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Newspaper Framing of Political Party Propaganda during the 2022 Electioneering Campaigns in Nigeria: A Content Analysis of The Sun and The Guardian

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Abstract
This study examined how The Sun and The Guardian reported the propaganda of political parties in the first three months of the official campaign for Nigeria's 2023 general elections, which opened on 28 September 2022. It sought to establish the volume of campaign propaganda stories in both newspapers, the propaganda devices those stories carried, the news frames through which they were presented and their evaluative tone. Anchored on framing theory, the study adopted quantitative content analysis. Two constructed weeks (14 issue-days) were drawn from the 95-day window between 28 September and 31 December 2022, yielding 4,109 published stories, of which 441 campaign propaganda stories (The Sun, 285; The Guardian, 156) formed the units of analysis. Data were analysed with frequencies, percentages and chi-square. The Sun devoted a significantly larger share of its output to campaign propaganda than The Guardian (14.3% against 7.4%; $\chi^2 = 51.57$, df = 1, $p < .001$). About three in four stories (76.9%) carried an identifiable propaganda device, led by glittering generalities (20.0%), name-calling (15.4%) and bandwagon (13.6%). The strategy and game frame dominated (30.2%), and half of the stories were positive in tone (49.2%). The two newspapers did not differ significantly in the devices, frames or tone they carried, although device use differed by party. The study concludes that both newspapers largely relayed party propaganda rather than interrogating it, and recommends that editors subject campaign claims to verification and give issue reporting greater weight than the contest itself.

Keywords: political propaganda, propaganda devices, news framing, electioneering campaigns, Nigerian press, content analysis

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1. 0 INTRODUCTION

Elections in Nigeria are fought as much in the newspapers as at the polling units. Each campaign season produces a flood of statements, rallies, endorsements and counter-statements that parties feed to the press in the hope of shaping how voters see them and their rivals. For the 2023 general elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2022) fixed 28 September 2022 as the start of public campaigns for the presidential and National Assembly elections and 12 October 2022 for the governorship and state assembly contests. From those dates, the All Progressives Congress (APC), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the Labour Party (LP), the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and smaller parties competed openly for public attention, and much of that competition was conducted through the national dailies.

What reached readers in this period was rarely raw information. Campaign messages are crafted to persuade, and a good part of that persuasion takes the form of propaganda: the deliberate use of symbols, labels and selective claims to manage collective attitudes (Lasswell, 1927). When a newspaper carries such messages, it does more than transmit them. Through the stories it selects, the devices it allows to stand unchallenged and the angle from which it tells each story, the newspaper frames party propaganda for its readers (Entman, 1993). The question of how the press handled party propaganda in the 2022 campaign window is therefore a question about the quality of the information on which millions of voters later acted.

Existing research on Nigerian election coverage has made useful progress. Studies of the 2015 and 2019 campaigns have documented the dominance of non-issue and attack messages in newspaper advertising (Batta et al., 2015), the spread of hate speech through the press (Adisa et al., 2017), the influence of ownership on campaign coverage (Abubakre, 2017) and the framing of presidential campaigns (Oloyede, 2019; Oriola et al., 2022). Little of this work, however, has measured the propaganda devices carried in campaign stories and the frames through which they were presented within the same design, and none has compared The Sun and The Guardian over the opening months of the official 2022 campaign. This study addresses that gap.

The study pursued four objectives: to ascertain the volume of campaign propaganda stories in The Sun and The Guardian between 28 September and 31 December 2022; to identify the propaganda devices those stories carried; to determine the news frames through which the stories were presented; and to determine their evaluative tone. Four research questions followed from these objectives. To test whether the two newspapers differed, four null hypotheses were formulated: H01, there is no significant difference between The Sun and The Guardian in the share of their output devoted to campaign propaganda

stories; H02, there is no significant difference between the two newspapers in the propaganda devices carried; H03, there is no significant difference between them in the news frames used; and H04, there is no significant difference between them in the tone of their campaign propaganda stories.

The study matters for three groups. For editors and reporters, it offers measured evidence of how much party propaganda passes into print and in what form, which can inform newsroom guidelines for future elections. For media regulators, election observers and civil society groups that monitor campaign conduct, it provides a replicable instrument for tracking propaganda devices across titles and over time. For scholars, it brings propaganda devices and news frames into a single analysis of the same stories, so that the frames supplied by parties can be distinguished from those imposed by newspapers, and it extends the Nigerian evidence base into the opening phase of the 2022 campaign, a period that studies of Nigerian elections have rarely examined in its own right.

2. 0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Review

Electioneering campaign: An electioneering campaign is the organised effort of parties and candidates to win votes within the period the law allows. Under the Electoral Act 2022, public campaigning begins 150 days before polling day and ends 24 hours before it, which is why INEC (2022) fixed 28 September and 12 October 2022 as the opening dates for the national and state contests. The campaign is therefore a bounded period with its own rhythm: an opening phase of launches, manifestos and the inauguration of campaign councils, a middle phase of rallies across the states, and a closing phase of intensified attack and mobilisation. This study covers the opening phase and the start of the middle phase, when parties were defining themselves and their rivals for the first time in the official contest.

Political propaganda: Lasswell (1927) defined propaganda as the management of collective attitudes through the manipulation of significant symbols, a definition that places the emphasis on intent and technique rather than on truth or falsehood. Jowett and O'Donnell (2019) refine the idea by distinguishing propaganda from persuasion: persuasion seeks to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuaded, while propaganda is a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions and direct behaviour towards the propagandist's own ends. In electoral politics the distinction is often blurred, because parties present self-serving claims in the language of public interest. For this study, political party propaganda is taken to mean any message from a party, candidate, campaign organisation or partisan supporter that seeks to win support or diminish a rival through symbolic and selective appeals rather than verifiable argument.

Propaganda devices: The most widely used classification of propaganda techniques remains the seven devices popularised by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (Lee & Lee, 1939). Name-calling attaches a negative label to a person or idea so that it is rejected without examination. Glittering generalities link a cause to virtue words such as progress, unity or renewal that resist scrutiny. Transfer borrows the authority of respected symbols, such as religion, ethnic identity or national heroes. Testimonial uses the endorsement of an admired person or group. Plain folks presents the propagandist as one of the ordinary people, often through gestures of charity or familiarity. Card-stacking selects only the facts that favour one side, and bandwagon urges people to join a cause because everyone else supposedly has. Because Nigerian campaigns generate a steady stream of denials and rebuttals, this study added refutation, the counter-propaganda of disowning or dismissing a rival claim, as an eighth category.

News framing: Entman (1993) describes framing as selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a text, so as to promote a particular problem definition, interpretation, moral evaluation or remedy. In election reporting, scholars commonly separate issue framing, which centres on policies and their consequences, from strategy and game framing, which centres on winning and losing, tactics, alliances and the conduct of the campaign itself (Aalberg et al., 2012). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) showed that conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality and responsibility frames recur across news outlets, and that more serious outlets use them differently from sensational ones. Building on these schemes and on the Nigerian context, this study recognised five frames: strategy and game, character and image, conflict, issue and policy, and ethno-religious.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on framing theory. Goffman (1974) introduced the frame as a schema of interpretation that allows people to locate, perceive and label events, and Entman (1993) carried the idea into communication research by showing that news texts frame through the presence or absence of keywords, stock phrases, sources and judgements. The theory holds that the way a story is packaged shapes what audiences consider important and how they evaluate it, even when the facts reported are accurate. Framing theory suits this study for two reasons. First, propaganda devices are themselves framing tools: name-calling and glittering generalities are attempts by political actors to fix the terms in which a rival or a cause is understood. Second, newspapers apply a second layer of framing when they decide whether a campaign statement is told as a contest, a quarrel, a promise or an ethnic and religious matter. Examining both layers together reveals whether the press merely relays the frames supplied by parties or reframes them for readers. The theory's main limitation is that it says little

about effects at the level of individual voters; this study therefore makes claims only about what the newspapers published, not about how readers responded.

3.1 Empirical Review

"Propaganda, hate speech and attack in Nigerian election coverage" Batta et al. (2015) found that, of the political advertisements in The Guardian and The Punch between January and March 2015, 63% addressed no real issue, and personal attacks accounted for 41.04% of the non-issue advertisements. Adisa et al. (2017), in a critical discourse analysis of hate speech published in newspapers during the 2015 general election, concluded that hate speech was central to campaigning and that politicians used the press to stoke hostility between ethnic and political groups, and they urged newspapers to scrutinise politicians' claims before publishing them. Akpojivi and Aiseng (2022) found that Vanguard and The Guardian applied labels such as "clueless" and "failure" to President Jonathan in 2014 but cast his successor in a heroic frame in 2015, which shows that newspapers can carry name-calling in their own reporting. Tejumaiye et al. (2018), surveying 392 voters in Lagos, found that respondents recognised attacks on opponents and appeals to ethnic sentiment as aims of 2015 political advertising, although advertising mainly reinforced existing choices. These studies agree that attack and labelling are central to Nigerian election communication, but they differ on where responsibility lies: Batta et al. (2015) and Tejumaiye et al. (2018) locate it in the parties' paid messages, while Adisa et al. (2017) and Akpojivi and Aiseng (2022) show the press reproducing such labels in its own pages. None of these studies measured the full set of propaganda devices in campaign news, and none examined the 2022 campaign window or compared The Sun with The Guardian. This study takes up that task.

"Framing of Nigerian election campaigns" Oriola et al. (2022), studying 92 editions of five dailies, including The Guardian and Daily Sun, between November 2018 and February 2019, reported coverage of the 2019 presidential campaign dominated by the ruling party and mostly framed around issues, although readers perceived it as personality-driven and full of name-calling and mudslinging. Oloyede (2019) likewise found the issue frame dominant in 159 stories on the 2019 presidential race in The Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust, with campaign promises mostly presented as achievable. In contrast, Amenaghawon and Salawu (2020) found intra-party strife and political conflict to be the issues most often covered by the Yoruba-language Alaroye in the seven months before the 2019 election, and Ikpgegbu and Ihejirika (2020) found that most political statements reported by Vanguard and The Punch during the 2019 campaign were not issue-based. Ojebuyi and Chukwunwike (2018), analysing 565 items in The Punch, The Guardian and the Daily Sun during the 2015 campaign, found that coverage concentrated on the two leading male candidates. These studies disagree on whether issue framing or contest framing dominated

Nigerian campaign reporting: Oriola et al. (2022) and Oloyede (2019) point to issues, while Amenaghawon and Salawu (2020) and Ikpgegbu and Ihejirika (2020) point to conflict and non-issue statements. Part of the disagreement may lie in method, since none of these studies coded propaganda devices and frames together. By coding both for the same stories, this study can show which reading better describes how party propaganda reached readers in 2022.

"Ownership and partisanship" A recurring concern in Nigerian press research is that ownership shapes coverage. Abubakre (2017) found that The Nation and Nigerian Tribune coverage of the 2015 presidential campaign largely reflected the political leanings of their publishers, though with notable instances of balance. Abubakre and Oyewo (2015) showed the direction of that leaning: The Nation used ineffective governance and corruption frames against the PDP, while Nigerian Tribune presented Goodluck Jonathan as a performer and a democrat and stressed Muhammadu Buhari's military past. These findings suggest that comparing two dailies with different ownership histories and editorial reputations can show whether differences in propaganda reporting are systematic or incidental.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Design: The study adopted quantitative content analysis, a design suited to describing the manifest features of media texts systematically and replicably. It was preferred to a survey because the research questions concern what the newspapers published rather than what readers recalled, and to qualitative discourse analysis because the aim was to measure the relative frequency of devices and frames and to test differences between two newspapers.

Newspapers and population: The Sun and The Guardian were selected purposively. Both are national dailies with large online readerships, both maintain complete and publicly searchable online archives for 2022, and they differ in editorial tradition: The Guardian is commonly regarded as a sober broadsheet of record, while The Sun is known for its popular, high-volume coverage of politics. The population comprised all stories published on both newspapers' websites in their news, politics and opinion sections between 28 September 2022, when INEC (2022) opened public campaigning, and 31 December 2022, a period of 95 days.

Sample and sampling technique: Two constructed weeks were drawn from the 95-day window. For each day of the week, two dates were selected at random from all dates in the window falling on that weekday, giving 14 issue-days: 29 September, 26 October, 31 October, 12 November, 22 November, 24 November, 28 November, 29 November, 30 November, 11 December, 16 December, 17 December, 23 December and 25 December 2022. Constructed-week sampling

was chosen because it accounts for the weekly cycle of newspaper content; Riffe et al. (1993) showed that one constructed week estimates six months of daily newspaper content as efficiently as larger samples, and that two constructed weeks suffice for a year, so two weeks give a comfortable margin for a three-month window. All stories published on the 14 sampled days were retrieved from each newspaper's online archive, a total of 4,109 stories (The Sun, 1,992; The Guardian, 2,117). These were first filtered with a list of campaign terms (party names and acronyms, the names of the leading candidates and words such as campaign, rally, candidate, election and vote), and each remaining story was then read and retained only if its main actor was a party, candidate, campaign organisation or partisan supporter and its subject was the 2023 contest. Stories on foreign elections, INEC logistics, court rulings without a partisan message, budgets and the separate Osun State transition were excluded, as were stories republished verbatim on the same day. This produced 441 units of analysis: 285 from The Sun and 156 from The Guardian.

Unit of analysis and coding: The unit of analysis was the individual story. Each story was coded on its headline and opening text, which in news writing carry the angle the reporter has chosen. The coding sheet recorded the genre of the story, the party of the message source, the type of source, the dominant propaganda device (the seven devices of Lee and Lee, 1939, plus refutation, or none), the dominant news frame (strategy and game, character and image, conflict, issue and policy, or ethno-religious) and the tone of the story (positive, negative or neutral). Where more than one device or frame appeared, the coder recorded the one that dominated the headline and lead. Every coding decision was logged against the story's web address, so that each figure reported below can be traced to the published text.

Validity and reliability: Content validity was addressed by deriving every category from established schemes: the propaganda devices from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (Lee & Lee, 1939) and the frames from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and Aalberg et al. (2012), adapted to the Nigerian campaign. Each category was defined with decision rules in a written codebook. All stories were coded by a single trained coder using that codebook; intercoder reliability was therefore not computed, a limitation acknowledged in Section 6.

Data analysis: Data were summarised in frequencies and percentages. Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance, as it is the appropriate test for differences in the distribution of categorical data between independent groups. H01 was tested with a two-by-two test of campaign stories against all other stories published by each newspaper on the sampled days; H02 to H04 were tested with contingency tables of each variable against newspaper. No expected cell frequency fell below 5 in any of these tests.

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5.0 RESULTS

Research Question One: Volume of campaign propaganda stories. Across the 14 sampled days, The Sun published 285 campaign propaganda stories, an average of 20.4 per day, against The Guardian's 156, an average of 11.1. Relative to total output, campaign propaganda made up 14.3% of The Sun's stories and 7.4% of The Guardian's. News reports accounted for nine in ten units in both newspapers (Table 1). PDP-originated messages formed the largest share in The Sun (38.9%), while APC-originated messages led in The Guardian (36.5%), and the Labour Party received a larger share in The Sun (15.1%) than in The Guardian (10.3%).

Table 1: Campaign propaganda stories by genre and party of source

Category	The Sun n (%)	The Guardian n (%)	Total n (%)
News report	258 (90.5)	138 (88.5)	396 (89.8)
Interview and analysis	16 (5.6)	10 (6.4)	26 (5.9)
Opinion and column	11 (3.9)	8 (5.1)	19 (4.3)
PDP	111 (38.9)	49 (31.4)	160 (36.3)
APC	93 (32.6)	57 (36.5)	150 (34.0)
LP	43 (15.1)	16 (10.3)	59 (13.4)
NNPP	3 (1.1)	5 (3.2)	8 (1.8)
Other parties	21 (7.4)	13 (8.3)	34 (7.7)
Two or more parties	14 (4.9)	16 (10.3)	30 (6.8)
Total	285 (100)	156 (100)	441 (100)

Note: Stories retrieved from the two newspapers' online archives for 14 constructed-week days between 28 September and 31 December 2022. Genre and party are reported separately; each column sums to 100% within each block.

Campaign propaganda was spread evenly across the window rather than concentrated around particular events. Table 2 shows that The Sun published more campaign stories than The Guardian on every one of the 14 sampled days, with the widest gaps on 30 November and 31 October 2022.

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Table 2: Campaign propaganda stories per sampled day

Sampled day	The Sun	The Guardian	Total
Thursday, 29 September 2022	25	14	39
Wednesday, 26 October 2022	22	15	37
Monday, 31 October 2022	24	8	32
Saturday, 12 November 2022	21	11	32
Tuesday, 22 November 2022	26	13	39
Thursday, 24 November 2022	22	12	34
Monday, 28 November 2022	18	9	27
Tuesday, 29 November 2022	19	14	33
Wednesday, 30 November 2022	25	8	33
Sunday, 11 December 2022	22	13	35
Friday, 16 December 2022	12	9	21
Saturday, 17 December 2022	16	9	25
Friday, 23 December 2022	17	12	29
Sunday, 25 December 2022	16	9	25
Total	285	156	441

Research Question Two: Propaganda devices. Some 76.9% of the stories carried at least one identifiable propaganda device (Table 3). Glittering generalities were the most frequent device (20.0%), typically in candidates' promises to rebuild, unite or transform their state or the country. Name-calling followed (15.4%), in exchanges in which rivals were described as unfit, sick, liars or desperate, and bandwagon came third (13.6%), in claims of mass defections, million-member support groups and guaranteed percentages of the vote. Testimonial (8.6%), refutation (6.8%) and transfer (5.7%) were less common, and card-stacking and plain folks were the least used (3.4% each). The Sun carried proportionally more transfer and plain folks stories, mostly endorsements framed in religious terms and candidates' charitable gestures, while The Guardian carried proportionally more name-calling.

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Table 3: Dominant propaganda devices in campaign stories

Device	The Sun n (%)	The Guardian n (%)	Total n (%)
Glittering generalities	56 (19.6)	32 (20.5)	88 (20.0)
Name-calling	39 (13.7)	29 (18.6)	68 (15.4)
Bandwagon	41 (14.4)	19 (12.2)	60 (13.6)
Testimonial	25 (8.8)	13 (8.3)	38 (8.6)
Refutation	18 (6.3)	12 (7.7)	30 (6.8)
Transfer	20 (7.0)	5 (3.2)	25 (5.7)
Card-stacking	8 (2.8)	7 (4.5)	15 (3.4)
Plain folks	13 (4.6)	2 (1.3)	15 (3.4)
No identifiable device	65 (22.8)	37 (23.7)	102 (23.1)
Total	285 (100)	156 (100)	441 (100)

Device use varied with the source of the message. Candidates leaned on glittering generalities, which accounted for 47.2% of candidate-sourced stories, while surrogates and endorsing groups relied on testimonial (20.7%) and bandwagon (18.5%), and campaign councils on name-calling (29.8%) and bandwagon (27.7%). Among the three leading parties, the Labour Party's messages leaned on glittering generalities (32.2%), the PDP's on name-calling (18.8%) and the APC's on bandwagon (18.7%), a difference that was statistically significant when the less frequent devices were combined ($\chi^2 = 18.66$, df = 10, p = .045).

Research Question Three: News frames. The strategy and game frame was the most frequent (30.2%), followed by character and image (20.0%), conflict (19.7%), issue and policy (16.1%) and ethno-religious frames (14.1%), as Table 4 shows. The distribution was almost identical in the two newspapers.

Table 4: Dominant news frames in campaign stories

Frame	The Sun n (%)	The Guardian n (%)	Total n (%)
Strategy and game	87 (30.5)	46 (29.5)	133 (30.2)
Character and image	60 (21.1)	28 (17.9)	88 (20.0)
Conflict	55 (19.3)	32 (20.5)	87 (19.7)
Issue and policy	43 (15.1)	28 (17.9)	71 (16.1)
Ethno-religious	40 (14.0)	22 (14.1)	62 (14.1)
Total	285 (100)	156 (100)	441 (100)

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Research Question Four: Tone. Nearly half of the stories were positive in tone (49.2%), about a quarter negative (26.8%) and the rest neutral (24.0%), as Table 5 shows. The Sun carried a slightly higher share of positive stories (51.6%) and The Guardian a slightly higher share of negative ones (30.1%). Tone was closely tied to frame: 72.4% of conflict-framed stories were negative, while 73.2% of issue-framed and 60.9% of strategy-framed stories were positive.

Table 5: Tone of campaign propaganda stories

Tone	The Sun n (%)	The Guardian n (%)	Total n (%)
Positive	147 (51.6)	70 (44.9)	217 (49.2)
Negative	71 (24.9)	47 (30.1)	118 (26.8)
Neutral	67 (23.5)	39 (25.0)	106 (24.0)
Total	285 (100)	156 (100)	441 (100)

Table 6: Tone of campaign stories by news frame

Frame	Positive n (%)	Negative n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Total
Strategy and game	81 (60.9)	6 (4.5)	46 (34.6)	133
Character and image	54 (61.4)	22 (25.0)	12 (13.6)	88
Conflict	0 (0.0)	63 (72.4)	24 (27.6)	87
Issue and policy	52 (73.2)	9 (12.7)	10 (14.1)	71
Ethno-religious	30 (48.4)	18 (29.0)	14 (22.6)	62
Total	217 (49.2)	118 (26.8)	106 (24.0)	441

Note: Percentages are calculated across each row.

Test of hypotheses: Table 7 summarises the chi-square tests. H01 was rejected: The Sun devoted a significantly larger share of its output to campaign propaganda stories than The Guardian. H02, H03 and H04 were retained: the two newspapers did not differ significantly in the propaganda devices, news frames or tone of the campaign stories they published.

Table 7: Summary of chi-square tests

Hypothesis	χ^2	df	P	Critical value	Decision
H01: Share of output	51.57	1	< .001	3.84	Rejected
H02: Propaganda devices	8.92	8	.349	15.51	Retained
H03: News frames	1.11	4	.893	9.49	Retained
H04: Tone	2.04	2	.361	5.99	Retained

Note: All tests at the 0.05 level of significance.

5. 1 Discussion of Findings

On volume, The Sun gave campaign propaganda roughly twice the share of its output that The Guardian did. With an average of 20 campaign stories a day, much of it relayed statements from state chapters, support groups and local endorsers, The Sun functioned as a broad noticeboard for the campaign, while The Guardian was more selective. This is consistent with Ojebuyi and Chukwunwike (2018), who found that national dailies differed in the space they gave the 2015 candidates, and it suggests that editorial tradition shapes how much room a newspaper gives to party messages. Volume, however, is not the same as quality. That the two newspapers did not differ in the devices, frames or tone of what they published indicates that the gap lay in how much propaganda each carried, not in how they handled it.

Propaganda devices ran through more than three quarters of the campaign stories, with glittering generalities, name-calling and bandwagon most common. This partly confirms the prominence of attack and labelling reported for the 2015 campaign (Adisa et al., 2017; Batta et al., 2015), but it differs in one respect: in the opening months of the 2022 campaign, glittering generalities edged ahead of name-calling. One reason may be timing. The window studied here covered the launch phase of the campaign, when candidates were unveiling manifestos and action plans and making broad promises, before the sharper attacks that typically intensify as polling day nears. The finding also agrees with Batta et al. (2015) that Nigerian campaign communication favours non-issue appeals, and with Tejumaiye et al. (2018) that voters recognise attacks on opponents as a standard aim of campaign messages. Transfer was visible at 5.7%, mostly in religiously framed endorsements, which fits the weight of religion in Nigerian presidential voting documented by Ojo (2020) and the controversy over the APC's same-faith ticket in 2022.

The distribution of devices across sources and parties is instructive. Candidates spoke in glittering generalities while surrogates and campaign councils did most of the attacking and crowd-claiming, a division of labour that allowed candidates to appear statesmanlike while their agents carried the negative messages. The Labour Party's reliance on glittering generalities fits a challenger campaign built on the promise of a new Nigeria; the PDP's on name-calling fits an opposition party attacking the record of the government; and the APC's on bandwagon fits a ruling party projecting inevitability. In each case, the newspapers reproduced these strategies largely as the parties supplied them.

The headlines themselves show how directly the devices passed into print. Name-calling ran through stories such as The Guardian's report that the PDP campaign claimed Tinubu lacked the mental alertness to be president (17 December 2022) and The Sun's report of the APC campaign council describing Atiku and the PDP as given to pathological lies (17 December 2022). Bandwagon appeared in The Sun's report that 200 support groups had promised Tinubu ten million votes (29 November 2022) and in

The Guardian's report of a Kano APC chairman vowing to capture the state by hook or crook (24 November 2022). Glittering generalities headlined promises such as Obi's pledge to rebuild Nigeria and Tinubu's pledge to recharge Lake Chad (The Sun, 12 and 22 November 2022). Transfer drew on religious and traditional authority, as when a cleric declared that God would use Obi to redeem Nigeria and when Enugu traditional rulers presented the ofo, a symbol of authority, to the PDP governorship candidate (The Sun, 22 November and 29 September 2022). Plain folks appeared in stories of Obi spending Christmas with displaced persons in Benue (The Guardian, 25 December 2022) and of a PDP chieftain distributing rice in Edo villages on Atiku's behalf (The Sun, 16 December 2022). In most of these stories the claim formed the headline and the lead, and any response from the other side, where it appeared at all, came later in the text.

In framing, the contest crowded out the issues: the strategy and game frame dominated, with issue and policy framing in only one story in six. This sides with Aalberg et al. (2012), who show strategy and game framing to be a persistent feature of election news, and with Amenaghawon and Salawu (2020), who found intra-party strife and political conflict the most covered issues before the 2019 election. It departs from Oriola et al. (2022) and Oloyede (2019), who reported issue frames as dominant in 2019. The difference may reflect the unit of analysis: this study coded campaign propaganda stories, which centre on parties' own claims, whereas broader coverage studies include features and analysis that discuss policy more often. Ethno-religious framing, at 14.1%, was less prominent than the weight of religion in voting reported by Ojo (2020) might lead one to expect, which suggests that identity concerns, though present, gave way in news framing to the mechanics of the contest once the campaign opened.

Half of the stories were positive in tone. Taken with the dominance of strategy framing, this means that the typical campaign story in both newspapers reported a party or its supporters claiming support, promising progress or predicting victory, with little challenge. Conflict stories were overwhelmingly negative, but they were outnumbered by stories in which parties spoke well of themselves. In framing terms, the newspapers largely accepted the frames that parties supplied rather than imposing frames of their own (Entman, 1993). Abubakre (2017) attributed partisan leaning in 2015 coverage to ownership; the present results point to a related but different problem, which is that both newspapers, whatever their ownership, gave party propaganda a largely uncritical passage to readers.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how The Sun and The Guardian reported political party propaganda in the first three months of the official campaign for Nigeria's 2023 general elections. It found that The Sun carried significantly more campaign propaganda than The Guardian, but that the two newspapers handled it in much the same way: most

stories carried a propaganda device, most were framed around the contest rather than issues, and half were positive towards the party concerned. The study concludes that the Nigerian press in this period served more as a channel for party propaganda than as a filter of it, and that the difference between a popular and a sober daily lay in the quantity of propaganda carried rather than in the critical treatment of it.

Four recommendations follow. First, editors should require reporters to verify or contextualise campaign claims, particularly bandwagon claims of mass support and glittering promises without detail, before publication. Second, newspapers should balance the reporting of the contest with issue-based reporting that examines candidates' manifestos and records. Third, name-calling by campaign spokespersons should be reported as a feature of the campaign to be scrutinised, not as news in itself. Fourth, the Nigerian Union of Journalists and media training institutions should include the recognition of propaganda devices in election reporting training.

The study has limitations. It analysed the online editions of the two newspapers, which may differ from the print editions in story selection and placement, and it coded headlines and opening text rather than full stories. All stories were coded by a single coder using a written codebook, so intercoder reliability could not be reported. The sample covered the opening months of the campaign and two newspapers; future studies could extend the window to polling day, include more titles and print-only content such as political advertisements and cartoons, and test intercoder reliability with independent coders.

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