



NEWSPAPER COVERAGE AND FRAMING OF KOGI STATE 2023 GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION – A STUDY OF *THE PUNCH* AND *THE GRAPHIC* NEWSPAPER

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ABSTRACT

Politics and media coverage in Nigeria are closely intertwined, with the media playing a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse. This study examined *The Punch* and *The Graphic* framing in the coverage of Kogi State 2023 governorship election by assessing the prominence given to various candidates and parties, the bias in the coverage and the dominant frames of the election by *The Graphic* and *The Punch*. Framing and Agenda Setting theories were used to explain the study, after conceptual and empirical reviews. The study adopted content analysis research design with population of 209 editions of the selected newspaper published in Nigeria within six (6) months period; June 1, 2023 to November 30, 2023. Using a constructed week technique, the study arrived at a sample of 136 editions of the newspapers using the Krejcie and Morgan formula for sample size determination. Coding sheet was used to collect data from the publications, which were analyzed using tables and simple percentages. The study found out that high prominence was accorded more by *The Graphic* than *The Punch* newspaper in reporting 2023 Kogi state governorship election as analysis showed front pages domination. Also, both selected newspapers reported stories of 2023 Kogi state governorship election in favourable slants. In identifying dominant frames, analysis revealed that majority of the stories related to 2023 Kogi State governorship election was framed as national interest. Hence, it was recommended amongst others that newspapers should explore options when covering political events.

Keywords: Media coverage, Electioneering, Democracy, Media bias, Electoral process, Electorate.

Introduction

The society is made up of concern, fears, expectations, beliefs, hopes, anxieties, confidence and satisfactions on diverse issues. It is the responsibility of the media to adequately and accurately inform, educate and even entertain the public on those matters as they relate to the health, education, commerce, agriculture, government, sports, politics etc. Issue like politics, government, elections involve and affect people directly or indirectly: They are of public importance and balance with equal opportunity are supposed to be given to them so as to enable people take decisive action.

Okunna cited in Asemah (2011), opined that in every society, the mass media can play important political roles in the social system. The media in addition to providing information about the political process can confer status and legitimacy on political leaders and issues making them appearing more important and right.

Okunna, however identifies the following as the ways through which the media can enhance the status of political candidates: Giving large headlines to favour a candidate; Featuring more lead stories on the candidate; Giving more prominence and position to articles on the candidate; Printing more quotations from the candidate's speech; Through photographs and other prominence; and the media can print more remarks praising the candidate.

Through news coverage, newspapers inform the public about the issue positions and frames of the competing camps and convey information between political actors and citizens. In editorials and

commentaries, in contrast, newspapers become political advocates in their own right that raise their voice, set an agenda, pursue policy options and try to shape public opinion (Hangeior, 2016). When a vote takes place, citizen approval cannot be taken for granted, and political elites must try to influence public opinion through information campaigns. To do so, these elites critically depend on the media to communicate their issue positions and frames to the citizen public (Hangeior, 2016).

Journalists have to construct a clear narrative that will make sense to the audience so they will draw our attention to certain facts while ignoring other aspects of the story. They might filter their report through a political point of view or find an angle that reinforces their own bias. In communication studies, framing is the way news stories are constructed to evoke a particular interpretation or reaction from the audience. For instance, a news report might position the audience to view a politician as the hero in the narrative because of their economic policy to cut business taxes. By contrast, another news report might represent the same politician as the villain because they want to argue there might be less money for social reforms.

News organisations can emphasise an issue by labelling the story a “special report” or an “in-depth investigation”. This will give the impression it is worth reading. Or an interview with an expert might heighten the sense of urgency. Fallows (2022), Framing is the idea that the assumptions behind the presentation, emphasis, and selection of stories are generally far more important than usual indicators of “bias,” overt as they might be.

Framing is in many ways tied very closely to Agenda Setting theory. Both focus on how media draws the public’s eye to specific topics – in this way they set the agenda. But Framing takes this a step further in the way in which the news is presented creates a frame for that information. This is usually a conscious choice by journalists – in this case a frame refers to the way media as gatekeepers organize and present the ideas, events, and topics they cover.

Kogi State 2023 governorship election which was the fifth off-cycle governorship election in the state since 1999, following cancellation of the 2007 governorship election in the state in February 2008 by the Supreme Court of Nigeria over irregularities was keenly contested by 18 candidates of 18 different political parties.

From the list released by INEC, we have party A, AA, AAC, ADC, ADP, APC, APGA, APM, APP, BP, LP, NNPP, NRM, PDP, PRP, SDP, YPP, ZLP. Among these are four very prominent personalities who have relative image in the political landscape of the state and from popular parties. Alhaji Usman Ododo of All Progressive Congress APC was the auditor general of local government under the incumbent governor's administration and as well from Kogi Central senatorial district.

Former senator of Kogi West, Senator Dino Melaye of the People's Democratic Party PDP as well has significant effect cause by his popularity in Kogi and general politics of Nigeria. Also, Hon. Leke Abejide, Member representing Yagba Federal Constituency of ADC. And Yakubu Muritala Ajaka who was denied opportunity by APC through court injunction but incontrovertibly decamped to Social Democratic Party SDP to secure their nomination form and become their flagbearer. They are the highlight of the election.

The 2023 Kogi state governorship election is without doubt influenced by both local and national media. Goodnews & Oluwabunmi (2021) recommendation decipher that fact by noting that, the media should try to report any news received objectively and without bias as that can help put voters on the right track when choosing candidates to vote for. In the same vein, Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (2023) in the report of their pre-election assessment gave the recommendation below haven understand the nature and importance of mass media; Newspaper in election; "the media should strive to equally cover and broadcast political campaigns for all candidates; be ethical in their reporting throughout the process; and encourage fact checking and disseminate information accurately."

Statement of the Problem

The Graphic newspaper is government owned. However, it is accessed by every Kogite irrespective of their political leanings. There is disparity in the level at which ownership factor affected the coverage by *The Graphic*. *The Punch* on the other hand is owned by private individual and it is based on ownership interest as well. The punch has more credibility and wider reach. Since Nigeria media are run by ownership interests, their framing of stories tends to differ especially along political inclinations. Since readers are believed to more likely trust newspapers that are perceived as unbiased and independent, when they become too closely aligned with political parties, they risk losing their credibility and trustworthiness. Therefore, *The punch* Newspaper's frame will be used to measure or check the Graphic frame of Kogi state 2023 governorship election.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the balance in imbalance in the coverage and framing of Kogi state 2023 gubernatorial election.

This study was guided by the following objectives, which are to:

1. assess the prominence given to various candidates and parties in Kogi state 2023 governorship election by The Graphic and Punch Newspaper;
2. examine the slant in the coverage of the Kogi state 2023 governorship election by The Graphic and Punch newspaper;
3. ascertain the dominant frames of the Kogi state 2023 governorship election by The Graphic and Punch Newspaper.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

The concept of framing is related to the agenda setting tradition but explains the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The theory was first propounded by Ervin Goffman (1974). He explains that people interpret what is going on around the world through their primary framework. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning.

A frame according to Entman (1991), fundamentally involves selection and salience which according to him means “to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation for the item described”.

Therefore, framing is a process by which the media present an issue in a way that can help the audience to formulate an opinion on that issue. Framing as a theory is usually used as a theoretical framework to understand the content of the media in terms of the meaning they produce, the purpose they intend to achieve and the ideology they intend to maintain. Framing theory considers how the news media cover events and issues, and-in another component of the approach, how individuals make sense of these events and issues, drawing partially (but not exclusively) on media representatives. Two relevant commonsense understanding of what it means to “frame” demonstrates the theory.

Firstly, the media can be said to frame events and issues in the same way a photographer frames a photograph, choosing what aspect to highlight or draw attention to, and what parts to leave out (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Similarly, a media frame can be likened to the frame of a house, providing the structure around which everything else fits, and influencing the overall style of the construction (Tankard 2001).

According to Entman (1993), framing involves:

1. Selection: Choosing certain aspects of an issue or event to highlight.
2. Emphasis: Giving more importance to certain aspects over others.
3. Interpretation: Providing context and meaning to the selected information.

This framing process can influence how audiences think about issues, what they consider important, and how they evaluate information (Scheufele, 1999).

In this study, the focus is on the analysis of newspaper coverage of the 2023 Kogi State governorship election as covered by *The Graphic* and *The Punch*. The objective is to examine the framing of this election by the newspapers and assess whether these frames have impacted public opinion. The researchers will collect a comprehensive dataset of news articles related to the election published by *The Graphic* and *The Punch*, including headlines, article text, publication dates, and any accompanying multimedia content.

The content of the news articles will be analyzed to identify the framing techniques employed by the newspapers. This analysis will involve identifying patterns in the language used, the prominence given, and the overall tone and perspective of the coverage. By comparing the framing techniques used by each newspaper, the researchers can determine any differences or similarities in how the electioneering is presented to the audience.

Methodology

The researchers employed the content analysis approach to examine the frequency with which the topic under discussion was covered by two prominent Nigerian newspapers, namely *The Graphic* and *The Punch*. Content analysis is defined by Amana (2023) as an empirical, objective, and systematic method of studying the manifest content of mass media to discover possible patterns. This research design was chosen because newspaper contents can be systematically and quantitatively examined, allowing for inferences to be drawn. Therefore, the use of content analysis is appropriate for this study.

The population of the study consisted of two newspapers; weekly and national daily: *The Graphic*, which has a significant readership in Kogi State of Nigeria, *The Punch*, which has a substantial readership in most states and region of Nigeria. The newspapers were chosen for this study due to their wider readership and enhanced readability at the state and national level. The population included a total of 209 publications, comprises 183 for *The Punch* and 26 for *The Graphic*. These newspapers were analyzed over a period of six months, from June 1st, 2023, to November 30th, 2023.

The sample size for this work was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for sample size determination. The formula and calculation are presented below:

The formula is:

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP (1 - P)}{d^2 (N - 1) + X^2 P (1 - P)}$$

Where;

X = Level of confidence (95% or 1.96)

N = Population size (209)

P = Estimated population proportion (50% or 0.5)

d = Degree of error or precision (\pm 5% or 0.05)

Substituting the above into the formula;

$$S = \frac{(1.96^2)(209)(0.5)(1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2(209 - 1) + (1.96^2)(0.5)(1 - 0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{(3.84)(209)(0.5)(0.5)}{0.0025(208) + (3.84)(0.5)(0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{(3.84)(209)(0.25)}{0.52 + (3.84)(0.25)}$$

$$S = \frac{3.84 \times 52.25}{0.52 + 0.96}$$

$$S = \frac{200.64}{1.48}$$

$$S = 135.5$$

$$S = 136$$

The sample size, therefore, is 136.

Therefore, the sample size for this study is 136 editions of the newspapers, (26 editions of *The Graphic* and 110 editions of *The Punch* newspaper). This sample size was determined base of the percentage of the two newspapers in the population.

The researchers adopted simple random sampling method involving the use of constructed weeks. The constructed week had 8 days beginning from June 1, 2023. In order to give even representation for the newspaper (4 working days of the first 20 weeks and 5 working days of the last 6 weeks were selected in the constructed week for *The Punch*).

This means that a total of 110 editions of *The Punch* newspaper were selected between June 1, 2023 and November 30, 2023. Purposive sampling was adopted to give even representation to *The Graphic*. Because it is a weekly newspaper with one edition per week, the whole publications within the frame of study were taken. Thus, a total of 26 editions of *The Graphic* and 110 editions of *The Punch* newspaper were selected over 6 months, totaling 136. The following table shows how the days were selected.

Constructed week distribution of samples in this study

| Week | Month | The Punch | | | | | The Graphic | Total |
|------------------|-----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--|-------------|-------|
| Constructed week | JUNE 2023 | 1 st | 2 nd | 3 rd | 5 th | | 1 | 5 |
| | | 6 th | 7 th | 8 th | 9 th | | 8 | 5 |
| | | 13 th | 14 th | 15 th | 16 th | | 15 | 5 |
| | | 21 th | 22 nd | 23 rd | 24 th | | 22 | 5 |
| | | 27 th | 28 th | 29 th | 30 th | | 29 | 5 |
| Constructed week | JULY 2023 | 4 th | 5 th | 6 th | 7 th | | 6 | 5 |
| | | 12 th | 13 th | 14 th | 15 th | | 13 | 5 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----|---|
| | | 18 th | 19 th | 20 th | 21 th | | 20 | 5 |
| | | 25 th | 26 th | 27 th | 28 th | | 27 | 5 |
| Constructed week | AUG 2023 | 1 st | 2 nd | 3 rd | 4 th | | 3 | 5 |
| | | 8 th | 9 th | 11 th | 12 th | | 10 | 5 |
| | | 15 th | 16 th | 17 th | 19 th | | 17 | 5 |
| | | 22 nd | 24 th | 25 th | 26 th | | 24 | 5 |
| | | 29 th | 30 th | 31 st | 1 st | | 31 | 5 |
| Constructed week | SEP 2023 | 5 th | 6 th | 7 th | 8 th | | 7 | 5 |
| | | 13 th | 14 th | 15 th | 16 th | | 14 | 5 |
| | | 19 th | 20 th | 21 st | 23 rd | | 21 | 5 |
| | | 26 th | 27 th | 28 th | 29 th | | 28 | 5 |
| Constructed week | OCT 2023 | 3 rd | 4 th | 5 th | 6 th | | 5 | 5 |
| | | 10 th | 11 th | 12 th | 14 th | | 12 | 5 |
| | | 17 th | 18 th | 19 th | 20 th | 21 st | 19 | 6 |
| | | 24 th | 25 th | 26 th | 27 th | 28 th | 26 | 6 |
| Constructed week | NOV 2023 | 31 st | 1 st | 2 nd | 3 rd | 4 th | 2 | 6 |
| | | 7 th | 8 th | 9 th | 10 th | 11 th | 9 | 6 |
| | | 14 th | 15 th | 16 th | 17 th | 18 th | 16 | 6 |
| | | 21 st | 22 nd | 23 rd | 24 th | 25 th | 23 | 6 |

The data for this study was collected using a coding sheet, which is a tool utilized in systematic data collection for content analysis research.

Unit of Analysis and Content Categories

In this study, the unit of analysis is news stories covering Kogi State 2023 governorship election. The content categories include measured genre stories/news content, straight news (S), dump news stories (DN), prominence, frames, frequency of coverage, slant of the stories.

Inter-coder Reliability

For this study, the researcher employed the services of two coders who assisted in coding reports relating to PDP campaign crisis in Nigeria into different frames of analysis. The coders, who were trained by the researcher, were instructed and given guidelines on how to code items into the various frames of analysis already spelt out by the researcher. To determine the inter-coder reliability, the researcher adopted the Holstic formula (in Wimmer and Dominick, 2003, p.137).

$$\text{reliability} = \frac{2(m)}{N1 + N2}$$

Where;

M = the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree.

$N1 + N2$ = the numbers of coding decisions by the first and second coder.

Therefore,

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Inter – coder reliability} &= \frac{2(136)}{136 + 136} \\ &= \frac{272}{272}\end{aligned}$$

Inter – coder reliability = 1

There is a perfect positive reliability level for the coders results since the result is +1.

Data Presentation and Analysis

One hundred and thirty-six (136) issues were content-analyzed throughout a six-month period, from June 1, 2023 to November 30, 2023, during which candidate nomination across political parties, political campaigns and election preparation was all over the media and was prominently displayed on many stories.

Table 1: Genre of Story on 2023 Kogi State Governorship Election

| VARIABLE | THE PUNCH | | THE GRAPHIC | |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Straight News | 24 | 85.7% | 11 | 64.7% |
| Dump News Stories | - | - | 2 | 11.8% |
| Feature Article | 4 | 14.3% | 4 | 23.5% |
| Soft News | - | - | - | - |
| TOTAL | 28 | 100% | 17 | 100% |

Table 1 presents the type of stories in *The Punch* and *The Graphic* Newspaper that covered 2023 Kogi State Governorship Election. The two newspapers, *The Punch* and *The Graphic*, adopted same approaches in terms of the types of stories they published. *The Punch* predominately featured straight news stories and few feature articles.

In the same vein, *The Graphic* focused more on straight news stories with few feature articles, and dump news stories. This suggests a similarity in editorial priorities and storytelling styles between the two newspapers. In furtherance, the high frequency of straight news stories by the two newspapers *The Punch* (85.7%) and *The Graphic* (64.7%) indicates a potentially comprehensive and detailed coverage of the 2023 Kogi State Governorship election.

Table 2: Level of Prominence in the Coverage of 2023 Kogi State Governorship Election

| VARIABLE | THE PUNCH | | THE GRAPHIC | |
|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Front page | - | - | 10 | 58.8% |
| Centre page | - | - | 2 | 11.8% |
| Back page | - | - | - | - |
| Inside page | 28 | 100% | 5 | 29.4% |
| TOTAL | 28 | 100% | 17 | 100% |

In table 2, the prominence of 2023 Kogi State Governorship election stories by *The Punch* and *The Graphic* is analyzed. All *The Punch* newspaper stories were on the inside page (100%), indicating that these stories were not considered the most significant. On the contrary, *The Graphic* newspaper primarily placed stories related to the 2023 Kogi state governorship election on the front page (58.8%), indicating that these stories were considered the most significant and attention-grabbing.

The fact that *The Graphic* placed limited number of stories on the inside page and centre page of less prominent suggests that the newspaper give high prominence to the election during the period of this study. Overall, this distribution of stories across different pages reflects the editorial decisions and priorities of the two newspapers.

As a state-owned newspaper, the importance placed on the coverage of the election by *The Graphic* shows how significant the election is and the evident proof of editorial policy on issue or matter of state concern.

Table 3: Slant/ Bias of Reports, News, On 2023 Kogi State Governorship Election

| VARIABLE | THE PUNCH | | THE GRAPHIC | |
|--------------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Favourable | 11 | 39.3% | 15 | 88.2% |
| Unfavourable | 5 | 17.8% | 1 | 5.9% |
| Neutral | 12 | 42.9% | 1 | 5.9% |
| TOTAL | 28 | 100% | 17 | 100% |

Table 3 is an analysis of the slant or bias in the coverage of the 2023 Kogi state governorship election by *The Punch* and *The Graphic* newspaper. Most of *The Punch* stories have neutral slant with closely favourable slant in its presentation and rare or few stories with unfavourable slant (17.8%). This implies that majority of the stories on the election were presented without bias and uncontroversial.

The coverage of the election was predominantly ethical. Fairness and objectivity with equal opportunity given to all concern shows the organization stand of The Punch newspaper on electioneering. Most of the stories of *The Graphic* had favourable slant (88.2%) and insignificant numbers of unfavourable, and neutral slant. This implies that majority of the stories were presented with strong positive terms.

The news content either promote the state ruling party and candidate or propagate the state government activities and agenda while endorsing the party's preferred candidate without reference or interest of others, propaganda.

Table 4: Kinds of Frame Used in reporting 2023 Kogi State Governorship Election

| VARIABLE | THE PUNCH | | THE GRAPHIC | |
|----------------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Ethnic | 10 | 35.7% | 7 | 41.2% |
| Religion | - | - | - | - |
| National frame | 18 | 64.3% | 10 | 58.8% |
| TOTAL | 28 | 100% | 17 | 100% |

Table 4 provide insights into the frames used by *The Punch* and *The Graphic* in the coverage of 2023 Kogi State Governorship Election. The dominant frame used by *The Punch* is “National Frame” (64.3%). This indicate that the central theme in the reporting was the national concern within the electioneering.

The reports were to any ethnic or religion leaning, the programme of the national government, electoral body, law enforcement agency and few political activities calculating to the election were focused on and present in a frame that resonant with the national interest and state principle of social cohesion and national integration without arising any region or party above other.

While *The Graphic* has competing frame depicting the electioneering, “National Frame” (58.8%) and “Ethnic Frame” (41.2%). The ethnic interest here is associated with political ethnicity; some of their report and the prominence given was more on matter of concern to the All Progressive Congress APC and the government of Kogi state who is the owner and controller of the media outlet.

The prominence of this frame suggests that the media focused on highlighting and analyzing the electoral process. By consistently framing election in this way, the newspapers conveyed the electoral process and activities as a key narrative in their coverage of the 2023 Kogi State governorship election. These percentages offer a clear distribution of the framing strategies employed in the news coverage of this election, which can be valuable for understanding the media's portrayal and emphasis on different aspects of the stories.

Table 5: Frequency of Coverage of 2023 Kogi State Governorship Election

| VARIABLE | THE PUNCH | | THE RAPHIC | |
|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Weekly | 21 | 75% | 15 | 88.3% |
| Bi-weekly | 7 | 25% | 2 | 11.7% |
| Monthly | - | - | - | - |
| Bi-monthly | - | - | - | - |
| Quarterly | - | - | - | - |
| TOTAL | 28 | 100% | 17 | 100% |

Table 5 is an analysis of the frequency in the coverage of the 2023 Kogi State governorship election by *The Punch* and *The Graphic* newspaper. Majority of the stories (75%) were published in successive weeks by *The Punch*. Likewise (88.3%) of *The Graphic* were published in successive weeks. None of the stories were published monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly. This implies that there was a high frequency in the coverage of the 2023 Kogi state governorship election by the newspapers. Subsequently, the findings based on these frames were discussed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the data.

Discussion of Findings

Politics and media coverage in Nigeria are closely intertwined, with the media playing a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse. However, the media landscape in Nigeria is often characterized by partisanship, sensationalism, and bias.

Many media outlets are owned or influenced by political actors, leading to selective reporting and propaganda. This can result in misinformation, disinformation, and a lack of objective reporting. Additionally, the government has been known to exert pressure on media outlets, limiting freedom of expression and press freedom.

The data presented in tables 1 and 2 provides an answer to this question. We measured prominence based on the genre or type of story or report; generally, straight news stories are considered more significant when compared with dumb news, features, or soft news. The findings in table 1 reveal that in *The Punch* newspaper, news stories accounted for 85.7%, features for 14.3%, while there were no dump news story and soft news.

In *The Graphic* newspaper, straight news stories constituted 64.7%, features for 23.5%, and dump news stories for 11.8%, while there was no soft news story. This indicates that both *The Punch* and *The Graphic* newspapers primarily focused on straight news stories related to the 2023 Kogi state governorship election, in contrast to feature and other genres as highlighted in the study. This means, more prominence was given to the election by the duo. From this study, it can be inferred that in terms of page placement, high prominence was given strongly to reports on Kogi state 2023 governorship election as most of the stories in *The Graphic* newspaper were published on the front pages (58.8%), followed by inside pages and nonexistence on the back page as it's mostly reserved for opinion and headlines.

The Punch newspaper gave fairly low prominence to the coverage of the election as reports related to the election were published inside page (100%). While both selected newspapers were considered independently in their coverage of Kogi state 2023 governorship election, findings show that high prominence was accorded by *The Graphic* than *The Punch* newspaper in reporting the election as analysis showed a 58.8% front pages domination.

News stories, in the view of Kim and Dennis (2019) are generally regarded as more significant in terms of prominence or importance compared to feature articles, with features being considered the second most prominent, and so forth. This is in agreement with Lasswell's argument, which suggests that elements like personality or individual figures and parties or agencies tend to attract media attention when determining what is considered newsworthy (Getzkow& Shapiro, 2010).

Additionally, we measured prominence by examining the position or page allocation of each story. Front-page stories are associated with high prominence, while back-page stories are considered next to front page, with the centre-page and inside-page stories deemed to have less prominence or importance. In *The Punch* newspaper, hundred percent of their stories were placed on the inside pages, while there was no story related to the election on both the front page, centre page or back page.

In *The Graphic* newspaper, about sixty percent of their stories appeared on the front pages, few graced the centre page, featured on the inside pages, there were no stories on the back pages except continuation stories on the front pages. The attention given to the various political parties and candidates by the understudy newspapers shows a high level of prominence in their coverage, but more evident in *The Graphic* newspaper which gave about sixty percent front page space to matter related to the election. From

this study, it can be inferred that in terms of story bias or slant, The Graphic newspaper reported stories of Kogi state 2023 governorship election with a positive tone that shows appraisal of the electioneering. While The Punch reported it in a more lightly and neutral tone.

In view of this analysis, *The Punch* newspaper predominantly allocated space on the inside pages to cover the 2023 Kogi state governorship election, without stories on the front and back pages. This is because the front page, being the first point of contact, specifically features headlines and main human interest or topical issues, while the back page, often seen as the “second point of contact,” is mainly reserved for sport stories.

The Graphic newspaper on the other hand, majorly allocated space on the front pages to cover the 2023 Kogi state governorship election, with considerable number of space on the inside pages. This is because front page, being the first contact point primarily features headlines, government related activities or issues and core human interest or topical state issues, while the back page, often seen as the “second point of contact,” is usually reserved for headlines and opinions.

Based on this assessment, it can be concluded that both *The Punch* and *The Graphic* newspapers provided substantial coverage of the 2023 Kogi State governorship election, effectively informing the public. However, *The Graphic* provide more substantial coverage by the importance given via the location of the stories.

This coverage exposed citizens to the electoral process, various political parties, candidates which the elites depend on to communicate their issue, position, and frame to the citizen public (Trech, 2012). This aligned with Okunna’s assertion as cited in Asemah (2011), that in every society, the mass media can play important political roles in the social system.

The media in addition to providing information about the political process can confer status and legitimacy on political leaders and issues making them appearing more important and right. Giving more headlines to favour a candidate, featuring more lead stories on the candidate, giving more prominence and position among others.

THE PUNCH newspaper, page 3, October 25, 2023, Kogi poll: ‘Political apathy hits voters, parties battle economic crisis.’

THE GRAPHIC newspaper, page 1, August 30 to September 5, 2023, ‘Ododo is best suited to consolidate on my achievements.’

The answer to this research question is provided in table 3, which analyzed the slant or bias in the coverage of the Kogi state 2023 governorship election by *The Punch* and *The Graphic* newspaper. The data indicated that the coverage of the election by *The Punch* newspaper, there was close margin in the favourable and neutral slant. This implies that fair, positive and pleasant terms were used to describe the election and the electoral process.

With majority of the stories over forty percent presented in a neutral tone, about forty percent in a favourable and less than twenty percent in an unfavourable tone of coverage, this shows that the newspaper give a positive and objective account of the election. Likewise, *The Graphic* newspaper had about ninety percent of favourable, with mere around ten percent of unfavourable, and neutral coverage. This shows a high and strong positive portrayal by the newspaper.

The favourable slant or bias in the coverage of Kogi state 2023 governorship election can be explained by the media's role as a watchdog, agenda-setter, education, and status conferral of the society. The media often inform, educate, and expose the public to issues and matter of importance needed for their informed decision-making, social development and wellbeing.

The media also aim to educate and sensitize the audience about the dangers and consequences of their decisions, actions and inactions. The tone, language, and context used in reporting can shape voters' perceptions of candidates and issues. Media outlets' endorsements or positive coverage can enhance a

candidate's credibility and appeal. In the study of Onwude et al (2017) cited earlier, it was found that the media serves as a means for modifying the direction of audience attitude to an issue or situation.

The predominant positive slant used by *The Graphic* and the fair neutral tone by *The Punch* in the Kogi state 2023 governorship election is also consistent with the assumptions of the Framing theory. The theory holds that the media is capable of deciding how audience perceived story through how it is presented, either by emphasizing, elaborating, selecting or deselecting. In this case, the positive aspects of the election were emphasized, perhaps to influence the public's view of electoral process, political participation and political behaviour and continue their role as status conferral of society and democratic participant and development communicator.

THE PUNCH, pg. 30. 1 August, 2023, 'Kogi ex-appointees back Ododo's gov ambition.'

THE GRAPHIC, pg. 10. 20 September, 2023, 'APC Guber candidate. Ododo takes Mopamuro by storm.'

Table 4 provides valuable insights into the framing strategies employed by the newspapers in their coverage of the Kogi state 2023 governorship election. These percentages offer a clear distribution of the framing strategies, shedding light on how the media portrayed and emphasized various aspects of this election.

Subsequently, the findings based on these frames were discussed, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of the data. The dominant frames used by *The Punch* and *The Graphic* newspaper in the coverage of Kogi state 2023 governorship election are National and ethnic frames; this is seen in the analysis where 64.3% of *The Punch* and 58.8% of *The Graphic* had a national frame and 35.7% of *The Punch* and 41.2% of *The Graphic* had an Ethnic frame.

The examination of the framing used by *The Punch* and *The Graphic* newspaper in covering of Kogi state 2023 governorship election reveals interesting patterns. Rather than focusing on Religion and Ethnic frames as previously suggested, the data demonstrates a nuanced approach. Approximately sixty-four percent (*The Punch*) and about sixty percent (*The Graphic*) of the stories were indeed geared toward national interest in nature, while a notably, significant portion of the stories almost forty percent (*The Punch*) and over forty percent (*The Graphic*) were framed Ethnic interest, with no percentage adopting a Religion frame. This quite noticeable variety in framing suggests that the newspapers employed quite range of tones and strategies in their coverage of this election, reflecting its straightforwardness and transparency.

This varied framing can be attributed to the media's multifaceted role as gatekeepers and storytellers within society. Media outlets make deliberate choices about which stories to feature and how to present them, influenced by their editorial policies and news values. They also seek to engage and captivate their audience by employing engaging language and attention-grabbing headlines.

The findings of this study contradict the findings of Ikegbunam (2020), who observed that ethno-religious sentiment have influenced the Nigerian political environment to the extent that citizens have less concern to the provisions of the constitutions but much on ethnic origin of a would be leader. Likewise Hangeior (2016), the Findings of the study indicate that local newspapers in Makurdi frame their reports on politics in Benue State based on regional, sectional, and tribal lineages, further findings reveal that the fact-based approach (news stories) dominates other genres of presenting political issues.

Conversely, this study noted national interestism in coverage, with newspapers focusing on elements designed to intrigue and fascinate readers, such as the campaign process, INEC report, defection and endorsement as well as critiques of the parties and candidates in the election. This underscores how media outlets strategically select and present information to capture public interest.

The positive framing of the Kogi state 2023 governorship election aligns with framing theory, which posits that the media can shape audience perceptions by emphasizing or de-emphasizing specific aspects of an issue. Frames are viewed as mental structures that influence reality interpretation, allowing newspapers to construct their narrative of this election. This highlights the influential role of journalists and

media organizations in shaping public understanding and attitudes while the frame of coverage determined the level of importance and attention given to issue.

The outcome of the election further consents to the framing theory assumption of priming, which state that, exposure to certain frames or information can activate related concepts, influencing subsequent judgments and decisions. This thus align with the agenda-setting which assumes that the media has the power to influence the public agenda by selectively highlighting certain issues, events, or topics, thereby shaping audience perceptions of what is important and worthy of attention. This can be seen in the frame of *The Graphic* in most of their stories on APC and its candidate during the election.

Conclusion

The influence of media in framing the societal issues and event cannot be overemphasized. While this is evident in every human endeavor, it is more visible in the political arena as the media serve as a bridge between the party and congress, candidates and electorates, electoral body and voters.

Based on these findings, it is evident that *The Graphic* newspaper provided relatively high prominence to the coverage of the Kogi state 2023 governorship election, with most stories appearing on front pages, followed by inside-page placement. The back page was rarely utilized for such content, primarily reserved for opinions stories and headlines.

The Graphic newspaper showed a higher degree of prominence in its coverage compared to *The Punch* newspaper. These findings highlight the newspapers' approach to covering the Kogi state 2023 governorship election, emphasizing the prominence, positive tone, and frame of national interest in their reporting. No doubt, this study underscored the influence of media framing and agenda setting theories in shaping the portrayal of political events in the minds of their reader.

Though this can create a more favourable narrative, build momentum, and ultimately shape public opinion and behavior in a way that benefits the candidate or caused being covered as it is evident in the content of *The Graphic* newspaper, it can also have negative impact on the people when there is unbalanced reporting; favouring one candidate or party over others, creating uneven playing field. This can be seen in the outcome of the 2023 Kogi state governorship election where *The Graphic* gave more prominence to APC at the detrimental of other party and *The Punch* focusing more on the electoral body, law enforcement agency activities with little attention to opposition parties.

Recommendations

In light of these findings, it was recommended that:

1. newspapers (national dailies) should consider diversifying the placement of such stories. It is important for newspapers to allocate space on both front and the back pages for political content, not just only on the inside pages.
2. Given the positive slant in the coverage by *The Graphic* and competing neutral-positive tones by *The Punch*, which show that a fair representation of events and perspectives surrounding the election were made. Newspapers should strive for more balanced reporting by providing information on other stakeholders in electoral process; opposition party and candidate's activities.
3. Newspapers should explore a wider range of framing options when covering political events. While the national interest was dominant frame in this study, other frames should be considered, such as historical context, public sentiment and performance evaluation. News organizations should be publicly responsible in their reporting processes and remain accessible to all party while maintain their accountability to audience or reader through the upheld of public interest ethic. They should clearly articulate their framing choices and editorial decisions, allowing audience needs to take preeminence in their story's presentation.

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