon, Pitt, Kietzmann and McCarthy (2015) argue that the accessibility of communication platforms that enable the instantaneous diffusion of messages at near-zero cost and

the willing convenience of cheap, yet very effective tools (personal computers, tables and portable phones) promote dialogue between leaders and the people. Again, with the entry cost far less than any other campaign medium (Gulati et al., 2004), the interactive media platforms provide non-mainstream third-party politicians an interesting chance to recruit supporters and broaden their electoral appeal. An appraisal of the 2000 presidential race in the United States by Gulati et al. (2004) thus reveals most of the Internet content as virtually identical to the TV news and print content. The presidential race reported by about 55 Internet sites, but hardly any of the published material was original.

As Internet penetration rate increases with the growth of numerous participatory platforms, political candidates and organizations begin to “change the channel” to rely more on emerging media to communicate directly with constituents. The participatory media appeals so extensively to political actors as it provides a “source-controlled” type of interaction that is often supported by user-generated content (Tedesco, 2004, pp. 508-510). The rise of user-generated content, however, brings forth a paradigm shift in the power to produce and disseminate political messages from the shores of professional journalists and media strategists directly into the hands of political actors and other individuals who utilize it for self-aggrandizement. As a result, some of the practices of political players have been modified to include “selectivity and deliberate omission methods” (Parenti, 1993, p.191) in constructing stories, memories, myths and beliefs about many of the issues and events that citizens encounter in the political news (Louw, 2005). While selectivity and omission have political purposes intended to shape public opinion and guide public discourse (Lawrence, 2010), there are high chances for the spread of misleading information.



Twitter has gained prominence over the years as the most used participatory media platforms for political and other civic engagements.

Empirical investigations have been conducted with specific regard to the use of Twitter as a tool for campaigning. Graham, Jackson and Broersma's (2016) study for example, compared the prevailing practices in the utilization of Twitter as a communication tool between British and Dutch parliamentary candidates in the general elections of 2010. It shows that contestants depended strongly on persuasive communication kind of impression management as compared to more active communication forms such as mobilizing and promotional campaigns. In both instances, about half of the candidates' tweets comprising updates from campaign trails compensated for unidirectional forms of communication. In the event of British, one-off partisan assault was the order of the day. On the other side, Dutch candidates used Twitter more as a public discussions forum, presenting their stance on a specific political or social issue. This accounts for almost a quarter of their tweets. Another noteworthy finding was that in comparison with the Netherlands, UK journalists are more probable to use tweets as sources of news on the political activities of candidates. In both instances, there is also a reciprocal connection between Twittersphere politics and traditional news media coverage of events during the period (Graham et al., 2016).

In addition, Thimm, Einspänner-Pflock and Anastasiadis's (2016) study unveils that Twitter has become an embedded component of online communication framework that is strategically-organized and from which almost every political actor seeks a benefit. Its use can be weighed as part of the continuing process of modernizing and mediatizing political communication in particular and especially lobbying in which

politicians, communication strategists and electorate adopt innovative communication techniques. While Germany still lags behind other European nations when it comes to the use of other participatory platforms for political communication, it appears that the use of Twitter by leaders is becoming more distinguished. What is striking is that leaders do not seem to use Twitter much to engage in dialogue with constituents, but mainly to communicate policies and to present themselves. In the context of political campaigning, this heralds one of the implications of participatory media platforms – the bypassing of traditional norms that guarantee quality in all communication practices (Thimm et al., 2016).

As aptly observed in Vlatković's (2018) study, Donald Trump's reign is a remarkable instance of using Twitter as a powerful way to reach a great deal of potential voters. The understanding of the manner in which personalized messages flow on Twitter is grounded in the theoretical foundation of framing, and as such, has contributed importantly in creating political supremacy for Trump. Knowing the possibilities and advantages that Internet-mediated communication platforms could add to a campaign, Trump developed a communication strategy that, with an accentuated presence on Twitter, framed the information circulated to the widest crowd of the platform's users and future voters. Twitter is increasingly being used by mainstream media to disseminate their news. Today, for a number of purposes, a great percentage of mainstream media have been compelled to produce Twitter-specific content. However, Twitter is unique in its ability to maintain a consistent and sustainable level of communication, an edge over other interactive platforms and even above traditional news delivery methods. Thus, Twitter is convenient for spreading "breaking news" even in the absence of conventional media platforms (Vlatković, 2018).

When analysing the influence of Twitter and other interactive media platforms on political communication process, it is as well, important to note that a similar influence occurs in the process of creating the media agenda resulting from the interactions between political actors and professional news providers. The process by which this influence occurs on the overall priority given to issues in the media agenda is known as “agenda-building.” Agenda-building research examines how certain groups, such as those in politics and business influence what issues journalists cover as well as how the public perceive issues. In the agenda-building process, actors who wish to shape journalists’ stories and public perception often disseminate information subsidies, which include speeches, videos, and press releases, message tweets and posts on interactive media platforms, etc. Many studies have shown that information subsidies especially through interactive media platforms are successful in affecting news media coverage and public opinion (Parmelee, 2013). Agenda-building conceptualizes the general process of constructing mass media agendas and in particular, how media and journalists make the choice of what information and sources to use (Nisbet, 2008).

Bearing in mind the several changes brought to media operations as well as the changing news and political practices, the spread of misleading information is rapidly becoming easier than ever. Although misinformation is a common problem in all media, it is exacerbated through participatory platforms consisting of networks that are outside the control of traditional gatekeepers. With the accessibility of interactive media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to over one-third of the world’s population (including politicians and public officials) where they can create and circulate content instantly and globally, an immense quantity of information has been placed at our fingertips. Unfortunately, this has also led to the viral spread of

misinformation on the Internet which poses a significant threat to the open exchange of views, survival of democracy and legitimacy of the content we receive from the media (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2018; Tandoc et al., 2018; Fernandez & Alani, 2018; Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Shao et al., 2018). In representative democracies, according to Graham (1999), instead of ordinary citizens, the participatory media could be used to focus more power in the hands of political elites. Political actors and organizations appear to have higher technological and financial resources as well as the capacity to use them or employ skilled staff to handle these resources for them than the ordinary people do. Thus political actors can effectively utilize technological tools to retain power by meddling with public perceptions to gain popular mandate in favour of certain policies.

The current wave of distortion, mistruths and hoaxes on the Internet are instances of the broader issue of abuse of participatory media that received significant attention in the literature. In view of that, Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) observe that misinformation occurs on participatory media when there is deliberate misrepresentation of facts in content (mostly user-generated) through for example, the cropping of photos, choosing quotes or statistics selectively to frame issues (by giving them different perspectives) or individuals (to correct or change perceptions about them). This suggests a cogent relationship between framing and misinformation. Placing this into context would require theoretical grounding from the standpoint of agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing. Yet, it is important to explore the shifting research focus originating from the foregoing developments.

### **2.5.2 The Shifting Research Focus**

The mainstream media still dominate the arenas of communication, particularly news production (Domingo et al., 2008), but there are alternative agenda-setting and

framing actors in certain fields and they produce news content themselves. Consequently, institutional journalism is facing a severe threat to its social function – a practice parallel to its own. Regarding political communication, the participatory media could be described as “a double-edged sword.” While it is beneficial to have diverse sources facilitating the speedy flow of information faster than through the traditional top-down media like television or newspapers, the problem simply is, information on participatory media are often not vetted, investigated or confirmed before dissemination and this leads to misinformation and unsubstantiated rumor spreading like wildfire on the cyberspace (Wood, 2018).

As the growth of Internet and participatory media tools usher political communication research into a new era, attention is no longer focused on the mainstream media but on the excesses of new communication tools, the quality and effect of content produced and disseminated through the alternative platforms. However, Gerwin (2011) points out that there are only few studies on the relationship between participatory media and politics but since the 2008 campaigning for presidential election in the United States, scholars recognized the importance of interactive media platforms even in political contexts. Few of these studies were also conducted to evaluate the extent of use and abuse of the platforms for spreading political information in Nigeria. For example, Olabamiji (2014) asserts that in addition to ensuring wide access, the participatory media put a high volume of information production and sharing at the hands of “netizens,” taking the practice away from the exclusive control of social elites or specialists called reporters and editors. Media products distributed through the cyberspace are managed by immediate consumers, targeting worldwide audiences to bridge the divide between the information-rich and information-poor. A qualitative content analysis of some

political gladiators' participatory media platforms in Olabamiji's (2014) study reveals that the utilization of the platforms in spreading political messages has upgraded the level of political awareness among the electorate, yet it is also being misused to frequently trigger information warfare among contenders who spitefully intimidate and discredit each other. The study reveals further that in Nigeria, the mainstream media often exacerbate such warfare through their dependence on, and reproduction of content from the said platforms without proper gatekeeping (Olabamiji, 2014, p.95). Though beneficial in fostering dialogues between candidates and the electorate, problems still exist in the usage pattern of participatory platforms for spreading electioneering messages in Nigeria as practices are seldom dysfunctional.

According to a study by Suntai and Targema (2017), there is no doubt that the development of alternative media has revolutionized the political communication system and broadened the boundaries of political participation. It demonstrates the reality that cyberspace offers an opportunity for the ongoing government-the-governed interaction, liberalizing the marketplace of thoughts in nations like Nigeria. This is one of the dividends of democracy accompanying the said advancements in communication technologies (Suntai & Targema, 2017). Anchored on the social responsibility theory, Suntai and Targema's (2017) study concludes that a careful observation of trends in the use of participatory platforms for political purposes, shows a number of risks that are not only worrying, but also capable of diminishing the possibilities offered by participatory media to nations with budding democracies such as Nigeria.

The above, therefore provides the pathway towards understanding the trending practices in the utilization of interactive media platforms for spreading political messages particularly during electioneering. To this end (Tavani, 2013), we can conclude that cybertechnology or participatory media seems to have both democracy-enhancing and democracy-threatening aspects. The current practice is different from professional journalism and is not likely to substitute journalism (Anderson, 2011), but altering it.

## **2.6 Theoretical Grounding**

This study utilizes the agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing theories to understand how the use of participatory media platforms for spreading political messages by politicians is influencing the news focus of the mainstream media and shaping public perceptions about issues and events.

### **2.6.1 Agenda-setting**

The framework of most studies evaluating the influence of media content on public perception about political issues is usually situated in the context of agenda-setting theory. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's assessment of the 1968 presidential race between Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey put the template for agenda-setting research. Their hypothesis predicts a connection of cause and effect between media content and electorates' perception (Griffin, 2003). Since the early study by McCombs and Shaw, agenda-setting research has concentrated on the connection between the public rankings of issues and the level of attention given to such issues by the news media. This is commonly achieved through the layouts (size and placement) of story headlines, pictures and captions, text graphics, footages, space and timing in the print and broadcast productions. The concept of agenda-setting explains the series of actions through which concerted attention is accorded to

subjects in the news to influence the ordering of importance given to such issues by the audience. This deals so much with salience – the comparative importance of an issue on an actor’s agenda and of the relationships between actors’ political agendas in the news (McCombs, 2004; McQuail, 2010; Soroka, 2002). Evidence exists in the literature about the idea of agenda-setting originating from Walter Lippmann’s (1922) well-known work on public opinion which theorized that the media serve as negotiators between the “outside world and the images in our heads,” denoting that news media contributes to the construction of our worldviews.

The thrust of agenda-setting theory emphasizes that the news media may not often be effective in showing the audience “what to think,” but it is amazingly capable of teaching them “what to think about” through the format of presentation and frequency of items in the news. This hypothesis suggests the media’s ability to increase public awareness through the frequency of issues in their coverage (Griffin, 2003; Severin & Tankard, 2001). In attempting to interpret issues relating to policies and leadership, the media set agenda for public discussions through journalistic outputs such as commentaries, editorials, opinion articles, columns, broadcast discussions, etc.

For more than 30 years, the effect of agenda-setting has been proven through its wide applicability especially in political communication research. It is also important to note that there is a tremendous variability of the levels, geographical and cultural settings in which agenda-setting occurs. Whereas the “first level” of agenda-setting centers on the extent of attention given to an issue by the media, the “second level” also known as “attribute agenda-setting” focuses on attributes or features that describe issues, people or other subjects in the news (Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, &



Weaver, 2009; McCombs, 2004). Inherently, setting the agenda is a process that occurs in three stages. First, it is necessary to establish priorities for issues to be discussed in the news or “media-agenda.” Second, the media-agenda impacts or interacts in some way with what the audience members believe, producing the “public-agenda.” Third, the public-agenda also influences or interacts with what policymakers find essential, producing the “policy-agenda.” In the easiest and most straightforward variant of the theory, the media-agenda impacts the public-agenda and the public-agenda impacts the policy-agenda (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

A recent study by Hyun and Moon (2016) shows how the news media shape the pictures of political contenders in the public through the attribute agenda-setting. When news media display and emphasize various characteristics and qualities of political players, the electorates are inclined to react to the media’s handling of these attributes. This hypothesis indicates that characteristics highlighted in the media are prioritized in the mind of the audience in much the same manner as traditional agenda-setting works. While traditional agenda-setting deals with the salience of an item, the building of attribute-agenda relies on the characteristics and character traits of an item, whether a political figure, issue or event (Hyun & Moon, 2016). Usually, the audiences will have different impressions about a political candidate or an issue depending on whether the candidate is shown to be a strong leader or someone who pushes a narrow agenda (McCombs et al., 2011).

In examining how agenda-setting works in the current sphere of online news, Slavnić’s (2016) study notes that agenda-setting is one of the essential theories whose impacts have been questioned by the growth of the Internet and modern systems of communication. As a participatory platform, Twitter has specifically

evolved to become a highly relevant news source, defining the issues that deserve greater public attention. However, Slavnić's (2016) study stresses that countless content travel from Twitter to the mainstream news, but the volume of information, style of incorporation and presentation of Twitter content in media texts vary considerably among societies. Nowadays, mainstream media rely on Twitter messages from already established political actors and trending issues as their sources of news. This speaks volume of the agenda-setting impact of Twitter on mainstream news coverage and how the media agenda consequently becomes influenced by news sources including representatives in government and prominent individuals in society whose activities are frequently reported by the media or whose views they quote to clarify specific issues. The media-agenda is affected not only by sources, but also by factors such as media routine, professional journalistic standards and the in-house ideologies of individual media organization (Slavnić, 2016). These trends which have obviously been transformed by technology, contribute strongly to the agenda-setting and media agenda-building processes in the contemporary communication space.

### **2.6.2 Agenda-building**

The agenda-building theory is an extension of agenda-setting that emerged as a framework for explaining how information sources influence the issues that are given priority in the media-agenda. Agenda-building emerged from criticisms of the agenda-setting theory. Lang and Lang (1981) for example, noticed that in the agenda-setting hypothesis, "the whole question of how issues originate is sidestepped, nor is there any recognition of the process through which agendas are built" (p.448). To understand how the agenda-building works, Gandy (1982) suggests that it is apt to go beyond agenda-setting to determine who sets the media's

agenda, how and for what purpose it is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society.

Agenda-building, according to Nisbet (2008), involves the process by which news organizations and journalists feature, emphasize, and/or select certain events, issues, or sources to cover over others. Research in the area is closely linked to but distinct from the agenda-setting tradition which examines the connection between the issues portrayed in the news media and issues' priorities of the public. Agenda building focuses on how news coverage both reflects and shapes the priorities of government officials, decision-makers, and elites (Nisbet, 2008). Like the agenda-setting, agenda-building also occurs in two levels. The first-level of agenda-building commences when reporters are persuaded to cover issues they otherwise might have ignored. This deals with the linkages between salience on the part of media coverage and those attempting to influence journalists' decision on what to cover. The second-level of agenda-building also works like the attribute agenda-setting. This occurs when journalists are being influenced by their sources to use certain attributes to portray issues and other objects through framing. However, information subsidies that emanate from sources in the form of YouTube videos, Facebook posts, Twitter tweets, press releases, etc. are an important element in the first and second levels of agenda-building (Parmelee, 2013). Information subsidies are supplied by sources (political actors and interested parties), with the hope that journalists will be led to focus on issues the political actors find desirable and incorporate the actors' point of views concerning those issues into the media-agenda.

Recent developments in participatory media use by journalists and politicians called the attention of researchers to explore how political actors use different interactive

media platforms as information subsidies to impact news coverage. Twitter is a specifically relevant tool to focus on because research indicates that journalists nowadays rely heavily on Twitter for their jobs. Journalists often find story ideas and sources from tweets they receive. Findings from Parmelee's (2013) study indicate that tweets from political leaders contribute significantly to agenda-building. Leaders' tweets are story idea generators, tip sheets, sources of quotes and data, places to find diverse sources, resources for background information, and fact-checking tools. The findings clearly show the presence of agenda-building. In other words, a political tweet that acts as a tip sheet to spark a story idea is influencing object salience in coverage regarding issues and candidates, which is the basis of agenda-building (Parmelee, 2013).

The understanding of framing will further illustrate how agenda-setting and agenda-building work in the contemporary journalism and political practices.

### **2.6.3 Framing**

There is considerable scholarly discussion on the connection between framing and agenda-setting and whether or not, framing is an extension of agenda-setting. However, the current study emphasizes that in addition to influencing 'what' issues the professional news providers prioritize in their agenda through the agenda-building process thereby pointing to the public what issues to also prioritize and think about through the agenda-setting role, the news media equally influence the audience's minds on 'how' to think about such issues through the framing or interpretation of certain aspects of the issues presented in the agenda. Moreover, there is evidence in the literature about the concept of framing emanating from Erving Goffman's (1974) *Frame Analysis* in which he stated that a frame is necessary to arrange fragmentary pieces of knowledge or information. The frame

(Entman, 1993) highlights certain pieces of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, making it more perceptible, meaningful or memorable to the public. A frame often added to the media-agenda is the main organizing idea for news material that offers a background and indicates a view of an issue through a combination of methods, selection, emphasis and exclusion (McCombs, 2004).

Framing theory follows from the idea that people conceive the world from different perspectives, depending not only on their individual interests but also on the path that professional reporters and editors draw for the audience through the media material they consume (Baran & Davis, 2010). Framing has also been described as “schemata of interpretation” which does not only calls the audiences’ attention to the dominant perspectives in the picture created on their minds (by suggesting what should be considered as important or irrelevant in the picture), but repeatedly encourages a particular depiction of problems, fundamental analysis, ethical assessment and suggestions for the handling of objects depicted in the picture (Entman, 1993; McCombs, 2004).

Framing calls attention to certain aspects of fact in the framework of political news, while obscuring other elements that can guide the audience to distinct responses. As the foremost sources that the media rely on to get information for their political news, candidates and political organizations exploit the power of framing through the information they supply to the media to strategically shape public discourse and views for self-glorification. However, political actors compete with journalists over news framing through the campaign speeches, manifestos, official press releases, news conferences, official gazette, message tweets and posts on social media, etc. they provide to journalists (Entman et al., 2009). Framing is therefore to be

understood as the outcome of interaction between different actors: interested sources (including politicians, celebrities and the likes), media establishments, journalists and the audience (McQuail, 2010). Framing involves premeditated attempts to distort or mend aspects of a perceived reality. Going into the detail of this, Parenti (1993, pp.200-201) notes that:

By attempting to “bend the truth rather than breaking it,” using emphasis, nuance, innuendo and peripheral embellishments, politicians and other political communications agents can produce a desired feeling and response from the public without resorting to direct advocacy and without going too far from the appearance of objectivity. Framing is therefore accomplished in the manner in which the news is produced, the level of exposure, positioning (as the lead or supplement story), presentation style (compassionate or slighting), accompanying images and graphic effects, and labeling through the choice of words or language. Short of lying, the news media and other actors in the framing process can mislead us in different ways, suggesting for us what to think about an issue even before we have had the opportunity to think about it for ourselves. Like commodities, labeling is inevitable for political and general news.

Certainly, framing would reflect the interests of both the selected sources and the context in which a message is produced and presented to the public.

According to a study by Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar (2016), there are different approaches to understanding the effects of framing. The accessibility–applicability discrepancy is essential to our comprehension of framing effects. The presentation style or framing approach adopted most often will influence the schema called upon to process the message transmitted. Yet, communication effect studies place framing in a more prevalent category of persuasion where any perceived effect may arise from variations in the persuasive strength or assigned value of a given message, rather than variations in the manner of presentation of the same message (Cacciatore et al., 2016). The expansion of alternative communication platforms, including networking sites that function with the accessibility of Web 2.0 technologies:

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. is increasingly pushing researchers to rethink framing effects. These technologies increasingly play significant role in creating reinforcement effects as well as “preference-based effects” that generate audience-media interactivity which raise the influence or chances of “belief-inconsistent” messages reaching the audience. With the recurring shifts however, it has become more difficult to comprehend and differentiate framing effects in the new communication ecosystem from other persuasive media effects mechanisms (Cacciatore et al., 2016).

In the modern political environment (D’Angelo et al., 2019), it is hard for the news media to discuss about a political candidate, issue or incident without conveying a context, perspective or implied narrative. While agenda-setting relies on an issue’s presumed salience or significance, framing focuses on the issue’s perspective. It is noteworthy that these concepts can be clustered together to understand how the effect of one reinforces the other. Recently, significant advances have been made in computational and social research – “big data” allowing sophisticated narrative analysis of conventional and ideologically-focused news sources as well as public responses in interactive media (D’Angelo et al., 2019). This calls for a rethink in the digital age of the conversational dynamics of public sphere, especially in the study of framing effects.

The hypothesis of agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing were adopted in this study to understand how politicians’ tweets build the news agenda for the mainstream media and influence public perceptions about political issues and candidates in the context of Nigeria’s 2019 electioneering. The applicability of these theories to the study is clarified further in the subsequent discussions.

#### **2.6.4 Applicability of Theories to the Study**

A first attempt to understanding how the agenda-setting, agenda-building and framing work is to acknowledge that news doesn't select itself (Griffin, 2003). When information is supplied by sources to journalists and the media, it comes with an in-built frame that conforms to the purpose the sources and is unlikely to be objective (McQuail, 2010). Also, the news media not only passively convey information, repeating a public official's words verbatim, or conveying precisely the occurrences at an event. The media (including journalists and editors) concentrate attention on influencing the audiences' understanding of what constitute the most significant issues of the day through their daily choices and presentation of issues in the news. The audiences' attention is further focused on a particular news angle, and their perception (pictures of the world) molded and refined by the way the media interpret the news through framing (McCombs & Bell, 1996). The above suggests that both the selection process to make some aspects of chosen information more salient towards building the media-agenda, setting the public-agenda and the interpretation given to news to shape the reality are guided by the ideological leanings of the sources and actors involved in the production and dissemination processes. Because we look up to the media for hints as to where our attention should be focused, we weigh as important, whatever the media present to us as important through the news.

Relative to previous discussions in the literature about journalism's construction of reality is a perspective on the news selection and presentation styles often placed within the precincts of news values (Bell, 1991). In order to be chosen, news events must commonly meet one of these criteria: power elites or celebrities (activities related to influential or renowned individuals and organizations); magnitude



(incidents viewed as important either by the amount of people impacted or by future impacts on culture), etc. Additional factors that determine what become news include format considerations (house style of individual media organizations), public interest, source considerations, resources and the need for a combination of distinct categories of subjects in the news (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Stromback, Karlsson, & Hopmann, 2012).

Issues are given significance in the selection and presentation of political events by referring to specific news values that link one incident to comparable ones. While political actors are famous as belonging to the class of power elite in society, their activities attract great attention from the public and media. As earlier noted, the participatory media facilitate direct dialogues on issues and events between governments, politicians and their constituents. Often trending on Twitter, these dialogues stimulate the public debates which journalists and the media consider as newsworthy. The 'public interest' and 'controversy' generated by politicians' activities on Twitter and other participatory platforms on one hand, and the socioeconomic status of politicians as 'prominent' personalities on the other hand, are important news determinants for the media in the coverage of political events. The above demonstrates why the mainstream media resort to the practice of incorporating material (user-generated) from interactive media platforms into professionally-produced news content. Thus, the thesis of the current study is based in the following discussions.

### **2.6.5 Setting the Agenda for the Agenda Setters**

The methods of controlling communicative streams and media material were significantly modified with the introduction of new communication technologies in the 1990s. This revolution has not essentially altered the industrial logic of media

productions or diminished the institution's ability to handle and regulate communication (Carah & Louw, 2015). Political actors are now able to trade narratives "up the chain" of mainstream news media using the power of networked communication on emerging media platforms. A study by the Data and Society Research Institute indicates that participatory platforms are central to manipulating the mainstream media by allowing those with comparatively peripheral opinions to discover one another, collaborate on production and dissemination of information, and sharing viewpoints that would be inappropriate to air in their daily lives. Often called "media manipulators" or "media agenda-builders" (including actors with vested interests in propagating certain message frames), these collaborators use interactive media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. to distribute intense posts to a sizeable amount of individuals and seed topics for journalists to cover (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that in the information age, the blogs and social media handles of political candidates and organizations have not only become major sources of political news for journalists, but are equally seen as competitors to the mainstream in terms of stimulating great public attention and contributing to political debates. By mid-2000s some mainstream media were beginning to integrate content from the personal blogs of political candidates and organizations, as well as content from other users or co-producers into their own online and conventional news. This constitutes a threat to the authority of established mediating agencies and subverted their control over the public agenda (Curran, 2002; Domingo et al., 2008; Edelman, 2001; Lowrey, 2006). This can be problematic if journalists' decisions on what is noteworthy for media coverage are more dependent on what messages they receive from politicians and not what they investigate themselves (Metag & Rauchfleisch,

2016). There is increasing proof in the literature that, along with many details of those subjects, reporters and editors have great power to form the primary subject of public significance. With the growing transition in news production, however, many individuals are using participatory media and other news outlets to complement that initial picture and discover alternative views on occurrences that suit their own standards. This is called “agenda melding” from the audience’s point of view (Coleman et al., 2009).

In answering the pertinent question raised by Griffin (2003, p.394): “who sets the agenda for the agenda setters?,” the current study emphasizes that the newsroom (including reporters and editors as gatekeepers of political dialogues) sets the public-agenda in the mainstream, whereas in the information age, the public (comprising political actors as sources and the audience who currently serve as co-producers through the influx of user-generated content) play an important part in building the news agenda of the mainstream media. Therefore, a new media ecosystem is emerging in which cyber-communities debate and stretch the narratives generated by various sources. These cyber groups improve the involvement of audiences in journalism routines, enabling citizen journalism, investigative and data-driven reporting, analysis and fact-checking, thus developing these practices into a pool of tips for obtaining data and narrative thoughts where the mainstream media feed upon (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

#### **2.6.6 Collaborative Framing through Participatory Media**

Before the development of interactive media platforms, the construction of reality to shape public opinion and stimulate debates about political issues was an exclusive affair of professional journalists and by extension, spin-doctors. Related studies from the literature demonstrate how participatory media platforms have overwhelmingly

reduced the temporal barriers in the creation and distribution of information with built-in frames that suit the purpose of sources. The development of a new information ecosystem introduced a web of decentralized news sources that plagiarize, jump to unwarranted conclusions, or simply fabricate information to fit their purposes and preset beliefs (Fernandez & Alani, 2018; Wood, 2018). Twitter, for instance offers an unprecedented opportunity for such practices, with a series of complicated challenges that make its influence on content framing particularly pertinent and challenging. In the contemporary news practice, journalists frequently use online sources; and Twitter is popular. Professional news providers, whether consciously or by accident, pick tweets that come with built-in frames and use them for their articles. Among these tweets, many are written by politicians or political parties (who would painstakingly construct narratives that complement their interests), especially during election campaigns (Broersma & Graham 2012; Lecheler & Kruikemeier 2016). The contemporary communication structure makes it easier for different actors to produce misleading content that can be shared with a global network of online audience.

As journalism witnesses a paradigm shift with audiences' material increasingly being incorporated into the news disseminated through a variety of mainstream and networked platforms, the practice of framing or "bending the truth rather than breaking it" as Parenti (1993, p.200) describes, has become to a two-way process including institutionalized actors (professional media producers) and amateur content creators (whether ordinary users, political actors or groups with vested interests) who are delivering highly partisan news content to a worldwide audience pre-selected for their likely support (Louw, 2005). The foregoing explains the growing influence of participatory media in framing political narratives to shape public opinion (Seth, 2008),

thus fostering the quick and wide diffusion of misinformation. The research data to be analyzed in subsequent chapters will reveal current trends in the incorporation of user-generated content from the Twitter handles of two presidential candidates into the mainstream news content published by selected news media in Nigeria.

## Chapter 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the approach adopted for the research, the population of the study, sampling methods, and data collection and analysis procedures.

#### 3.1 Research Methodology and Design

In a study of this nature, it is necessary to define the framework for collecting and analysing the set of data in line with the objectives of the study. A suitable analogy in the describing a research design is that of a construction in which case there is no point in drawing up a plan, ordering materials or setting critical dates for completing the project phases until the contractor knows what kind of building to be constructed and for what purpose (de Vaus, 2001). In communication and other social sciences research, the choice of a design is informed by the research purpose which is determined prior to data collection and analysis. The aim is not only to define a logically structured procedure to guide the activities of the investigation but also to guarantee that the proof acquired allows the investigator to respond as unambiguously as necessary to the research questions (Eid, 2011; van der Meer, 2016).

In line with the objectives of this study, the positivist approach of mixed quantitative and qualitative content analysis was adopted to examine how tweets from the Twitter handles of two presidential candidates set the news agenda for mainstream media thereby influencing public opinion and perception about political issues within the

period of 2019 electioneering in Nigeria. The approach was adopted because the data collected from studies using this design can be quantified to describe some characteristics of the manifest content of communication.

### **3.1.1 Content Analysis**

Media material can be studied using distinct methods, but content analysis offers a systematic and objective framework for understanding message content, testing hypotheses of message characteristics, contrasting media material to the “real world,” assessing media representation of certain groups in a cultural setting and laying the foundation for pilot-testing media effects research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). As a methodology, content analysis refers to a set of procedures for the systematic, replicable assessment of the characteristics of communication content (both manifest and latent) that includes classifying the components of a media text by applying a structured coding system from which inferences can be drawn about the content. Content analysis is most valuable when it has a historical perspective (when studying changes in the manner in which content are presented at different periods) or a comparative perspective (comparing and contrasting the features of two or more content produced using distinct machineries at different cultural and geographical settings) – or both perspectives (Berger, 2001; Neuendorf, 2002). The purpose is to learn something about the content and those who produced the message – written text whether in digital or in print, as well as other forms such as pictures, videos, films or visual media. Studies examining social issues including gender and race representation, violence, media coverage of political activities, etc. are often conducted using different approaches of content analysis (Canhoto, Rose & Spinks, 2015; Rubin, Rubin & Piele, 2000).

Content analysis can be qualitative or quantitative. As adopted in this study, the mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative content analysis aims to examine the characteristics of the selected communication content that have been categorized and assigned numerical values in accordance with valid statistical measurement rules comprising their quantity, frequency of occurrence, etc. to analyze the relationships involving those values in order to reliably answer the research questions (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000).

### **3.2 Population and Sample**

A study population generally consists of a well-defined collection of individuals, objects or content with common characteristics that are of particular interest to a scientific inquiry. For a content analysis, two significant factors in determining the suitable population or in “defining the universe” are the subject area and the timeframe that must be logically compatible with the research questions and linked to the study’s objectives (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

For an accurate definition of the universe, it is imperative to state that a total of seventy-three political parties and candidates registered and contested in the 2019 presidential race (INEC, 2019), but campaigning was dominated by two major aspirants: Muhammadu Buhari of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and Atiku Abubakar of the opposition People’s Democratic Party (PDP). These candidates were purposively chosen because of their popularity among the electorate and the established party machines on which they contested, as well as the amount of media coverage they (parties and candidates) received during the period. On the other hand, more than thirty newspapers, both print and online versions, are published in Nigeria (Nigerian Press Council, 2019). The choice of *Daily Trust*,



*Punch* and *Vanguard* was based on the consideration of their geographical spread in terms of operational base, outreach, ownership and their consistency in publishing news stories via Twitter and other Internet platforms. They are also among the 10 leading circulation newspapers based in the cities of Abuja (the administrative capital) and Lagos (the business hub of the country).

However, the population of this study comprises the total tweets posted on the Twitter handles of two presidential candidates in the Nigeria's 2019 general elections and the news content published via the Twitter handles of three major Nigerian newspapers between November 18, 2018 and February 28, 2019; covering the electioneering to the post-election periods. Statistically, the population consists of  $n215$  tweets from Muhammadu Buhari's handle,  $n233$  from Atiku Abubakar on one hand, and  $n3,442$  news content from *Daily Trust*,  $n3,221$  from *Punch* and  $n3,060$  from *Vanguard* on a range of topics including education, business and economy, politics, sports, health, on the other hand. These yielded a total of  $N=10,171$  as the study population.<sup>1</sup>

To obtain a representative sample, the tweets from both candidates were stratified into three subsets of tweeting periods: electioneering, election and post-election. Thus 69.9% of the total  $n215$  tweets from Buhari and 64.4% of the  $n233$  from Atiku were selected across the strata. This yielded  $n150$  tweets each from the two candidates, totaling a sample of  $N=300$ . To carefully scrutinize and pick out specific elements that are relevant from the large size of political news content which cannot be exhausted as it is too expensive and time-consuming, the purposive sampling

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<sup>1</sup> where  $n$  = number of units in population subset and  $N$  = sample in each population subset.

technique was carried out according to criteria of selection that flow logically from the objectives of the study (Lindlof & Bryan, 2002; White & Marsh, 2006). This produced  $n=2,021$  from *Daily Trust*,  $n=1,819$  from *Punch*, and  $n=1,423$  from *Vanguard* which puts the total at  $N=5,263$ . Using three strata of publishing periods: electioneering, election and post-election, the  $N=5,263$  news content were assigned numbers to generate a simple random sample. Relying on a table of random numbers,  $n=100$  items each were picked randomly from the numbered news content across the three publication strata in the three newspapers until the desired sample size of  $N=300$  was reached. This procedure was useful in achieving a consistency in the sample size, since the number of news content per newspaper cannot be greater than the number of tweets from the candidates. To ensure distribution across a study period, Ferguson (2000, p.90) observes that “the analyst can limit the sample to several items each week or month that are picked randomly. Alternatively, for a shorter term study, the researcher can select several items per day or can draw the sample from different days of the week.” Thus, the total sample for this study is  $N=600$  drawn from the two population clusters.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Because of the changing practices in political communication and journalism in general, Twitter (and other participatory platforms) has become a data source which can be utilized for the purpose of research. According to Ahmed, Bath and Demartini (2017), through the Search Application Programming Interface (API), or through the Firehose Application Programming Interface (API), data can be obtained from Twitter at a fee or no price. Most research has concentrated on the Search API because it efficiently allows anyone with an Internet connection to acquire data from Twitter. However, this study follows the path of previous researches (Dang-Xuan,

Stieglitz, Wladarsch, & Neuberger, 2013; D’heer & Verdegem, 2014; Graham et al., 2016; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012) that utilize a combination of the Search API and other computer software and Internet applications to gather data from Twitter.

Guided by the study time frame, the Twitter Advanced Search API was utilized to systematically query tweets from the following handles: @MBuhari (Muhammadu Buhari), @atiku (Atiku Abubakar), @daily\_trust (*Daily Trust*), @MobilePunch (*Punch*), and @vanguardngrnews (*Vanguard*). By specifying a range of dates (November 18, 2018 to February 28, 2019), the API produced individual tweets from these handles within the study period. The search results page was received as: “from:daily\_trust, OR from:MobilePunch, OR from:vanguardngrnews, OR from:mbuhari, OR from:atiku since:2018-11-18 until:2019-02-28.” To archive the data, two Google Chrome browser application extensions: iMacros (personal edition) and FireShot (lite version) were utilized to record and save the tweets for future reference.

### **3.4 Unit of Analysis and Content Categories**

Messages posted on a Twitter feed have a character limit of 280. So, the unit of analysis consists of the words and phrases in individual tweets from the two presidential candidates and news tweets from the selected newspapers.

The content categories for this study emanate from preliminary examination of the data. This comprises four major categories based on common factors and themes that emerge from the data. The first cluster was according to time frame: electioneering period i.e. November 18, 2018 to February 14, 2019 (before postponement of the polls) and February 16 to 21 (after the rescheduling); the election period i.e. February

22 to 24 2019 (24 hours before and 24 hours after the polls); and the post-election period i.e. February 25 to 28 2019. The second cluster was according to issues: security (addressing insurgencies, fostering unity, inclusiveness, etc.), anti-corruption/electoral matters (promoting accountability, zero tolerance for nepotism, impunity, misappropriation of public funds, conduct of credible elections, etc.) and economic recovery/diversification (job creation, business openings, infrastructure, etc.). These were the dominant issues in the two candidates' manifestos. The third was based on narrative frames used by the candidates: appraise (i.e. attempt to create or correct an existing public perception through self-praise) and attack (i.e. attempt to discredit or intimidate an opponent). Lastly, the style of presentation or representation of candidates' tweets in the news was under: direct (stories that replicate most elements of the tweets verbatim through quotations), partial (reproduced with modifications through comments and paraphrasing), and indirect (stories that describe the issues and refer to other sources for authenticity). In addition, a miscellaneous category labeled as "others" was created for content that do not fit into any of the four. These categorizations follow the research questions.

### **3.5 Coding Scheme**

A standardized coding sheet was systematically created based on the content categories and utilized for data coding and subsequent analysis. See Appendix A.

### **3.6 Inter-coder Reliability**

To pilot-test the coding scheme, two interdependent coders were issued coding guides with 10% ( $n=60$ ) of the total sample ( $n=150 \times 2 + 300 = N=600$ ) for reliability check. There are different formulas for calculating the inter-coder reliability (Matthew, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002). The inter-coder coefficient was calculated using Cohen's (1960) *kappa* formula:  $k = (P_o - P_c) / (N - P_c)$ , where N is

the total number of judgments made by each coder,  $P_o$  is the proportion of units which coders agreed and  $P_c$  is the proportion of units which agreement is expected by chance. The coders agreed on fifty-eight judgments and two agreements were expected by chance,  $0.80 = (58 - 2)/(60 - 2)$ . This method was applied in a similar analysis by Ersoy (2016). However, Neuendorf (2002, p.145) confirms that “the coefficient should be at 95% (i.e. not  $< 0.75$ ) confidence level, plus or minus .04”.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Coded data were inputted into the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 and analyzed using crosstabulation method of descriptive statistics. The results were discussed through textual interpretation to illustrate the findings in line with the research questions.

### **3.8 Research Ethics**

The researcher complied with the regulations of Research and Publications Ethics Board. All relevant forms were completed and submitted to the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research through the appointed Supervisor and Departmental/Faculty Monitoring Committees as at when due. The study also complied with other ethical concerns relating to data-sourcing from the Internet and social media platforms such as privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, and appropriation of others’ personal stories (Sharf, 1999). Twitter’s Terms of Service and Privacy Policy which govern how users may access and use the platform are also included (Ahmed et al., 2017).

## Chapter 4

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter establishes meaning from the statistically analyzed data in relation to the research objectives and questions clearly defined in chapter one.

#### 4.1 Analysis of Variables in Data

Overall, this study consists of seventeen variables split across the two clusters of data assembled from the sample size. Variables were defined based on the researcher's placement of data into units and categories of analysis as spelt out in chapter three. This ensured the efficiency of data analysis and interpretation as presented below.

Table 4.1: Distribution of tweets among candidates by tweeting periods

Tweeting Candidates		Tweeting Periods			Total
		EP	PP	PE	
MB	Count	133	1	16	150
	% of Total	44.3%	0.3%	5.3%	50.0%
AA	Count	134	1	15	150
	% of Total	44.7%	0.3%	5.0%	50.0%
Total	Count	267	2	31	300
	% of Total	89.0%	0.7%	10.3%	100.0%

Table 4.1 shows a crosstabulation of tweets from the handles of @MBuhari - Muhammadu Buhari (MB) and @atiku - Atiku Abubakar (AA) according to tweeting periods. It infers that AA has 44.7% ( $n=134$ ) of the tweets in Electioneering Period (EP). Both candidates have 0.3% ( $n=1$ ) each in the Polling Period (PP), while MB has

5.3% (*n*16) in the Post-Election Period (PE). In summary, the electioneering period has 89.0% (*n*267) of tweets across the three periods. It is also interesting to note the variations in candidates' tweeting activities in the EP and PE. Atiku tweeted more than Buhari during EP because he was more optimistic while Buhari tweeted more in the PE because he had won. Candidates tweeted very low in the PP because the Electoral Act prohibits campaigns 24hours before and during the polls.

Table 4.2: Distribution of tweets among candidates by issues

Tweeting Candidates		Issues in the Candidates' Tweets			Total
		SE	AE	ER	
MB	Count	41	75	34	150
	% of Total	13.7%	25.0%	11.3%	50.0%
AA	Count	31	72	47	150
	% of Total	10.3%	24.0%	15.7%	50.0%
Total	Count	72	147	81	300
	% of Total	24.0%	49.0%	27.0%	100.0%

Table 4.2 infers that 13.7% (*n*41) of tweets on Security (SE) issues were from MB, 25.0% (*n*75) of tweets on Anti-corruption/Electoral Matters (AE) from MB and 15.7% (*n*47) of tweets on the issues of Economic recovery/diversification (ER) from AA. However, anti-corruption and electoral matters (AE) were dominant with 49.0% (*n*147) of the total tweets by issues. Buhari's tweeting has more of SE and AE because his campaign was dominated by efforts to showcase past achievements on these issues while Atiku's has more of ER because he focused on promises of reviving the economy if elected.

Table 4.3: Dominant narrative frames in candidates' tweets

Tweeting Candidates		Narrative Frames in Tweets			Total
		AP	AT		
MB	Count	98	52	150	
	% of Total	32.7%	17.3%	50.0%	
AA	Count	71	79	150	
	% of Total	23.7%	26.3%	50.0%	
Total	Count	169	131	300	
	% of Total	56.3%	43.7%	100.0%	

Table 4.3 reveals that 32.7% (*n*98) of tweets from @MBuhari (MB) used the Appraise frame (AP) and 26.3% (*n*79) of the tweets from @atiku (AA) utilized the Attack (AT) frame. The appraise frame has 56.3% (*n*169) of the total tweets by frames. As the incumbent, Buhari used more of appraise frame because he is seeking reelection. This could be a strategy deployed to influence voters' decision while Atiku utilized the attack frame as a counter-strategy to convince the electorate that the incumbent has failed in delivering on the promises made earlier.

Table 4.4: Newspapers' news tweets according to publishing periods

Tweeting Newspapers		Publishing Period of News Tweets			Total
		EP	PP	PE	
<i>DT</i>	Count	52	21	27	100
	% of Total	17.3%	7.0%	9.0%	33.3%
<i>PU</i>	Count	42	28	30	100
	% of Total	14.0%	9.3%	10.0%	33.3%
<i>VG</i>	Count	60	14	26	100
	% of Total	20.0%	4.7%	8.7%	33.3%
Total	Count	154	63	83	300
	% of Total	51.3%	21.0%	27.7%	100.0%



Table 4.4 indicates 20.0% (*n*60) of news tweets are from @vanguardngrnews - *Vanguard* (VG) in the Electioneering Period (EP), 9.3% (*n*28) from @MobilePunch - *Punch* (PU) in the Polling Period (PP) and 10.0% (*n*30) are yet again from *Punch* in the Post-Election Period (PE). Accordingly, the electioneering period takes 51.3% (*n*154) of the total news tweets across the three periods. This is because the period was dominated by series of campaigns and mobilization efforts across the country by candidates and political parties. During the PP, the newspapers focused more on informing the electorate about results of the ongoing elections, instead of the usual focus on the candidates' activities.

Table 4.5: Newspapers' news tweets according to issues

Tweeting Newspapers		Issues in the News Tweets			Total
		SE	AE	ER	
<i>DT</i>	Count	35	37	28	100
	% of Total	11.7%	12.3%	9.3%	33.3%
<i>PU</i>	Count	30	35	35	100
	% of Total	10.0%	11.7%	11.7%	33.3%
<i>VG</i>	Count	34	51	15	100
	% of Total	11.3%	17.0%	5.0%	33.3%
Total	Count	99	123	78	300
	% of Total	33.0%	41.0%	26.0%	100.0%

Data in table 4.5 illustrate that 11.7% (*n*35) of the news tweets on Security (SE) emanate from *Daily Trust* (DT), 17.0% (*n*51) on Anti-corruption/Electoral Matters (AE) came from *Vanguard* (VG), and 11.7% (*n*35) on Economic recovery/diversification (ER) from *Punch* (PU). The AE dominate other issues with 41.0% (*n*123) of the total news tweet across the three newspapers. The obvious reason is because both candidates and political parties accused each other of

economic corruption and electoral fraud. There were many instances where Buhari and his party, the APC accused Atiku and other members of the PDP of being responsible for the country's economic woes because of their tolerance for corruption during the 16 years of PDP rule. Atiku and the PDP also used different defense mechanisms by accusing Buhari of presiding over the most corrupt administration and for being selective in the anticorruption war since there are allegedly corrupt member of the APC who were not being investigated.

## 4.2 Crosstabulation Analysis of Tweets between Candidates and Newspapers

The data presented in this section provide a roadmap towards answering the research questions stated in chapter one.

Table 4.6: Newspapers' news tweets according to sources

Tweeting Newspaper		Source of News Tweets		Total
		MB	AA	
<i>DT</i>	Count	33	26	59
	% of Total	17.6%	13.9%	31.6%
<i>PU</i>	Count	52	38	90
	% of Total	27.8%	20.3%	48.1%
<i>VG</i>	Count	16	22	38
	% of Total	8.6%	11.8%	20.3%
Total	Count	101	86	187
	% of Total	54.0%	46.0%	100.0%

Table 4.6 demonstrates that out of the total *n*187 news sourced from the candidates, 54.0% (*n*101) were from @MBuhari (MB). Among newspapers, the *Punch* (PU) published 48.1% (*n*90) of the total news sourced from @MBuari (MB) and @atiku (AA). Obviously, Buhari received more media attention than Atiku because of the

power of incumbency. A number of reasons including political affiliation or economic interest could account for the variation in frequency of coverage by the newspapers.

Table 4.7: Style of presentation/representation of candidates' tweets in the news

Tweeting Newspaper		Style of Presentation of Candidates' Tweets in the News			Total
		DI	PA	IN	
<i>DT</i>	Count	18	21	20	59
	% of Total	9.6%	11.2%	10.7%	31.6%
<i>PU</i>	Count	35	28	27	90
	% of Total	18.7%	15.0%	14.4%	48.1%
<i>VG</i>	Count	12	15	11	38
	% of Total	6.4%	8.0%	5.9%	20.3%
Total	Count	65	64	58	187
	% of Total	34.8%	34.2%	31.0%	100.0%

Table 4.7 shows that 18.7% (*n*35) of candidates' tweets were published by *Punch* (PU) using the Direct (DI) presentation style without modifications, and another 15.0% (*n*28) presented using the Partial (PA) style with modifications in the same newspaper. Again, 14.4% (*n*27) of the news published using the Indirect (ID) style was from the *Punch* newspaper. The DI presentation style takes 34.8% (*n*65) of the total across the three presentation styles. The figures below illustrate further.

### 4.3 Cross-matching of Tweets and Published News

This section illustrates the candidates' tweets and how they were presented in the form of news by the selected newspapers. It is however, important to note some points of emphasis from the candidates' tweets upon which the publishing newspapers based their stories as illustrated in figures 1-20.



Figure 1: @MBuhari's campaign launch message

The *Punch* newspaper sourced the above story from a combination of two @MBuhari's tweets on his campaign launch. The style of presentation is partial because it contains phrases that capture elements from the two tweets: "showcases achievements" and "launches campaign documents."



Figure 2: @MBuhari's message to candidates

The style of presentation adopted by *Daily Trust* is both direct and partial. It captures a segment of @MBuhari's first tweet and modified it as: "Buhari lunches campaign" and another from the second tweet: "Let us not set it ablaze."



Figure 3: @MBuhari’s visit to wounded troops

The two newspapers used different presentation styles in publishing @MBuhari’s tweet. *Daily Trust* modified it as: “Buhari pays tributes to fighting insurgents” while *Punch* used the same photo directly from the tweet and modified the wordings thus: “Buhari visits wounded soldiers.”

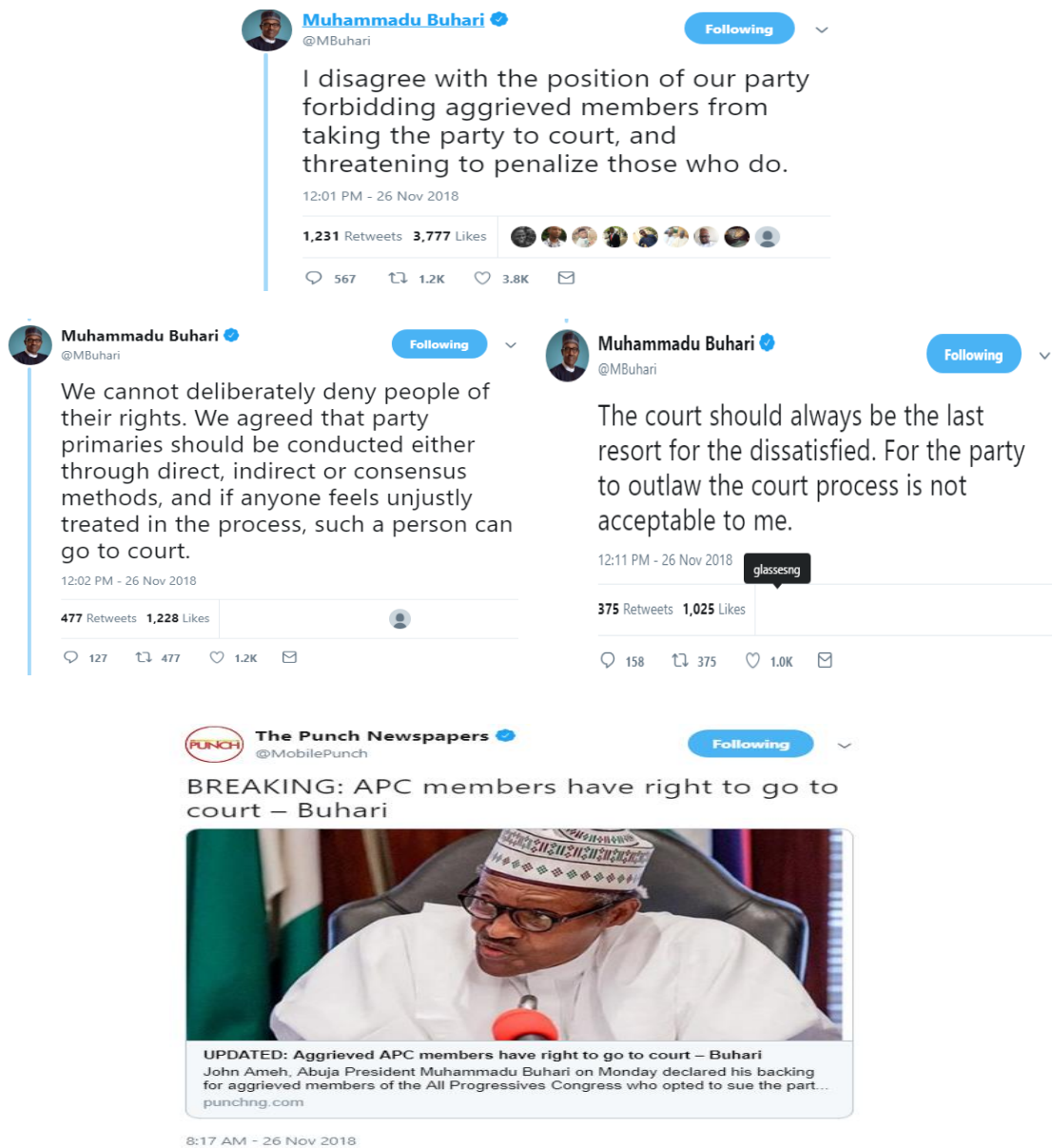



Figure 4: @MBuhari’s message to aggrieved party members

*Punch* newspaper adopted the partial presentation style in publishing the above story from @MBuhari’s tweets. Yet again, the headline was modified to sound like a direct quotation: “APC members have right to go to court – Buhari.”

**Muhammadu Buhari** @MBuhari  
 One of the questions that came up today in my meeting with Nigerians in Poland was on the issue of whether I've been cloned or not. The ignorant rumours are not surprising — when I was away on medical vacation last year a lot of people hoped I was dead.



10:42 AM - 2 Dec 2018

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**Muhammadu Buhari** @MBuhari  
 I can assure you all that this is the real me. Later this month I will celebrate my 76th birthday. And I'm still going strong!


10:56 AM - 2 Dec 2018

1,078 Retweets 3,074 Likes

733 1.1K 3.1K

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**Vanguard Newspapers** @vanguardngnews  
 Buhari: I'm not 'Jubril, I'm Buhari, President makes mockery of critics



Buhari: I'm not 'Jubril, I'm Buhari, President makes mockery of critics - Vanguard Newspapers  
 President Muhammadu Buhari, has finally responded to the canard making rounds that he died when he went for a medical treatment in UK and replaced by one Jubril...  
 vanguardng.com

11:14 AM - 2 Dec 2018

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**Vanguard Newspapers** @vanguardngnews  
 Buhari: I'm not cloned, I am Buhari and will soon celebrate my 76th birthday




Buhari: I'm not 'Jubril, I'm Buhari, President makes mockery of critics - Vanguard Newspapers  
 President Muhammadu Buhari, has finally responded to the canard making rounds that he died when he went for a medical treatment in UK and replaced by one Jubril...  
 vanguardng.com

11:15 AM - 2 Dec 2018

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**Vanguard Newspapers** @vanguardngnews  
 Buhari reacts to cloning allegation, promises to celebrate 76th birthday on Dec. 17 == has been published on Vanguard News Nigeria - [vanguardng.com/2018/12/buhari](http://vanguardng.com/2018/12/buhari) ...



1:11 PM - 2 Dec 2018

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**Vanguard Newspapers** @vanguardngnews  
 I am still Buhari, not Jubril, President tells Nigerians




Buhari: I'm not 'Jubril, I'm Buhari, President makes mockery of critics - Vanguard Newspapers  
 President Muhammadu Buhari, has finally responded to the canard making rounds that he died when he went for a medical treatment in UK and replaced by one Jubril...  
 vanguardng.com

11:20 AM - 2 Dec 2018

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**The Punch Newspapers** @MobilePunch  
 Finally, Buhari addresses rumours of being cloned in Poland  
[bit.ly/2DTv7sy](http://bit.ly/2DTv7sy)



9:45 AM - 2 Dec 2018

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**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust  
 #BREAKING: It's real me, I'm not cloned – @MBuhari


[dailytrust.com.ng/breaking-its-r](http://dailytrust.com.ng/breaking-its-r) ... via @daily\_trust @NGRPresident @AsoRock @OfficialAPCNg @APCNigeria @CrossCheckNG @Sam\_Ezeh



9:20 AM - 3 Dec 2018

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**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust  
 Buhari: I am not cloned, I am still going strong + VIDEO



Buhari: I am not cloned. I am still going strong - VIDEO - Daily Trust  
 President Muhammadu Buhari has broken his silence on the "cloned" rumours. Some Nigerians including public figures have claimed that Buhari is dead and has been replaced by one Jubril...  
 dailytrust.com.ng

11:54 AM - 2 Dec 2018

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**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust  
 It's ignorant, irreligious to say I'm cloned – Buhari

It's ignorant, irreligious to say I'm cloned – Buhari – Daily Trust  
 President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday reacted to rumours making the rounds that he has been cloned saying "it's real me". Daily Trust reports that there have been allegations that one "Ji..."  
 dailytrust.com.ng

9:20 AM - 3 Dec 2018

Figure 5: @MBuhari's comments on cloning



The four stories from *Vanguard* newspaper adopted the direct, partial and indirect presentation styles. However, the *Punch* used the indirect style with the photo taken directly from the tweet while *Daily Trust* utilized the direct presentation style in three published stories.

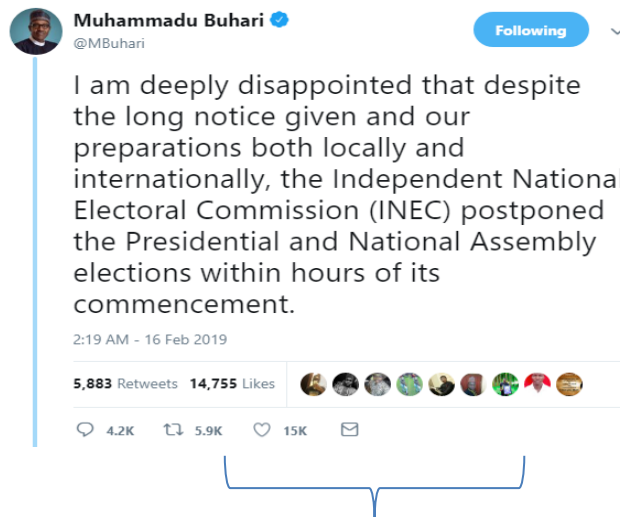


Figure 6: @MBuhari’s comments on poll shift

The two stories from *Punch* utilized the direct presentation style, as follows: “I’m deeply disappointed with INEC – Buhari.” However, the two stories were published by the same newspaper at different dates.

**Muhammadu Buhari** @MBuhari Following

Today I received a delegation from the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, USA, here to assess our pre-election preparations. It was an opportunity for me to again assure that I will ensure a level playing field for all contestants in 2019.

9:41 AM - 17 Dec 2018

852 Retweets 2,988 Likes

373 852 3.0K

**Muhammadu Buhari** @MBuhari Following

What the incumbents at the time used to do was just to award votes, and then tell anyone who was dissatisfied to go to court. But we won't do that. I am prepared to give the opposition the opportunities I was not given in the past.

9:43 AM - 17 Dec 2018

496 Retweets 1,455 Likes

210 496 1.5K

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust Following

President Muhammadu Buhari has reiterated his determination to ensure a level-playing field for all contestants into political offices in 2019 general elections.



2019: I'll give my opponents opportunities I didn't get - Buhari – Daily Trust  
President Muhammadu Buhari has reiterated his determination to ensure a level-playing field for all contestants into political offices in 2019 general elections. The ...  
dailytrust.com.ng

10:23 AM - 17 Dec 2018

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust Following

Buhari: I'll give opposition opportunities I never had  
[dailytrust.com.ng/buhari-ill-giv ...](http://dailytrust.com.ng/buhari-ill-giv...)  
[@daily\\_Trust](https://twitter.com/daily_Trust)  
[#DailyTrust](https://twitter.com/DailyTrust)



Buhari: I'll give opposition opportunities I never had – Daily Trust  
President Muhammadu Buhari has promised to give the opposition opportunities in the coming elections, the type he himself was never accorded on the four occasion...  
dailytrust.com.ng

6:30 AM - 18 Dec 2018

**Vanguard Newspapers** @vanguardngnews Following

2019: I'll give my opponents opportunities I didn't get, says President Buhari==has been published on Vanguard News Nigeria - [vanguardngr.com/2018/12/2019-i ...](http://vanguardngr.com/2018/12/2019-i...)



2019: I'll give my opponents opportunities I didn't get, says President Buhari==has been published on Vanguard News Nigeria - [vanguardngr.com/2018/12/2019-i ...](http://vanguardngr.com/2018/12/2019-i...)

10:34 AM - 17 Dec 2018

7 Retweets 18 Likes

**The Punch Newspapers** @MobilePunch Following

2019: I'll give my opponents the opportunity I was denied, Buhari vows



2019: I'll give my opponents the opportunity I was denied, Buhari vows  
President Muhammadu Buhari has reiterated his determination to ensure a level-playing field for all contestants into political offices in 2019 general elections. The P...  
punchng.com

11:22 AM - 17 Dec 2018

45 Retweets 123 Likes

Figure 7: @MBuhari's comments on free and fair elections

One of the stories from *Daily Trust* adopted the partial presentation style while the second used the direct style. The *Vanguard* and *Punch* used the partial style.

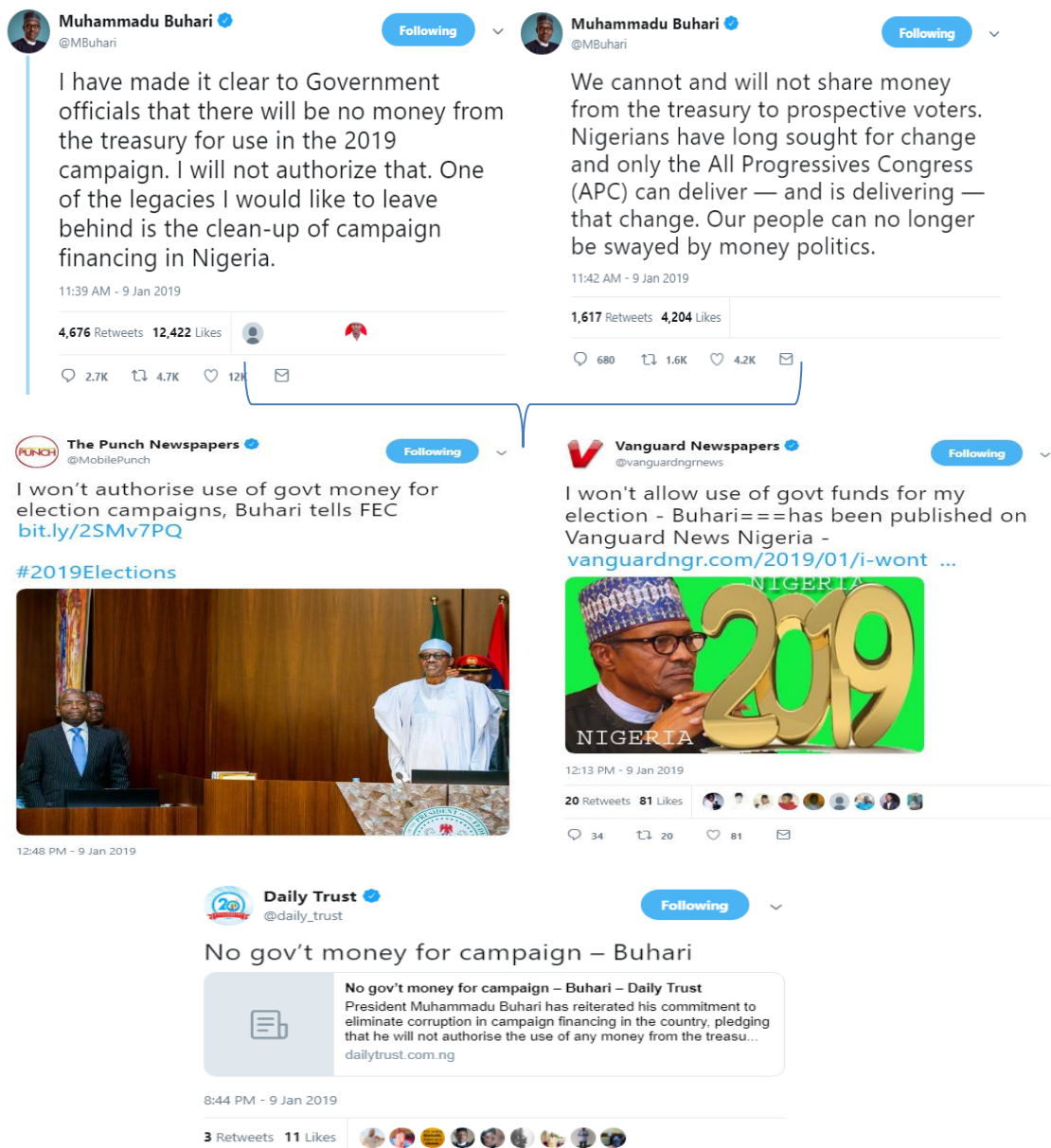


Figure 8: @MBuhari’s comments on campaign fund

The two stories from *Punch* and *Vanguard* utilized the direct presentation style while *Daily Trust* used the partial style. For example, the headline used by *Punch* was quoted verbatim from @MBuhari’s tweets: “I won’t authorize use of govt money for election campaign.” *Vanguard* newspaper also quoted as follows: “I won’t allow use of govt funds for my election.” However, *Daily Trust* modified the tweet as: “No gov’t money for campaign – Buhari.”

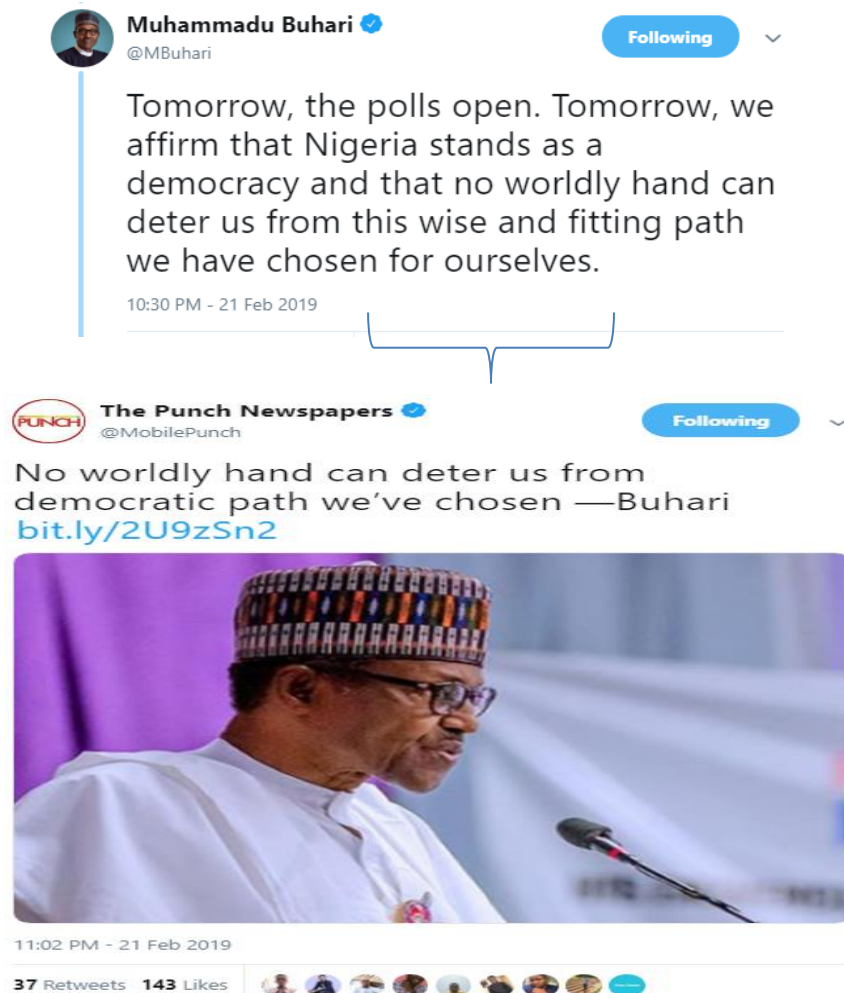


Figure 9: @MBuhari’s comments on democracy

The stories from *Vanguard* and *Punch* utilized the direct presentation style. For example, the headlines of both newspapers were quoted directly from @MBuhari’s tweets: “no worldly hand can deter us from this wise and fitting path.”

**Muhammadu Buhari** @MBuhari Following

I would like to make a special appeal to my supporters not to gloat or humiliate the opposition. Victory is enough reward for your efforts.


11:12 PM - 26 Feb 2019

1,796 Retweets 3,666 Likes

---

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust Following

Don't gloat or humiliate opposition, Buhari urges supporters



Don't gloat or humiliate opposition, Buhari urges supporters – Daily Trust  
President Muhammadu Buhari has urged his supporters not to gloat or humiliate opposition as they celebrate his victory. In his acceptance speech at the campaign ...  
dailytrust.com.ng

12:58 AM - 27 Feb 2019

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust Following

Don't gloat or humiliate opposition, @MBuhari urges supporters

[dailytrust.com.ng/dont-gloat-or- ...](http://dailytrust.com.ng/dont-gloat-or-...)



9:44 PM - 26 Feb 2019

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**Vanguard Newspapers** @vanguardngrnews Following

Don't incite opposition, Presidency tells Buhari's supporters [dlvr.it/QztN2n](http://dlvr.it/QztN2n)  
[@vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com) #vanguardnews



7:14 AM - 28 Feb 2019

**Vanguard Newspapers** @vanguardngrnews Following

Don't humiliate Atiku, others, Buhari begs [dlvr.it/QzpC4P](http://dlvr.it/QzpC4P) [@vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com)  
#vanguardnews

Figure 10: @MBuhari's comments to supporters on gloating opposition

The presentation style used in the news from *Daily Trust* was direct. However, quotes from @MBuhari's tweet were used verbatim in the two stories published on different dates with different pictures. *Vanguard* also used the partial styles for two stories published differently. For example, "don't incite opposition..." and "don't humiliate Atiku, others, Buhari begs."

**Atiku Abubakar** @atiku  
 My plan to get Nigeria working again.  
 #TheAtikuPlan #LetsGetNigeriaWorkingAgain



9:08 61K viewers  
 My plan to get Nigeria working again. #TheAtikuPlan #LetsGetNigeriaWorking...  
 Atiku Abubakar @atiku

3:00 AM - 19 Nov 2018  
 5,421 Retweets 8,775 Likes

**Atiku Abubakar** @atiku  
 Today, I am formally presenting myself to you as the presidential candidate of not just the @OfficialPDPNig, but of the hopes and aspirations of all Nigerians.  
 #TheAtikuPlan

3:02 AM - 19 Nov 2018  
 4,004 Retweets 9,227 Likes

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust  
 BREAKING  
 LIVE: Atiku unveils plans for Nigeria  
[dailytrust.com/ng/live-atiku-unv ...](http://dailytrust.com/ng/live-atiku-unv...)  
 @atiku  
 @OfficialPDPNig



3:07 AM - 19 Nov 2018  
 17 Retweets 39 Likes

**The Punch Newspapers** @MobilePunch  
 BREAKING: Atiku launches presidential campaign, calls it 'The Atiku Plan'



Atiku launches presidential campaign, calls it 'The Atiku Plan'  
 The presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar, has launched his campaign for the 2019 presidential election. He called it The Atiku Pla.  
 punching.com

3:24 AM - 19 Nov 2018  
 134 Retweets 354 Likes

Figure 11: @atiku's campaign launch

The stories from *Daily Trust* and *Punch* newspapers were presented using the partial style. For example, *Daily Trust* modified and published the tweet as: “Atiku unveils plans for Nigeria” while *Punch* published as: “Atiku launches presidential campaign, calls it The Atiku Plan’.”



Figure 12: @atiku’s comments on inclusive leadership

In publishing @atiku’s tweet, *Daily Trust* utilized the partial presentation style. This is evident in the modification of the wordings of tweets as published in the story headline: “@Atiku flags off campaign, promises inclusive govt.”

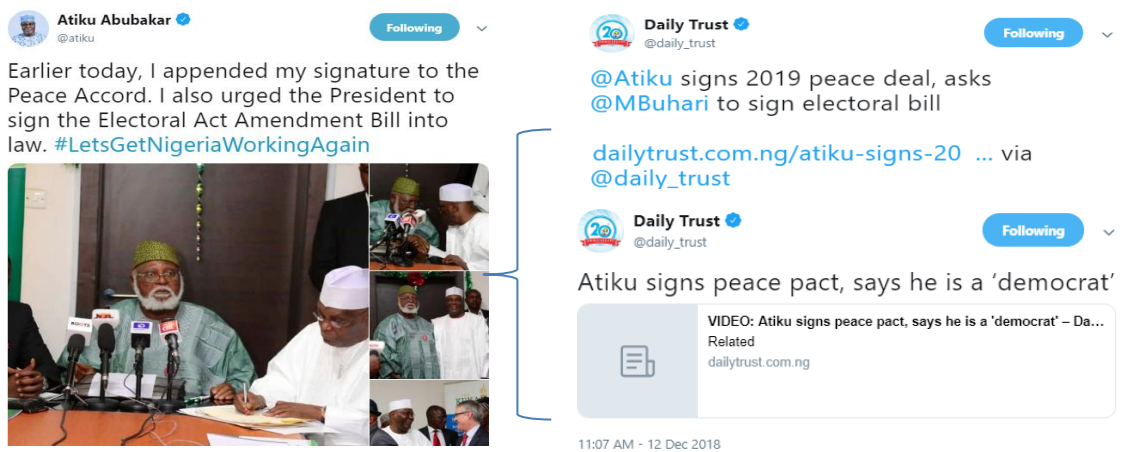


Figure 13: @atiku’s comments on peace pact

As seen above, *Daily Trust* published two stories from @atiku’s tweet using the partial presentation style. The stories were published at different dates with slight modifications in the headlines.



Figure 14: @atiku’s comments on presidential debate

Here, a segment of @atiku’s tweet was published verbatim by *Daily Trust* using the direct presentation style.



Figure 15: @atiku’s comments on shunning presidential debate

The partial presentation style was used in one of the stories by *Daily Trust*, while the indirect style was used for the second story. Both stories were published on different dates by the same newspaper.



**Atiku Abubakar** @atiku Following

The Purported Suspension of CJN Onnoghen is an Act of Dictatorship Taken too Far.

Read more: [facebook.com/14312764639/po](https://facebook.com/14312764639/po)

10:52 AM - 25 Jan 2019

2,681 Retweets 5,225 Likes

893 2.7K 5.2K

**Atiku Abubakar** @atiku Following

The purported suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria by President Muhammadu Buhari, is an anti-democratic act which I reject in its entirety and call on Justice Onnoghen and the judiciary to resist with every legal and constitutional means that they can muster.

11:57 AM - 25 Jan 2019

3,120 Retweets 7,109 Likes

1.0K 3.1K 7.1K

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust Following

A former Vice president and the presidential candidate of the @OfficialPDPNig, @atiku has described the suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Honourable Justice Walter Nkanu Samuel Onnoghen by @MBuhari as an act of dictatorship taken too far.



Suspension of CJN Onnoghen is an act of dictatorship taken too far — Atiku ...  
A former Vice president and the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar has described the suspension of the Chief Justice of N...  
dailytrust.com.ng

10:19 AM - 25 Jan 2019

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust Following

The purported suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria by @mBuhari, is an anti democratic act which I reject in its entirety and call on Justice Onnoghen and the judiciary to resist with every legal and constitutional means that they can muster.



Suspension of CJN Onnoghen is an act of dictatorship taken too far — Atiku ...  
A former Vice president and the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar has described the suspension of the Chief Justice of N...  
dailytrust.com.ng

11:41 AM - 25 Jan 2019

**Daily Trust** @daily\_trust Following

Suspension of CJN Onnoghen is an act of dictatorship taken too far — Atiku [dailytrust.com.ng/suspension-of- ...](https://dailytrust.com.ng/suspension-of-...) #dailytrust



Suspension of CJN Onnoghen is an act of dictatorship taken too far — Atiku ...  
A former Vice president and the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar has described the suspension of the Chief Justice of N...  
dailytrust.com.ng

1:53 PM - 25 Jan 2019

4 Retweets 14 Likes

**The Punch Newspapers** @MobilePunch Following

Suspension of CJN Onnoghen, an act of dictatorship taken too far @atiku [punchng.com/suspension-of- ...](https://punchng.com/suspension-of-...) #NigeriaDecides2019



Suspension of CJN Onnoghen, an act of dictatorship taken too far -Atiku ...  
The presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar, on Friday described the suspension of Onnoghen by Buhari an anti-democratic act. He  
punchng.com

1:03 AM - 26 Jan 2019 from Nigeria

71 Retweets 171 Likes

Figure 16: @atiku's comments on the suspension of CJN

The first three stories from *Daily Trust* utilize the direct presentation style with most phrases from @atiku's tweets used verbatim. Yet again, the story from *Punch* used the direct style.



Figure 17: @atiku’s comments on ASUU strike

*Vanguard* newspaper published @atiku’s tweet in the above story using the partial presentation style by focusing on one aspect of issues raised in the tweet.



Figure 18: @atiku’s comments on ambition

The *Punch* newspaper published @atiku’s tweet in the above news story using the direct presentation style. The wordings of the tweet were quoted verbatim as seen from the story headline.



Figure 19: @atiku's comments on military

The partial presentation style was adopted by *Vanguard* newspaper in publishing @atiku's tweet as the wordings were modified.



Figure 20: @atiku's comments on casting his vote

In publishing @atiku's tweets, the first story by *Punch* newspaper utilized the partial presentation style while the second used direct style. The story by *Vanguard* however, used the partial presentation style.

## 4.4 Findings

The findings are discussed in accordance with the research questions and literature review.

### Research Question 1

Findings in respect of research question one reveal the relationship between the candidates' tweets and news content published on Twitter handles of the selected newspapers as that which emanates in the process of constructing the reality about daily political events in the society. In the context of news production, this relationship is seen as that of the power struggle among actors in the political communication and meaning-making process about what issues the electorate should consider as worthy of attention. As presented in the literature (Berkowitz, 2009; Carah & Louw, 2015; Schudson, 2003), it is fitting to assert that the relationship between the candidates' tweets and the published news content is presumed as the journalists/media-to-sources relationship.

The data in table 4.6 reveal this further, as 31.6% (*n*59) of the *n*100 political news published via @daily\_trust (DT) were sourced directly from the two candidates' tweets. Specifically, 17.6% (*n*33) was from @MBuhari's (MB) tweets and 13.9% (*n*26) from @atiku's (AA). On the other hand, 48.1% (*n*90) of the stories published by @MobilePunch (PU) were sourced from the two candidates, with 27.8% (*n*52) from MB and 20.3% (*n*38) from AA. Similarly, @vanguardngrnews (VG) sourced 20.3% (*n*38) out of the *n*100 news from the candidates; 11.8% (*n*22) from @atiku and 8.6% (*n*16) from @MBuhari. This therefore portends a significant relationship between tweets from the two candidates and the news published via the Twitter handles of the selected newspapers. Convincing also, is the fact that Nigerian

newspapers are to a certain extent embracing and normalizing the trend of incorporating user-generated content particularly tweets from political leaders into their professionally produced news content. This is in line with findings from previous studies (Graham et al., 2016; Thimm et al., 2016) which revealed that journalists and the media are more likely to use tweets as their source of story ideas in the modern political environment.

### **Research Question 2**

Research question two seeks to ascertain the dominant issues featured in the candidates' tweets and in the published news content. Results in tables 4.2 and 4.5, reveal that anticorruption/electoral matters with 49.0% (*n*147) dominated the tweets of the candidates while 41.0% (*n*123) of content from the selected newspapers were on anticorruption/electoral matters. Perhaps, this issue became dominant in the candidates' tweets because their campaign manifestos revolved around efforts to showcase past achievements and promises of promoting accountability in governance, curbing nepotism, impunity, misappropriation of public funds, enhancing electoral credibility, among other issues of democratic reform.

The newspapers, on the other hand, could also have given more attention to this issue because corruption has always been adjudged to be a “cankerworm” and a “monster” that all and sundry blame for the economic woes and sociopolitical instabilities facing the country (Adeyemi, 2013). The need to perform the democratic role of holding government accountable while also empowering the electorate with necessary information to guide their choices (as expounded earlier in the literature: Akinwale, 2010; Constitution of Nigeria, 1999; UNESCO, 2012) could be among other reasons for the dominance of the issue in the news, especially towards

evaluating the performance of the incumbent government whose change mantra is “fight against corruption.”

### **Research Question 3**

This research question examines the dominant narrative frames in candidates’ tweets. Accordingly, data in table 4.3 reveal that 56.3% (*n*169) of the total *n*300 tweets from the two candidates utilized the appraise narrative, thus becoming the dominant frame. In this narrative frame, the candidates utilized certain communication strategies aimed at influencing public perceptions about themselves and the issues being addressed in their tweets. However, 43.7% (*n*131) of the total tweets utilized the attack narrative. Tweets in this category basically utilized communication strategies aimed at discrediting or intimidating a political opponent. Besides, several reasons could be given for the 32.7% (*n*98) of the total tweets in the appraise category emanating from candidate Buhari and 26.3% (*n*79) of the tweets in attack category from Atiku.

Whereas candidate Buhari was vying for a second term in office, his campaign efforts obviously focused on showcasing some achievements during the first term, as well as pledges of better performance to take Nigeria to the “Next Level” of prosperity if reelected. Atiku’s campaigns on the other hand, focused on presenting his candidacy as the only alternative that will “Get Nigeria Working Again” by providing better solutions to the recurring challenges of security, corruption and economy. As is the case with any electioneering effort, these candidates adopted concerted communication strategies via Twitter to frame certain policy issues to make them more salient thereby focusing public attention on specific aspect of those issues. It is in this process of framing that the public gets misinformed about certain

issues. Notable examples (from figures 1-20 above) to illustrate the narrative frames in the candidates' tweets include:

"...we are now faced with a choice: To keep on building a new Nigeria or to go back to its tainted past..." "...We are committed to deepening the work we started in the first term..." "...Join...on this journey to the NEXT LEVEL of..." (see Fig. 1 above).

"...we have no other country but Nigeria. Let us not set it ablaze..." (Fig. 2).

"...we have officers and men fighting bravely and tirelessly to keep our country safe..." (Fig. 3).

"...what the incumbents at the time used to do was just to award votes..." "...But we won't do that..." "...I am prepared to give the opposition the opportunities I was not given in the past" (Fig. 7).

"...We cannot and will not share money from the treasury..." "...Nigerians have long sought for change and only the All Progressives Congress (APC) can deliver..." "...our people can no longer be swayed by money politics" (Fig. 8).

"...Tomorrow, we affirm that Nigeria stands as a democracy and that no worldly hand can deter us from this wise and fitting path..." (Fig. 9).

"...I am officially presenting myself to you as the presidential candidate of not just the PDP, but the hopes and aspirations of all Nigerians" (Fig. 11).

"...I do not believe in attacking a man who is NOT here to defend himself" (Fig. 15).

"...is an act of Dictatorship Taken too Far..." "...is an anti-democratic act which I reject in its entirety and call on... and the judiciary to resist with..." (Fig. 16).

"...my first task on day one...will be to end this disgraceful strike..." (Fig. 17).

The usage of phrases such as "we," "our" and "us" in most of the tweets signify attempts to induce a sense of belonging and a show of concern to the electorate over the state of affairs in the country by appealing to their emotions to influence their perceptions about issues being discussed in the tweets. In contrast, other phrases and expressions such as "you," "I," "they," "their," "act of dictatorship," "resist," "award

votes,” “tainted past,” “disgraceful strike,” “headquarters of extreme poverty,” anti-democratic,” etc. indicate attempts to discredit and intimidate an opponent whether consciously or inadvertently. Even so, evidence from the literature (D'Angelo et al., 2019; McCombs, 2004; McCombs, Holbert, Kioussis & Wanta, 2011; McQuail, 2010; Soroka, 2002) reveals that politicians, bloggers, political satirists and critics do not only engage in message framing to strategically influence public perceptions and induce sympathy, but to amplify issues to the magnitude of featuring in the news agenda which in turn contribute to focusing public attention on specific facts. To lend credence to these findings, it is apt to reaffirm that the effectiveness of this framing depends on the style of presentation and frequency of coverage given to issues in the media agenda.

#### **Research Question 4**

As seen from the results in table 4.7 above, 34.8% (*n*65) of the *n*187 news sourced directly from the two candidates were published verbatim using most elements and direct quotations from the tweets without modifications. In this category, the *Punch* has 18.7% (*n*35) of the total. In the categories of tweets published with partial modifications through comments and paraphrasing, totaling 34.2% (*n*64) and tweets published indirectly with major changes through reference to other sources, tallying 31.0% (*n*58), the *Punch* takes the lead again with 15.0% (*n*28) in the former category and 14.4% (*n*27) in the latter.

In figure 2 for instance, @MBuhari's tweets read: “even as the Presidential and National Assembly campaigns kick off...we have no other country but Nigeria. Let us not set it ablaze...” In publishing this as a news story, @daily\_trust presents it as: “Buhari launches campaign manual, says: Let's not set Nigeria ablaze.” In figure 4, @MBuhari's tweets read: “I disagree with the position of our party forbidding



aggrieved members from taking the party to court...We cannot deliberately deny people of their rights...” However, @MobilePunch presents as follows: “APC members have the right to go to court – Buhari.” In figure 5, @MBuhari tweeted: “...the issue of whether I’ve been cloned or not... The ignorant rumours are not surprising... I can assure you all that this is the real me. Later this month I will celebrate my 76<sup>th</sup> birthday. And I’m still going strong!” Here, the style of presentation varies as @vanguardngrnews published four different stories from these tweets: “Buhari: I’m not Jibril, I’m Buhari, President makes mockery of critics;” “Buhari: I’m not cloned, I am Buhari and will soon celebrate my 76<sup>th</sup> birthday;” “Buhari reacts to cloning allegation, promises to celebrate 76<sup>th</sup> birthday on Dec. 17;” and “I am still Buhari, not Jibril, President tells Nigeria.” Also, @MobilePunch published: “Finally, Buhari addresses rumours of being cloned in Poland.” Likewise, @daily\_trust published varying reports: “It’s real me, I’m not cloned – Buhari;” “Buhari: I am not cloned, I am still going strong;” and “It’s ignorant, irreligious to say I’m cloned – Buhari.”

In figure 12, @atiku tweeted: “...one Nigerian cannot be as wise as all Nigerians. That is why I will offer inclusive leadership...,” while @daily\_trust published: “Atiku flags off campaign, promises inclusive govt.” In figure 17, @atiku tweeted: “If I get the job I am seeking, my first task on day one...will be to end this disgraceful strike and...,” whereas @vanguardngrnews published: “I’ll end ASUU strike first day in office – Atiku.” In figure 19, @atiku tweeted: “The Nigerian military is constitutionally responsible for protecting our national integrity and its borders...,” while @vanguardngrnews published it as: “Atiku to army: Protecting territory integrity is your business, not elections.” Worthy of note is the fact that in the body of some stories, the publishing newspapers make reference to the Twitter

handles of these candidates as the sources of their information for the news. In some case, the publishing newspapers use the same photos as used by the tweeting candidates. Regarding the frequency, it is interesting to also note that the newspapers in some instances publish two or more stories from a single tweet at different intervals. Distinct examples suffice in section 4.3 on cross-matching of tweets and published news (in figures 1 to 20) to lend credence to these findings.

By inference, the news media play an active role in reinforcing the significance of issues in the political actors' agendas through the style of presentation of such issues in the news. This corresponds with some assertions in the literature, that framing is achieved in the way the news is packaged, the amount of exposure, the tone of presentation, and the labeling and vocabulary. Learning from the news, on the other hand depends on two distinct sets of factors: individual differences and the style of news reports and programs that present public-affairs information (McCombs, Holbert, Kioussis & Wanta, 2011; Parenti, 1993). It therefore amounts to suggesting that political actors in Nigeria influence the framing of political news on one hand, and Twitter contributes significantly in building the agenda for issues which the mainstream media reinforce in their news through the style of presentation and frequency of coverage, thereby making the electorate consider issues in the agenda to be more salient than others, on the other hand.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a summary of the whole thesis, conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations for further research.

#### 5.1 Summary of the Study

Based on the literature and research findings, it is evident that technology has, and is increasingly transforming the practice of journalism in the contemporary. The communication strategies employed by political candidates and organizations have also been modified by the expansion of participatory media platforms, particularly Twitter which contributes to enhancing political dialogues between political candidates, representatives and the electorate. It is pertinent to say the emerging media technologies have transformed journalism into a free-for-all practice that anyone may engage in. This has been facilitated by the explosion of user-generated content. Individuals, political candidates and organizations nowadays contribute not only to the content produced by mainstream media, but also in the framing of content.

In this study, the researcher evaluated how tweets from the handles of Muhammadu Buhari as presidential candidate of the APC and Atiku Abubakar of the PDP set the news agenda for mainstream media thereby influencing public opinion and perceptions about political issues within the period of 2019 electioneering in Nigeria. Three Nigerian newspapers were analyzed, which are *Daily Trust*, *Punch* and

*Vanguard*. These were selected because of their ranking among the 10 leading circulation newspapers which are also consistent in publishing news via Twitter and other participatory platforms. Using a standardized coding sheet, a mixed approach of content analysis was used to examine *n*300 tweets from the two presidential candidates and *n*300 political news items from the three newspapers. This aided in answering the research questions and discussing the findings.

## **5.2 Conclusions Drawn from the Study**

This research was conducted to examine how tweets from the handles of two presidential candidates in the Nigeria's 2019 general elections contribute in building the news agenda for mainstream media and setting the public agenda to influence perceptions about political issues through their narrative frames. Three important periods; electioneering, polling and post-election were evaluated alongside three issues that dominated the campaigning; security, anticorruption/electoral matters and economic recovery. Findings were discussed in relation to four research questions and related studies.

The most important research questions examine the relationship between tweets from the two candidates and the news items published via the handles of the selected news media; and the dominant issue in the tweets and news. The basis for these questions was to provide a theoretical grounding for the research finding in line with the agenda-setting and agenda-building hypotheses. The research data revealed a significant relationship between the tweets and news predominantly in the electioneering and postelection periods. This suggests a verdict of politicians' tweets contributing in building the news agenda for mainstream media in relation to the coverage of political events in Nigeria. Among the three issues evaluated,

anticorruption/electoral matters dominated the tweets of the candidates and the news content from the selected newspapers. In addition to the fact that corruption is a major challenge to the country's political and economic progression, both candidates and political parties leveled accusations of corruption against each other.

The other research questions evaluate the dominant narrative frames in candidates' tweets and the style of presentation of the tweets in news content published by the selected news media. Here, framing provided the theoretical base for these research questions. Regarding the frame narratives in candidates' tweets, it was deduced from the research data that both candidates utilized more of the appraise frame, involving the use of strategically-organized communication, use of persuasive, impression management and promotional strategies in their tweets. This trend is unavoidable in most electioneering efforts around the world. For the style of presentation of tweets in the news content published by selected newspapers, it is fitting to conclude that the news content were largely source-dominated. In other words, the newspapers relied upon the tweets as their sources of information on the candidates' activities and to get perspectives on contending issues which they later present in the news, verbatim or with slight modifications.

In summary, this study concludes that Twitter has become not only an effective political campaign tool in Nigeria, but also a major source and dissemination apparatus where individuals, groups, organizations collect information about various subjects and redistribute same with other users even beyond the Twittersphere. In Nigerian journalism, Twitter has also attained the status of becoming an information source where professional journalists and established media outlets gather information, conduct polls to gauge popular opinion on share thoughts and issues,

and broadcast their news and other content. With the increasing popularity of Twitter among Nigerians, the practice of journalism is currently witnessing massive transformations which also pose some regulatory challenges concerning the quality of user-generated content that can be volatile and sometimes misleading.

To resolve these challenges, there is the need for journalists and media organizations in Nigeria to improve on their professionalism through prudent adherence to socially responsible journalism either by carefully devising rules for scrutinizing the facts contained in user-generated content before inclusion into their news content or by completely abstaining from including content that are user-generated into their news. For the Nigerian audience on the other hand, it is also necessary to improve on their media literacy level, as this would enable members of the public to build the essential skills for inquiring and contributing to the overall content of the media as a market place of ideas.

### **5.3 Recommendation for Further Research**

This study only examines three out of the hundreds of print and online newspapers that publish in Nigeria. It also evaluates the electioneering activities of two presidential candidates out of the hundreds of candidates that participated in the 2019 general elections over a period of four months. Since the study is limited in scope and time due to cost and other constraints, there is the need for further research to examine the electioneering activities of more candidates and political parties on Twitter and other participatory platforms in addition to the trends in media coverage of these activities. Future research could take a comparative perspective between the trends in one election period and the other or between styles of representation of user-generated content in broadcast and print media in Nigeria and beyond.

Additional research focus could be to examine audience reactions to the tweets and news in order to determine the extent of agenda-setting effect. For further research, the coding schema developed for this study could be used with modifications and where necessary, a different research instrument and approach may be adopted.

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## **APPENDICES**



## Appendix A: Coding Schema for Evaluation of Tweets and News

### Content

This coding schema contains two sections which to aided in answering the research questions.

#### Section A: Tweets from candidates

0001	0002			0003			0004		Total
	EP	PP	PE	SE	AE	ER	AP	AT	
MB									
AA									
Total									

#### Section B: Tweets from newspapers

0005	0006	0007			0008			0009			Total	
		SE	AE	ER	DI	PA	IN	EP	PP	PE		
DT	MB											
	AA											
PU	MB											
	AA											
VG	MB											
	AA											
Total												

## Coding Guides

### **Section A**

#### 0001 – *Source of tweet*

MB: @MBuhari (Muhammadu Buhari)

AA: @atiku (Atiku Abubakar)

#### 0002 – *Tweeting period*

EP: Electioneering period (Nov. 18, 2018 to Feb. 21, 2019)

PP: Polling period (Feb. 22 to 24, 2019)

PE: Post-election period (Feb. 25 to 28, 2019)

#### 0003 – *Issues*

SE: Security (addressing insurgencies, fostering unity, inclusiveness, etc.)

AE: Anti-corruption/electoral matters (promoting accountability, zero tolerance for nepotism, impunity, misappropriation of public funds, conduct of credible elections etc.)

ER: Economic recovery/diversification (job creation, business openings, infrastructure, etc.)

#### 0004 – *Narratives frames*

AP: Appraise (i.e. attempt to create or correct an existing public perception through self-praise)

AT: Attack (i.e. attempt to discredit or intimidate an opponent).

### **Section B**

#### 0005 – *Newspaper*

DT: @daily\_trust (*Daily Trust*)

PU: @MobilePunch (*Punch*)

VG: @vanguardngrnews (*Vanguard*)

#### 0006 – *News sources*

MB: @MBuhari

AA: @atiku

#### 0007 – *Issues*

SE: Security

AE: Anti-corruption/electoral matters

ER: Economic recovery/diversification

#### 0008 – *Style of presentation of candidates' tweets in the news*

DI: Direct (replicate most elements of the tweets verbatim through quotations)

PA: Partial (reproduced with modifications through comments)

IN: Indirect (relate with other sources for authenticity)

#### 0009 – *Publishing period*

EP: Electioneering period

PP: Polling period

PE: Post-election period