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Political Propaganda and Candidate Image-Making in Nigerian Newspapers during the 2022 Party Primaries: A Content Analysis of The Sun and Daily Trust

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Abstract
This study examined how The Sun and Daily Trust reported the contest for party tickets ahead of Nigeria's 2023 general elections, the period in which aspirants courted delegates, sought endorsements and fought over zoning. It set out to measure the volume of primaries coverage in both newspapers, the propaganda devices that coverage carried, the candidate attributes it projected or attacked, and its tone. Anchored on attribute agenda-setting and propaganda theory, the study adopted quantitative content analysis. Two constructed weeks (14 issue-days) were drawn from the 67-day primaries window of 4 April to 9 June 2022, yielding 3,330 published stories, of which 751 primaries stories (The Sun, 472; Daily Trust, 279) formed the units of analysis. Data were analysed with frequencies, percentages and chi-square. The Sun gave the primaries a larger share of its output than Daily Trust (24.5% against 19.9%; $\chi^2 = 10.11$, df = 1, p = .001). Half of the stories (50.5%) carried an identifiable propaganda device, led by glittering generalities (12.3%), testimonial (9.9%) and name-calling (8.9%). Identity, chiefly zoning and region, was the attribute most often attached to aspirants (17.0%), ahead of competence (11.7%) and popularity (10.7%), while money appeared in only 4.3% of stories. The newspapers differed significantly in devices, attributes and tone, although the effects were small: The Sun leaned towards endorsement and praise, Daily Trust towards attack, denial and the money question. The study concludes that the press largely carried the aspirants' self-presentation to the delegates and the public, and recommends that editors probe the claims and the finance behind candidacies at the nomination stage.

Keywords: political propaganda, party primaries, candidate image, attribute agenda-setting, Nigerian press, content analysis

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1.0 Introduction

In Nigeria the decisive contest for many offices takes place before the general election, inside the parties. Whoever wins the ticket of a dominant party in a state or zone often has the better part of the battle behind them, and the presidential nomination of the two largest parties narrows the national choice to a handful of names. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC, 2022) fixed 4 April to 3 June 2022 for the conduct of party primaries for the 2023 elections, and later extended the deadline by six days, to 9 June, for parties with outstanding primaries (Channels Television, 2022). Within that window, the All Progressives Congress (APC) moved its presidential primary to 6 to 8 June (Gazette, 2022), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chose its candidate at the end of May, and the Labour Party, the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) held their own contests.

The primaries season has a distinct communication logic. The decisive audience is small: party delegates, governors, party leaders and, in the APC case, the outgoing president. Yet aspirants also address the wider public, because the press coverage they attract becomes evidence of their standing. Declarations, endorsements, visits to state delegates and attacks on rivals compete for space, while parties issue guidelines, fix fees for nomination forms, screen aspirants and manage disputes over zoning and consensus. Much of this material reaches newspapers as statements and press releases, and how newspapers handle it shapes the image of each aspirant before most voters have any other source of information about them.

Research on the Nigerian press and elections has concentrated on the general election campaign. Studies of the 2015 and 2019 campaigns have examined hate speech (Adisa et al., 2017), framing (Oriola et al., 2022) and ownership bias (Abubakre, 2017), while the selection stage has received much less attention. Amenaghawon and Salawu (2020) found intra-party strife the issue most often covered by one newspaper before the 2019 election, and Ihembe and Isike (2022) traced how disputed primaries end up in the courts, but no study has measured the propaganda devices in primaries coverage or the attributes of aspirants it carried. The money question, which scholars of Nigerian primaries and elections have described as decisive (Onah et al., 2021; Sule, 2022), has also not been examined as a feature of press content.

This study addresses that gap by examining The Sun and Daily Trust during the 2022 primaries window. Its objectives were to establish the volume of primaries stories in the two newspapers; identify the propaganda devices those stories carried; establish the candidate attributes they projected or attacked; and determine their tone. Four research questions followed from these objectives:

What volume of coverage did The Sun and Daily Trust give the 2022 party primaries? Which propaganda devices did the stories carry? Which candidate attributes did they emphasise? What was their evaluative tone? Four null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level. H01: There is no significant difference between The Sun and Daily Trust in the share of their output devoted to the 2022 party primaries. H02: There is no significant difference between the two newspapers in the propaganda devices carried by their primaries stories. H03: There is no significant difference between them in the candidate attributes emphasised in those stories. H04: There is no significant difference between them in the tone of those stories.

The study matters for three reasons. First, it moves the analysis of political propaganda in the Nigerian press back to the stage at which candidates are made, where the gatekeeping role of newspapers is arguably greatest. Second, by recording the attributes attached to aspirants it gives an empirical account of the image the press built for the field from which the 2023 presidential and governorship candidates emerged. Third, it compares a Lagos-based and an Abuja-based daily on the same contest.

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Conceptual Review

Party primaries: A primary is the process by which a party chooses the candidate it will present at the general election. The Electoral Act (2022) allows Nigerian parties to nominate candidates by direct primary, by indirect primary through elected delegates, or by consensus, and in 2022 the main parties relied mostly on delegates. Because delegates are few and their votes can be bought, scholars of Nigerian primaries have linked the process to money politics, imposition and post-primary defection (Sule, 2022). In this study, primaries coverage refers to any story whose subject is the selection of candidates for the 2023 elections: declarations, nomination forms, endorsements, zoning and consensus, delegates, screening, voting, results and withdrawals.

Political propaganda: Lasswell (1927) defined propaganda as the management of collective attitudes through the manipulation of significant symbols, and Jowett and O'Donnell (2019) describe it as a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions and direct behaviour towards the propagandist's goal. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis identified seven common devices: name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card-stacking and bandwagon (Lee & Lee, 1939). In a primaries setting, these devices take recognisable forms. Testimonial appears as an endorsement by a governor, monarch or support group; bandwagon as a claim that delegates or a region have already "adopted" an aspirant; glittering generalities as promises to "rescue" or

"transform" the nation; and name-calling as attacks on rivals or on the party leadership. This study added refutation, the denial of a damaging claim, because counter-propaganda was a large part of the statements aspirants issued.

Candidate image: Candidate image refers to the set of qualities the public associates with an aspirant. McCombs et al. (1997) divided such attributes into substantive dimensions, such as ideology, qualifications and personality, and affective dimensions, the positive, negative or neutral tone in which they are presented. Nigerian contests add region, ethnicity and religion, which the zoning convention turns into a qualification. Ojo (2020) also showed that religion shaped voting across regions in the 2019 presidential election, which makes identity an attribute voters weigh in its own right. This study therefore coded five attributes: competence (experience and record), character (integrity and temperament), identity (zoning, region, ethnicity, religion and generation), popularity (acceptance and winnability) and money (wealth, patronage and inducement).

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on two theories. The first is attribute agenda-setting, also called second-level agenda-setting. Whereas the first level concerns which objects the media make salient, the second concerns which attributes of those objects they emphasise. McCombs et al. (1997) showed that the attributes of candidates stressed in Spanish media during the 1995 elections corresponded with the attributes voters used to describe the candidates. Golan and Wanta (2001) found a similar correspondence for cognitive attributes in coverage of the 2000 New Hampshire primary across three newspapers, while the affective tone of coverage had weaker effects. It suits a nomination contest, in which most voters first meet aspirants through the press. It directs attention to which qualities of aspirants the newspapers made salient and in what tone, and it is the basis of the image and tone variables in this study.

The second is propaganda theory, which treats political messages as deliberate attempts by interested actors to steer attitudes (Lasswell, 1927; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). Where agenda-setting explains what the press makes salient, propaganda theory explains why so much of what reaches the press is already shaped: aspirants, campaign organisations and support groups have a strong interest in placing favourable attributes before delegates and the public. The theory supplies the devices that the study counted. Taken together, the two theories frame the central question of the study, namely how far the newspapers passed on the attributes that aspirants and their promoters sought to attach to themselves, and how far they added scrutiny of their own.

3.1 Empirical Review

Press coverage of party primaries and intra-party contests. Amenaghawon and Salawu (2020) content-analysed the Yoruba-language Alaroye over the seven months before the 2019 presidential election, a period that included the 2018 primaries, and found intra-party strife and political conflict to be the issues it covered most. Ihembe and Isike (2022) showed that failures of party dispute mechanisms push aspirants into the courts, turning primaries into prolonged legal contests. Sule (2022), using perception data on the 2018 primaries of the APC and PDP, found that money politics shaped who emerged, and Onah et al. (2021), reviewing the 2020 Edo governorship poll, concluded that the monetisation of politics shifts power towards wealthy elites and excludes poorer citizens.

These studies agree that conflict and money shape Nigerian candidate selection, but they differ in where they locate the evidence. Amenaghawon and Salawu (2020) measured conflict in press content, while the money findings of Sule (2022) and Onah et al. (2021) rest on perception data and documentary review rather than press content. Whether newspapers themselves foregrounded the money question therefore remains open. None of these studies measured propaganda devices in primaries coverage, and none compared newspapers statistically.

Propaganda devices in Nigerian newspapers. Batta et al. (2015) found that 63% of political advertisements in The Guardian and The Punch during the 2015 campaign were non-issue messages, and that personal attacks made up 41.04% of those. Adisa et al. (2017), in a critical discourse analysis of hate speech carried by newspapers during the 2015 general election, found such speech central to campaigning and argued that politicians used the press to stoke hostility between ethnic and political groups. Ayuwo (2022) analysed the semiotic resources of newspaper campaign advertisements for selected 2019 candidates and showed how colour, dress, gesture and slogan were used to project candidates as competent and close to the people. Oriola et al. (2022) reported that coverage of the 2019 presidential campaign in five newspapers was dominated by the APC and was largely supportive in direction, while audience members recalled name-calling and mudslinging.

This body of work establishes that propaganda is a regular feature of Nigerian election coverage, but it disagrees on which register leads. Batta et al. (2015) and Adisa et al. (2017) found attack and hate speech prominent, while Ayuwo (2022) found a positive, image-building register. All of these studies, however, concern the general election campaign. It is not known whether the same devices dominate when the audience is a party's delegates and the opponents are members of the same party.

Candidate attributes and newspaper differences. Ojebuyi and Chukwunwike (2018) analysed 565 items in The Punch, The Guardian and the Daily Sun during the 2015 presidential campaign and found that coverage went almost entirely to the two leading male candidates, with the incumbent leading in front-page placement (62.1%). Oloyede (2019) found that The Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust framed most of the 2019 candidates' campaign promises as viable and achievable. In the United States, Golan and Wanta (2001) found that the three newspapers they examined differed in the attributes they gave the candidates in the New Hampshire primary. On newspaper differences in Nigeria, Abubakre (2017) found that The Nation and the Nigerian Tribune covered the 2015 presidential campaign in ways that reflected their publishers' political leanings, and Abubakre and Oyewo (2015) showed that The Nation framed the PDP in terms of corruption and ineffective governance while Nigerian Tribune presented its candidate as a performer and a democrat.

The evidence on candidate attributes points in two directions. Oloyede (2019) suggests that newspapers present candidates' own claims of competence largely at face value, while Ojebuyi and Chukwunwike (2018) show that visibility itself is unequally shared, favouring incumbents and leading contenders. Studies of ownership (Abubakre, 2017; Abubakre & Oyewo, 2015) imply that differences between newspapers should follow political alignment. No study has examined the attributes attached to aspirants during the Nigerian primaries, or compared a northern and a southern newspaper on that measure, and this study sets out to do both.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Design: The study adopted quantitative content analysis, which describes the manifest features of media texts systematically and allows differences between newspapers to be tested. It was preferred to a survey because the research questions concern what the newspapers published, not what readers remembered, and to discourse analysis because the aim was to measure how often devices and attributes occurred.

Newspapers and population: The Sun and Daily Trust were selected purposively. Both are national dailies with large online readerships and complete, publicly searchable online archives for 2022. They also differ in base and audience: The Sun is published in Lagos and has a strong readership in the South, while Daily Trust is published in Abuja and has its main readership in the North. The contrast mattered because zoning between North and South dominated the 2022 presidential nominations. The population comprised all stories published on both newspapers' websites in their news, politics, opinion, column and editorial sections between 4 April 2022, when INEC (2022) opened the primaries window, and 9 June 2022, the extended deadline (Channels Television, 2022), a period of 67 days.

Sample and sampling technique: Two constructed weeks were drawn from the 67-day window. For each day of the week, two dates were selected at random from all dates in the window that fell on that weekday, giving 14 issue-days: 6, 8 and 10 April; 2, 4, 7, 13, 19, 21, 24, 29, 30 and 31 May; and 2 June 2022. Constructed-week sampling was used because it accounts for the weekly cycle of newspaper content, and Riffe et al. (1993) showed that one constructed week represents six months of daily content as efficiently as larger samples, so two weeks give a wide margin for a window of 67 days. All stories published on the 14 sampled days were retrieved from each newspaper's online archive, 3,330 stories in all (The Sun, 1,925; Daily Trust, 1,405). They were first filtered with a list of primaries terms (party names and acronyms, the names of the leading aspirants and words such as primary, aspirant, delegate, consensus, ticket, nomination form and convention). Each story that passed the filter was then read and retained only if its main actor was an aspirant, party or partisan supporter and its subject was the selection of candidates for the 2023 elections. Stories on the separate Ekiti and Osun governorship elections of 2022, INEC logistics, court cases without a partisan message, governance, insecurity and defections that did not concern a ticket were excluded, as were stories republished with the same text on a later sampled day. This gave 751 units of analysis: 472 from The Sun and 279 from Daily Trust.

Unit of analysis and coding: The unit of analysis was the individual story, coded on its headline and opening text, which carry the angle the reporter has chosen. The coding sheet recorded the genre, the party of the message source, the office at stake (presidency, governorship, legislature, or the party as a whole), the type of source (aspirant, party organ, supporter or support group, journalist, or other actor), the dominant propaganda device (the seven devices of Lee and Lee, 1939, refutation, or none), the dominant candidate attribute (competence, character, identity, popularity, money, or none) and the tone (positive, negative or neutral). Where more than one device or attribute appeared, the coder recorded the one that dominated the headline and lead. Each decision was logged against the story's web address, so that every figure reported below can be traced to the published text.

Validity and reliability: Content validity was addressed by deriving the categories from established schemes: the devices from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (Lee & Lee, 1939), and the attributes from the substantive and affective dimensions of McCombs et al. (1997), extended with the identity, popularity and money attributes that earlier Nigerian studies identified (Ojo, 2020; Onah et al., 2021; Sule, 2022). 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 noted in Section 6.

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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, and Cramér's V was reported as a measure of effect size. H01 was tested with a two-by-two table of primaries 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. For H02, plain folks, transfer and card-stacking were combined as "other devices", because plain folks and transfer alone would have produced expected cell frequencies below 5. No expected frequency fell below 5 in any of the tests reported.

5.0 RESULTS

Research Question One: Volume of primaries coverage. Across the 14 sampled days, The Sun published 472 primaries stories, an average of 33.7 a day, against 279 in Daily Trust, an average of 19.9. Relative to total output, the primaries made up 24.5% of The Sun's stories and 19.9% of Daily Trust's. News reports formed close to nine in ten units in both newspapers, and the presidency was the office at stake in about half of all stories (Table 1). Daily Trust concentrated more heavily on the presidential race (60.2%) than The Sun (48.1%), which gave more space to governorship and legislative tickets. Messages from APC sources formed the largest share in both newspapers, followed by the PDP.

Table 1: Primaries stories by genre, office at stake and party of source

Category	The Sun n (%)	Daily Trust n (%)	Total n (%)
News report	410 (86.9)	256 (91.8)	666 (88.7)
Opinion, column and editorial	41 (8.7)	15 (5.4)	56 (7.5)
Interview and analysis	21 (4.4)	8 (2.9)	29 (3.9)
Presidency	227 (48.1)	168 (60.2)	395 (52.6)
Legislature	96 (20.3)	34 (12.2)	130 (17.3)
Governorship	94 (19.9)	34 (12.2)	128 (17.0)
Party as a whole	55 (11.7)	43 (15.4)	98 (13.0)
APC	220 (46.6)	144 (51.6)	364 (48.5)
PDP	158 (33.5)	84 (30.1)	242 (32.2)
APGA, LP and NNPP	41 (8.7)	13 (4.7)	54 (7.2)
Other parties	31 (6.6)	14 (5.0)	45 (6.0)
Two or more parties	22 (4.7)	24 (8.6)	46 (6.1)
Total	472 (100)	279 (100)	751 (100)

Note: Stories retrieved from the two newspapers' online archives for 14 constructed-week days between 4 April and 9 June 2022. Genre, office and party are reported separately; each block sums to 100% within each column.

Coverage rose as the window advanced (Table 2). Both newspapers carried their fewest primaries stories in early April, when aspirants were still declaring and buying forms, and the most in the last week of May, when the PDP and Labour Party chose their presidential candidates and legislative primaries were being held across the states. The Sun's single busiest day was Sunday, 29 May, when the outcome of the PDP presidential primary was reported. The Sun published more primaries stories than Daily Trust on every sampled day.

Table 2: Primaries stories per sampled day

Sampled day	The Sun n (% of output)	Daily Trust n (% of output)	Total
Wednesday, 6 April 2022	26 (15.3)	16 (11.3)	42
Friday, 8 April 2022	17 (12.2)	12 (11.4)	29
Sunday, 10 April 2022	32 (25.4)	9 (11.0)	41
Monday, 2 May 2022	30 (19.5)	12 (12.5)	42
Wednesday, 4 May 2022	35 (27.1)	25 (26.9)	60
Saturday, 7 May 2022	20 (20.8)	14 (19.2)	34
Friday, 13 May 2022	36 (26.9)	30 (27.0)	66
Thursday, 19 May 2022	34 (20.6)	23 (18.7)	57
Saturday, 21 May 2022	27 (29.0)	15 (22.1)	42
Tuesday, 24 May 2022	43 (28.1)	26 (23.2)	69
Sunday, 29 May 2022	56 (44.8)	17 (23.6)	73
Monday, 30 May 2022	36 (29.0)	24 (27.0)	60
Tuesday, 31 May 2022	44 (28.9)	32 (28.3)	76
Thursday, 2 June 2022	36 (21.8)	24 (18.9)	60
Total	472 (24.5)	279 (19.9)	751

Research Question Two: Propaganda devices. Half of the primaries stories (50.5%) carried an identifiable propaganda device (Table 3). Glittering generalities was the most frequent (12.3%), typically an aspirant's promise to "rescue", "transform" or "turn around" the country, as in "Road to 2023: I'll return Plateau to PDP for massive development – Mutfwang, PDP aspirant" (The Sun, 4 May 2022). Testimonial followed (9.9%), carried by endorsements from governors, monarchs and support groups, such as "Osinbajo has capacity to take

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Nigeria to greater heights, says Zulum" (Daily Trust, 24 May 2022). Name-calling (8.9%), bandwagon (7.2%) and refutation (6.0%) came next. The other half carried no device; they were mostly procedural reports of screening, timetables, results and disputes.

Table 3: Dominant propaganda device by newspaper

Propaganda device	The Sun n (%)	Daily Trust n (%)	Total n (%)
Glittering generalities	68 (14.4)	24 (8.6)	92 (12.3)
Testimonial	55 (11.7)	19 (6.8)	74 (9.9)
Name-calling	36 (7.6)	31 (11.1)	67 (8.9)
Bandwagon	35 (7.4)	19 (6.8)	54 (7.2)
Refutation	25 (5.3)	20 (7.2)	45 (6.0)
Card-stacking	17 (3.6)	10 (3.6)	27 (3.6)
Transfer	6 (1.3)	9 (3.2)	15 (2.0)
Plain folks	1 (0.2)	4 (1.4)	5 (0.7)
No identifiable device	229 (48.5)	143 (51.3)	372 (49.5)
Total	472 (100)	279 (100)	751 (100)

The devices were tied closely to who was speaking. Aspirants relied on glittering generalities (77 of 246 stories, 31.3%), supporters and support groups on testimonial (55 of 164, 33.5%), and party organs on refutation (18 of 85, 21.2%), mostly in denials of rumoured timetables, refunds or defections. Stories in which a journalist was the main source rarely carried a device (181 of 211, 85.8%, carried none), which shows that the propaganda content of the coverage came mainly from the statements of partisan actors rather than from the reporters' own framing.

Research Question Three: Candidate attributes. Identity was the attribute most often attached to aspirants (17.0%), ahead of competence (11.7%) and popularity (10.7%), with character (6.8%) and money (4.3%) further behind (Table 4). Identity stories were mostly about zoning and the claims of regions, for example "We'll only accept presidential candidate of Igbo extraction, Ohaneze tells Buhari" (Daily Trust, 2 June 2022). Competence stories presented an aspirant's record or experience, and popularity stories claimed that delegates, a region or a mass of supporters had already settled on an aspirant. Money appeared mainly in reports of nomination fees, gifts to delegates and complaints of vote buying, as in "Drama as Namadi Sambo's son asks delegates to return his money after losing PDP ticket" (Daily Trust, 24 May 2022). The Sun gave more weight to identity, competence and popularity, while Daily Trust gave relatively more to character and money.

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Table 4: Dominant candidate attribute by newspaper

Candidate attribute	The Sun n (%)	Daily Trust n (%)	Total n (%)
Identity (zoning, region, religion)	88 (18.6)	40 (14.3)	128 (17.0)
Competence and record	63 (13.3)	25 (9.0)	88 (11.7)
Popularity and winnability	57 (12.1)	23 (8.2)	80 (10.7)
Character and integrity	26 (5.5)	25 (9.0)	51 (6.8)
Money and patronage	14 (3.0)	18 (6.5)	32 (4.3)
No candidate attribute	224 (47.5)	148 (53.0)	372 (49.5)
Total	472 (100)	279 (100)	751 (100)

Research Question Four: Tone. Positive (37.7%) and neutral (38.3%) stories were almost equal in number overall, and negative stories made up about a quarter (24.0%). The two newspapers differed: positive stories were the largest group in The Sun (41.7%), while neutral stories led in Daily Trust (42.7%), which also carried a slightly higher share of negative stories (26.5% against 22.5%). Tone followed the attribute in play (Table 5). Almost every competence and popularity story was positive, while most money stories were negative, and identity stories were spread across all three tones, which reflects the double use of zoning as both a claim and a grievance.

Table 5: Tone of stories by newspaper and by candidate attribute

Category	Positive n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Negative n (%)
The Sun (n = 472)	197 (41.7)	169 (35.8)	106 (22.5)
Daily Trust (n = 279)	86 (30.8)	119 (42.7)	74 (26.5)
Competence (n = 88)	84 (95.5)	2 (2.3)	2 (2.3)
Popularity (n = 80)	76 (95.0)	4 (5.0)	0 (0.0)
Character (n = 51)	25 (49.0)	12 (23.5)	14 (27.5)
Identity (n = 128)	30 (23.4)	61 (47.7)	37 (28.9)
Money (n = 32)	5 (15.6)	7 (21.9)	20 (62.5)
No attribute (n = 372)	63 (16.9)	202 (54.3)	107 (28.8)
All stories (n = 751)	283 (37.7)	288 (38.3)	180 (24.0)

Note: Percentages are row percentages. The upper block compares the newspapers; the lower block combines them.

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Test of hypotheses: All four null hypotheses were rejected (Table 6). The Sun devoted a significantly larger share of its output to the primaries than Daily Trust. The newspapers also differed significantly in the devices, attributes and tone of their coverage. In each case, however, Cramér's V was below 0.15, which indicates small effects: the two newspapers shared the same broad pattern and differed in emphasis. The presence of a device did not itself differ between them (51.5% of stories in The Sun and 48.7% in Daily Trust; $\chi^2 = 0.42$, df = 1, p = .516). The difference lay in which devices appeared. Among the 379 device-bearing stories, glittering generalities and testimonial together made up 50.6% in The Sun and 31.6% in Daily Trust, while name-calling and refutation made up 25.1% in The Sun and 37.5% in Daily Trust.

Table 6: Summary of chi-square tests

Hypothesis	χ^2	df	p	V	Decision
H01: Share of output	10.11	1	.001	.055	Rejected
H02: Propaganda devices	15.56	6	.016	.144	Rejected
H03: Candidate attributes	16.39	5	.006	.148	Rejected
H04: Tone	8.89	2	.012	.109	Rejected

13Note: H01 compares primaries stories with all other stories published on the sampled days (N = 3,330). H02 to H04 use the 751 primaries stories. For H02, plain folks, transfer and card-stacking were combined; the smallest expected frequency was 16.72.

Supplementary analysis. Two further tests clarify where the differences lay. First, device use differed by office ($\chi^2 = 62.09$, df = 18, p < .001). Presidential stories carried a device most often (57.0%), followed by governorship stories (55.5%), while legislative stories (36.9%) and stories about the party as a whole (35.7%) were mostly procedural. Second, the attributes attached to APC and PDP actors differed ($\chi^2 = 15.00$, df = 5, p = .010). Identity accounted for 21.9% of PDP stories against 12.1% of APC stories, a gap that mirrors the PDP's decision to throw its presidential ticket open, while APC stories more often stressed competence (14.0% against 9.5%) and popularity (12.1% against 7.4%). The difference in tone between APC and PDP stories was not significant ($\chi^2 = 5.65$, df = 2, p = .059).

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding is that the primaries were a heavily reported event in both newspapers, more so than the general election campaign that followed. One in four stories in The Sun and one in five in Daily Trust on the sampled days concerned the selection of candidates. Read with Amenaghawon and Salawu's (2020) finding that intra-party strife was the issue most covered before the 2019 election, this suggests that the nomination stage is a main political event for the Nigerian press, not a prelude to one. Volume rose towards the end of May, following the parties' calendar.

The second finding concerns the devices. Unlike studies of the 2015 general election campaign, which found attack and hate speech prominent (Adisa et al., 2017; Batta et al., 2015), this study found that glittering generalities and testimonial led during the primaries. The difference is consistent with the logic of the selection stage. An aspirant seeking delegates cannot attack the party too openly, because the party is the platform, and is better served by grand promises and by visible endorsements from governors, monarchs and groups whose approval signals support among delegates. The finding that journalists' own stories rarely carried a device supports the argument of propaganda theory that the persuasive content of election coverage is supplied by interested actors (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019), and it suggests that the newspapers acted mainly as carriers of that content.

The third finding concerns the image of aspirants. Identity, rather than competence, was the attribute the press most often attached to aspirants, which agrees with Ojo (2020), who found religion and region shaping presidential voting in 2019, and with Tejumaiye et al. (2018), whose respondents ranked ethnic and religious considerations above party manifestos among the factors in their vote. In the language of attribute agenda-setting, the newspapers made "where an aspirant comes from" a salient qualification at the moment parties were choosing their candidates (McCombs et al., 1997). Competence and popularity appeared at similar levels. Both attributes, however, appeared almost always in a positive register, because they came mainly from the aspirants and their supporters, which means that they were self-presentation rather than assessment, much as Oloyede (2019) found candidates' promises reported at face value in 2019.

The scarcity of money in the coverage is perhaps the most telling result. Earlier work found money politics decisive in the 2018 primaries (Sule, 2022) and in the 2020 Edo governorship poll (Onah et al., 2021). Yet money was the dominant attribute in only 4.3% of the stories. Where it appeared, it was mostly a fee or a complaint by a losing aspirant, and Daily Trust carried twice The Sun's share of such stories. The gap between what this earlier work reports and what the press carried suggests that the most consequential attribute of the contest was the one least open to verification on deadline, and therefore the one the newspapers least often made salient.

The fourth finding is that the newspapers differed significantly but modestly. The Sun carried more endorsement and praise and was more positive in tone, while Daily Trust carried relatively more attack, denial and money stories and more neutral reports. The direction of the difference is consistent with Golan and Wanta (2001), who found that newspapers covering the same primary assigned candidates different attributes, but the small effect sizes suggest that a Lagos-based and an Abuja-based daily handled the contest in much the same way. Ownership (Abubakre, 2017) was not tested here, but the modest effects suggest that shared reporting routines weighed more than editorial alignment.

6.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that The Sun and Daily Trust reported the 2022 party primaries at a high volume and mainly by relaying the statements of aspirants, supporters and parties. Half of that coverage carried a propaganda device, led by the grand promise and the endorsement, and the image it built of the field was framed first by identity and only then by competence and popularity, almost always in terms that aspirants had chosen for themselves. Money, widely seen as the decisive factor in the contest, was largely absent from the coverage. The two newspapers differed in emphasis, with The Sun the more promotional and Daily Trust the more adversarial, but the shared pattern was stronger than the differences.

Three recommendations follow. First, editors should treat declarations and endorsements during the primaries as claims to be checked, setting an aspirant's promises against the record of offices already held. Second, newspapers should report the cost of candidacy directly, through the fees parties charge, the sources of aspirants' funds and the conduct of delegates, rather than waiting for complaints after the vote. Third, coverage of zoning should explain the arrangements and their consequences rather than simply relay regional demands, so that identity is reported as a political question and not presented as a qualification.

The study has limitations. A single coder coded headlines and opening text, so intercoder reliability could not be reported; the analysis covered online editions, which may differ from print; and the random dates did not include the APC presidential primary of 6 to 8 June 2022. The design also measured content, not effects. Future studies could use several coders and full texts, and pair content analysis with a survey of delegates or voters to test the attribute agenda-setting effects that this study could only infer.

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