

## **DIMENSIONS OF NEGATIVITY IN THE COVERAGE OF THE NIGERIA'S 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Critical Assessment of media coverage of the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria would, no doubt, yield a pitiable result of poor performance considering the high level of partisanship of both private and public media with respect to the tone and content of reportage. Even in advanced societies, the media can engage in discourse of political matter in ways that could favour or disfavour a political candidate, but with a clear boundary that abhor breach of professional ethics and blatant portrayal of falsehood. The history of media in Nigeria is intertwined with political developments, as such, most research tended to focus on the significance of the media in democratic transitions; highlighting basically on the position of the media as the 'Fourth Estate' whose agenda should be right in itself to guide people towards political decision and participation. Others have emphasized on the role of ownership in determining media coverage of elections in Nigeria. We are not aware of any study that investigates specifically media bias, tone or negativity in Nigeria. This paper attempts to fill this gap by examining dimensions of negativity towards politics during the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. By drawing on the previous study that conceptualized frame-related and individual-related negativity, the paper identified different methods through which news outlets frame negativity in the coverage of political issues. Such methods, as this paper shows, are the selection of like-minded sources, making salience of ideologically based opinion articles, re-publication of news items from other news channels that aptly supports specific agenda frame, and having headlines jaded with text and tone that negatively describe political actors. Drawing on the content analyses of six online media websites, the paper measured how news outlets frame stories that are conflict driven, pessimistic-centred, or reflect incapability or portray negativity towards political actors or institution during the coverage of the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. The paper demonstrates that the tone and content deployed to report issues of the election were capable of promoting political disengagements and media cynicism and concludes that the coverage of Nigeria's 2015 Presidential election was overtly negative, conflict driven, reflects predominantly incapability and offer pessimistic view or negative portrayal of political actors.*

**KEYWORDS:** Negativity, Framing, Election Coverage, Media Tonality, Media Bias, Political Actors

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In a functional democracy, the mass media remains inviolable as an intermediary between the ordinary people and those holding power on their behalf. During the period of democratic transitions most voters are informed about politics through the media and people form impression and evaluation of political actors and events through the information made available by intermediaries such as the media, political organisations and people with whom they discuss politics (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt 1998). This makes many in society to assume that the media has an effect on voters' perceptions of political parties and their candidates, hence, can

make them vote for one candidate or another (David Nicolas Hopmann, Vliegenthart, De Vreese, & Albæk 2010). The fact that the media could galvanise and prioritise societal problems and objectives and provide insights about candidates seeking to occupy public office brings into fore the reason to evaluate media works and the impacts of agenda-setting, framing, and priming effects of issues in the news (Chong & Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001; Entman 2010).

A plethora of research has highlighted the powerful role of the media in a democratic institution that they are deployed by different power interests in the society to achieve powerful force in political arena. In the changing world of journalism, news reporting has become increasingly interpretative and campaigns seen as a game (Aalberg, Strömbäck, & De Vreese 2011; Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn 2004). The interaction between behaviours of political actors, the public and the media content has been reflected in the mediatisation literature; thus provoking research in the academia that examines how endorsement (Chiang & Knight, 2011), news framing and bias (Entman, 2010), editorial slant (Druckman & Parkin 2005), party agenda (David N Hopmann, Elmelund-Praestekaer, Albæk, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese 2012) and negativity (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza 2011) have formed media logic in analysing political activities. These researches into media bias, framing and negativity afford social scientist the opportunity to understand how politics are covered by journalists and how that coverage might be influenced by, among other things, journalists' personal opinions (Shoemaker & Reese 1996 cited in David Nicolas Hopmann, de Vreese, & Albæk 2011).

In recent times, inquiries about news bias, power and influence, especially during democratic transitions, have tended to examine relationships between reporters and news source (Berkowitz 2009), as well as approaches and dimensions of negativity towards political news (Lengauer et al. 2011); provoking questions that asked whether reporters or source exert greater influence in shaping the news, and "how journalist's use of sources lead towards a particular news frame that either favour or excludes some issues over others" (Berkowitz 2009: 102), how negative profiling of candidate influence audience perceptions of candidate in political arena (Lengauer et al. 2011; Niven 2001; Walter & Vliegenthart 2010) or the extent personalised, contest or negative characteristics underline single media logic in the coverage of election campaigns (Takens, van Atteveldt, van Hoof, & Kleinnijenhuis 2013). These studies have suggested a different pattern of news frames that either presents a political candidates or party in a negative or positive slants during electioneering campaigns (see Chiang & Knight 2011; Druckman & Parkin 2005; Entman, 2010; Niven 2001).

Accordingly, negativity in political news portends a characterisation of news frame reflecting: a one-sided conflict reporting, indications of potential danger, or impressions that negative developments in politics are likely. In this direction, news outlets can also frame negativity by reflecting political failure, crises, disaster, fiasco, cynicism, threat, frustration, defeatism or disappointment or general indices of incompetence and misconduct (Lengauer et al. 2011). Thus, negativity in news reporting can be initiated in-house (endogenous negativity – whereby the negativity is initiated by the media) or by political actors (exogenous negativity – whereby the media disseminate negative news).

A review of literature shows that the need to maximise audience and achieve economic stability in the midst of commercial competitiveness are one of the reasons instrumental to increasing negative news toward politics (see Dunaway 2013; McMennamin, Flynn, O'Malley, & Rafter 2012). For example, Cohen (2008) finds that as news organisations feel greater economic pressure, they turn increasingly to negative news as a way of increasing audience size (see

Lengauer et al. 2011: 182). According to Lengauer et al., (2011), conflict-centred negativity is market driven compare to positive news given the fact that it is not only clearly identifiable and understandable; “it is more eye-catching, more dramatic and stimulates interest”.

Research in Psychology has found that Negative information tends to influence evaluations more strongly than comparably extreme positive information (Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo 1998). Other reasons for negative news could be explained in the ‘critical journalism’ approach which presents the need for the media to exercise its watchdog role on power holders against malfeasances. According to (Westerståhl & Johansson 1986), critic journalism begets the understanding of balance – whereof a “more confrontational climate” could be advanced while seeking a counter-statement from an opponent in response to statements making political news (cited in Lengauer et al. 2011:181). Although confrontational and negative political news could have an important news value – increases news available in decision-making situation and stimulate political debate- as stressed by scholars(e.g. Geer, 2008; Schuck, Vliegenthart, & De Vreese, 2011), it also has a demobilising effects on voters(see Dunaway, 2013; Geer, 2008; David Nicolas Hopmann et al., 2010; Patterson, 2009; Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010). According to Iyengar and Ansolabehere (1995), negative media campaigns disenfranchise voters by turning them off from the political process (see Geer 2008). The same concern is shared by (Patterson 2009) when he observed that ‘negative politics appears to wear some people down to the point where they simply want less of politics’ (Patterson 2009: 51). Research has found that media tone, priming and framing of issue has direct effects on how the public perceived such issue (Brown Givens & Monahan 2005; Dalton et al. 1998). For example, (Brown Givens & Monahan 2005) found that mediated portrayals of African American women influence judgments of African American women in social situations. Norris et al also indicate that a positive tone towards particular parties lead voters to have more positive evaluations of those parties (Norris 1999). Yet, no study has examined how Nigerian mass media have used its power of selection and use of language (tone) in reporting election and the implication of it to the power of the media as public agenda source.

In Africa, except Grabe, (1996) who investigates visual bias in the South African Broadcasting Corporation’s coverage of the 1987 and 1989 elections, there has been insignificant research, if any at all, that investigates bias, frames and negativity in African media. On the other hand, African researchers have alleged that western media’s framing and priming of Africa has affected the way the continent is perceived. In his investigation of the coverage of Zimbabwean crises in the Norwegian media, Ndlela (2005) demonstrates that the Norwegian media, through an unconscious social cultural or political bias in the selection of sources, angling and narrative devise of frame, reduced Zimbabwean issue into a “typical African story of tragedy and despair” which has become common stereotypical device associated with western media to frame Africa as “an unrelenting series of disasters” (Ndlela 2005:71). Also, we are not aware of any study that investigates media bias, frames or negativity in Nigerian media. Instead, most studies tended to tout the media’s information functionality and its capacity as an important institution without which there could be no democratic experience (Aghamelu 2014; Tettey 2001; Oboh 2015). This paper attempts to fill this gap by examining dimensions of negativity towards politics during the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. Drawing on the content analyses of six online media websites, we examined how news outlets frame stories that are conflict driven, pessimistic-centred, or reflect incapability or portray negativity towards political actors or institution during the coverage of the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical concept of Framing**

The concept of framing has an underlining theoretical foundation in media agenda and gatekeeping. Studies investigating media coverage of political events, such as election campaigns and power distribution or allegation of bias in news contents have measured different patterns in which the mass media successfully frame reality and connect them together in a narrative that influence what people think about (see Dimitrova & Strömbäck 2012; Entman 2010; McCombs & Ghanem 2001). Framing indicates that political issues can have multiple values from a variety of perspectives. Davis and Kent (2006) assert that frames enable humans to see certain things but not everything (Ghafour). To frame in communication means to “organise everyday reality by providing meaning to an unfolding strips of events” and promoting “particular definitions and interpretations of political issues” (see Chong & Druckman 2007:106).

Frame theory is significant in understanding the relationship between media institution, political actors and the public. For example, (Tankard 2001) suggests that framing studies can help understand how media work:

- (1) that news framing can eliminate voices and weaken arguments, (2) that the media can frame issues in ways that favour a particular side without showing an explicit bias, and (3) that defining the terms of a debate takes one a long way toward winning it (Tankard 2001:95).

According to him, framing is differentiated from the concept of “objectivity and bias” in that it accommodates the likelihood of additional more complex emotional responses and adds a ‘cognitive dimension’ (beliefs about objects as well as attitudes), while recognising the ‘ability of text – or a media presentation – to define a situation, to define the issue and to set the terms of a debate’ (Tankard 2001:96).

Much of the power of framing also comes from its ability to define problems – articulating cost and benefits - specifying causes, make moral assessments, and recommend solutions (Entman 1993, 2010). Entman shows that the communicators, the text, the receiver, and the culture (or if you like the environment) play significant role on how frames take place in communication process. The communicators make conscious or unconscious decision in selecting what to say, guided by frames (call schemata) that organise their belief systems. The texts contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements (Entman 1993:391). Although the receiver may literally be influenced by other things than those reflected in the text or the framing intention of the communicator, Entman argues that the common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of people largely influences the text and the communicator. For instance, framing of a politician might include moral character, experience, competence and policy view and frames shape their interactions in a way that result to more or less positive or negative sentiments toward the politician (Entman 2010).

The importance of issue salience explains the relationship between agenda setting, priming and framing (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007). Salience, in the words of Entman, “means making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or more memorable to the audience” (Entman 1993:392). The Nigerian 2015 Presidential elections (as we discuss below)

demonstrates a practical evaluation of media agenda, priming and framing. Media framing focused on corruptions, security, economy, governance and general competences of candidates. However, selections of attributes that defines those frames appeared speculative, sensational or superficial (sometimes one-sided) and overtly negative. Research has found that media's tone of the parties have direct effect to voters on candidate choice (Fournier, Nadeau, Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004; David Nicolas Hopmann et al. 2010) and news on success and failure appeared to be foremost important success factor during election (Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, Oegema, & De Ridder 2007).

This paper argues that the opposition Party – the All Progressive Congress – may have had some level of influence on the media that earned it more positive coverage than the incumbent's party –the People's Democratic Party. Scholars affirms that the “higher the level of political control a political actor or party can exert over a communication channel, the more likely the message will be transmitted as originally intended” (Walter & Vliegenthart 2010:444) and parties can use paid advertisement to send their message directly and unfiltered to the public(Geer, 2008). Evidence in this paper suggest that news headlines clearly attack political actors and seemingly reflected interest of party men over others. For example, headlines like: “*MEND calls President Jonathan a clueless, inept and bare-faced liar, urges Nigerians to vote him out*”; “*President Jonathan, why do you engage and condone corruption, terrorism, and impunity*” (SaharaReportersNewYork 2015); “*Buhari is brain dead*” by the wife of the President on campaign trail; “*Buhari will die in office*” paid advertisement by Gov. Ayo Fayose (The Sun Newspaper, January 19, 2015), demonstrate a potent expression of political leaning. Although ownership and the quest to maintain fascinating business model trail media angle of reportage during election, such headlines (as indicated above) are capable of polarising national political environment and can cause inter-ethnic disharmony which implicate on the ability of the media to maintain national integration. In addition, headline such as “*Yoruba at Ibadan Submit say only a bastard will vote for Goodluck Jonathan*” is denotatively negative, ultimately partisan and suggest how much political agenda defines media agenda.

Agenda setting philosophy emphasises how the media set agenda of objects for attention and agenda of attributes for thinking about the objects (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). As stated by McCombs & Ghanem, (2001), objects defining an agenda can be “political candidates, public institutions, or competing brands of goods” (p.68). McCombs & Ghanem argues the frame theory posit a convergence of agenda setting variables, asserting that since the hallmark of framing is located in the manner of news presentations rather than media effects, making aspects of issue more salient through different mode of presentation (what they call "second-level agenda setting") shift people's attitude. Like agenda setting theory, priming occurs “when news content suggests to the audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and government” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007:11). Frames works to shape and alter audience members' interpretation and preferences through priming (Entman 2010).

Studies in political coverage have considered frame, bias, and news slant as related object of negativity toward politics in the media (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000; Dimitrova & Strömbäck 2012; Druckman & Parkin 2005; Dunaway 2013; Entman 2010). Different definitions and approaches have been adopted to examine patterns of bias and framing of political news. According to (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000), two approaches are possible in content analysing frame: inductive and deductive approach. While inductive approach can “reveal the array of possible frames” by detecting many possible ways in which an issue can be framed (although labour intensive and difficult to replicate), a deductive approach involves “predefining certain

frames as content analytic variables to verify the extent to which these frames occur in the news” (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000:94). In their review of literature, studies have focused on the existence of one frame or another in the news and its consequences for public opinion. For example, a range of issues including conflict frame, responsibility frame, economic consequence frame as well as morality frames has been studied by researchers (see Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). Regarding dimensions of negativity toward politics, studies have coded negativity in *statements* (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010; Brandenburg, 2005), *paragraphs* or *story level* (see Lengauer et al. 2011; Patterson 2000).

This study focused on headline and story level since it is intended to assess evidences and dimensions of negativity towards the presidential candidates of PDP and APC in the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. We adopted directional definition of negativity in this study as opposed to evaluative definition to overcome measurement bias. Directional negativity is defined as “criticism directed at the opposing political party or candidate, regardless of the kind of criticism or accuracy” (Walter & Vliegenthart 2010:443). Two major hypotheses will be tested: H1 – coverage of Nigerian 2015 presidential election will be positively and significantly negative; H2 - PDP and its candidate will significantly receive more negative stories than the APC /candidate. The problem with most studies examining frames is that they tends to measure the differential effects of frame, rather than the differences in the mode of news presentation (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007), which is the approach this study is taken.

### **Justification**

The decision to review media coverage of the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria was based on the public outcry in some quarters that the news media blurred the line between journalism and politics by heavily engaging in party politics, malicious publication of half-truth, character assassination and superficial inclusion of reports that worked for the opposition candidate during the election. The researcher’s desire to identify some of the negative dimensions deployed by the media to frame political actors and institutions during the election was intended to highlights ways in which the news media are increasingly drifting from objective code of fair reporting, which is an important code of journalism as the ‘Fourth Estate of the realm’ and highlights the implications for the deepening media cynicism, political disengagement and scepticism. The Nigerian media has a duty to provide investigative, objective and fair presentation of political issues such that voters have informed voting decision for the 2015 presidential election justifying the rationale for the study.

### **DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this study is to investigate the claim making round that Nigerian media were overtly negative in their coverage of 2015 presidential elections by examining their overall negativity as well as dimensions of negativity. The paper followed the concept developed by Lengauer et al. (2011) and attempted to differentiate between frame-related negativity that originates from characteristics of the narrative overall structure and individual actor-related negativity that manifests itself in portrayals of political actors’ individual performance (i.e. of parties, candidates). On the frame-related negativity, it is further differentiated between directional and non-directional manifestations of negativity. Whereas non-directional negativity on the frame level refers to the generic manifestation of *tonality*, directional negativity reflects *confrontation*. We follow this concept and categorized directional negativity

in terms of whether article reach from one-sided criticism, attacks, and alleged scandals, which we conceptualise as *incapability and misconduct* to two-sided manifestations of these dimensions as *conflict* (Lengauer et al. 2011). As most studies on negativity focused on the US and Europe, we expect a different dimension in Nigeria, especially considering the chicanery surrounding party politics and its influence on journalism.

Data generation was through a content analysis of online websites of six (6) newspapers: *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times*, *Punch*, *Sun*, *Nation*, and *Vanguard* Newspapers between January 1<sup>st</sup> – which was the prime campaign period – and May 31<sup>st</sup> 2015 (the period of reflections and handover). Consideration for analysis was based on active online presence, and readership strengths of newspapers. The choice of APC and PDP was informed by the fact that they represent major political parties in the election and either of their candidates was expected to win the presidential election.

To be able to control data in terms of validity since the study focused on online version of news content which can allow for iteration and/or publication of news as it comes, we selected all news items that mentions presidential election whether opinion, news event, interview, adverts etc. in January (which was the peak of political campaigns) and we made a sample of three days per-week for the period between February and May 2015 through a systematic random sampling of calendar dates excluding Sundays. Studies have used this method to guarantee all items an equal opportunity of being selected for analysis (see Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). Dates selected included: February, 2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26, and 27; March: 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 24, 25, and 26; April: 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 14, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, and 29; May: 1, 4, 5, 8, 12, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27, 29, and 30. A total of nine hundred and sixty one (961) news stories were obtained from the websites of the six news outlets through a systematic browsing of the website's news stories from dates to dates and from months to months, selecting dates that fall within the sample and excluding dates that are not within the sample whether they contained news about Presidential elections or not.

### **Coding Scheme**

We coded different manifestations of negativity in order to “measure the intensity and multi-dimensionality of frame and actor related negativity and positivity in political news” (Lengauer et al., 2011:194). For the *levels of negativity*, coding was guided by negative indicators such as framing of political failure, fiasco centred tone, depiction of crises and disaster, frustrations, collapse, flop, denial, rejection, neglect, deterioration, resignation, scepticism, threats, cynicism, defeatism and disappointment. Indicators of positivity are political success, achievement, prosperity, hope, sustainability, gratification or accomplishment. If a story is clearly negative it is coded as 1; if it is clearly positive it is code 2; if it is neutral or reflects positive and negative variables, it is coded 3.

For *outlook*, coding was guided by whether news report is framed in pessimistic (coded 1) or optimistic (coded 2) or Balance/neutral or Not Applicable (code 3). A story is framed in optimistic terms if it primarily conveys the impression that positive developments are likely or possible or if problems at hand are solvable. The outlook is pessimistic if a story conveys the overall impression that negative, critical and threatening scenarios are likely or possible, or if the problems at hand are unlikely to be solvable (Lengauer et al. 2011). If there is no reflection of optimistic and pessimistic outlook, it is balanced in outlook. News report either supports ‘change’ or ‘transformation’ as APC and PDP were being identified. To ascertain whether a

story reflects pessimism or optimism, it is assessed on whether framing depicts anticipation of 'good' or 'bad' for either of the candidates who wins the polls.

For confrontational negativity, we assess news report in terms of whether it reflects two sided confrontation (*conflict*) or one-sided confrontations (*incapability and misconduct*) (Lengauer et al. 2011). Under one-sided confrontation, we have conflict-centred (code 1), consensus-centred (code 2) and not applicable (code 3). Indicators of *conflict* are: disagreement, confrontation, discordance, controversy. The *consensus* dimension refers to at least two-sided depiction of agreement, conformities, dispute settlement, and willingness of cooperation, willingness to compromise, approval or reconciliation. If a report does not reflect indications of conflict-centred, or consensus-centred, it is coded 'not applicable'.

The *incapability & misconduct* dimension is coded in terms of *incapability-centred* (coded 1), *capability-centred* (coded 2) or *Neutral or Not Applicable* (coded 3). Indicators of *incapability* dimension refers to unidirectional and unilateral depictions of critique, criticism, attacks, allegation of misconduct, moralising accusations, charge of wrong doing, accusation of incapability and incompetence, affronts and insults. The *competence* dimension comprises unilateral depictions of commendation, accordance of capability and competence, compliment, portrayal of merit or effectiveness. If a report does not reflect indications of *incapability or capability*, it is coded *not applicable*.

For *Actor-related negativity*, we coded items according to how it reflects to individual actor or party. For example: if a report is negative toward GEJ/PDP it is coded 1, negative toward GMB/APC it is coded 2. If it is positive towards GEJ/PDP it is coded 3, positive towards GMB/APC it is coded 4. If the report is neutral it is coded 5. Indicators of a prevalent *negative tone* towards a specific actor are depictions of individual failure, fiasco, disaster, crises, frustrations, miscarriage, collapse, flop, rejection, neglect, default, defeat, deterioration, resignation, disdain, criticism, attacks, scandal, and moralizing accusation, allegations of misconduct, charge of wrong doing, mistrust, and accusations of incompetence or negative traits. Indications of prevalent *positive tone* toward a political actor are depictions of individual victory, win, triumph, success, achievement, accomplishment, problem solutions, improvement, advance, prosperity, commendations, and accordance of competence, compliments, portrayal of merit, esteem, trust or positive traits. If a report does not reflect indications of *negative* or of *positive* tonality towards the specific actor, it is coded 'neutral'. An article can receive multiple codes according to indicators of each variable. For example, a headline such as: "*Buhari will die in office*" will be coded for *overall negativity*, *outlook*, *conflict-centeredness*, *incapability and misconduct* and negativity towards *individual actor*. The significance of this method, according to (Lengauer et al., 2011) is its promise to minimise frictional losses in measurement and its applicability to all kinds of recording units (involving statements, paragraph or reports)

We also tried to differentiate news-type – i.e. whether a story is a straight news/press release (code 1), opinion article (code 2), shared news – news from other outlets (code 3), and interview (code 4). To be able to understand and appreciate the contributions of source to political negativity, we also coded news reports in terms of whether it is coming from the PDP supporter or sympathiser (code 1) or from the APC's (code 2). If the source of the story is neither PDP's nor APC's we coded it as 'others' (code 3).

Units of analysis are the appeals made on the headlines and the storylines of the report. For every individual news story we asked 'what is the overall picture of the news story'? Does it



reflect conflict or incapability? What is the story type? What is the source of the news? Since our interest is understanding the dimension of negativity in news presentation, answers to this question guided coding across all variables and permits coder's overall impression of negativity in relations to indicators of each variable as well as how source contribute to negativity or positivity toward political news. This is in line with the method used by Dunaway (2013) to capture relative tone of campaign coverage. Also, Walter & Vliegenthart, (2010) used such measures as: the *number*, *content* and *targets* of positive or negative appeals to analyse whether a news story reflects "party praising itself or criticising opposition", reflects "issues, values or character traits" or "who is being praised or attacked" (Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010:448). Our choice of the *headlines* and *storyline* is presumably informed by the fact that the decision to include or exclude news item as well as the choice of diction are entirely the decision of reporters/ editors and thus "if a negative or positive tone comes about because of source's point of view, as against reporters' .....the reporters and editors are still responsible for *framing the headlines*, choosing the source, the angle or the quotes (Dunaway, 2013:32 emphasis added).

### Inter-coder Reliability

Independent researchers assisted in reviewing the coding instruments in relations to identified indicators of variables being examined. Also, a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's alpha on SPSS with the reliability value settling at .828

## RESULT

In all, 961 stories were included from the websites of six outlets: 168 (17.5%) from *Sahara Reporters*, 114 (11.9%) from *Premium Times*, 162 (16.9%) from *Punch*, 95 (9.9%) from *The Nation*, 332(34.5%) from *The Sun*, and 90 (9.4%) from *Vanguard*.

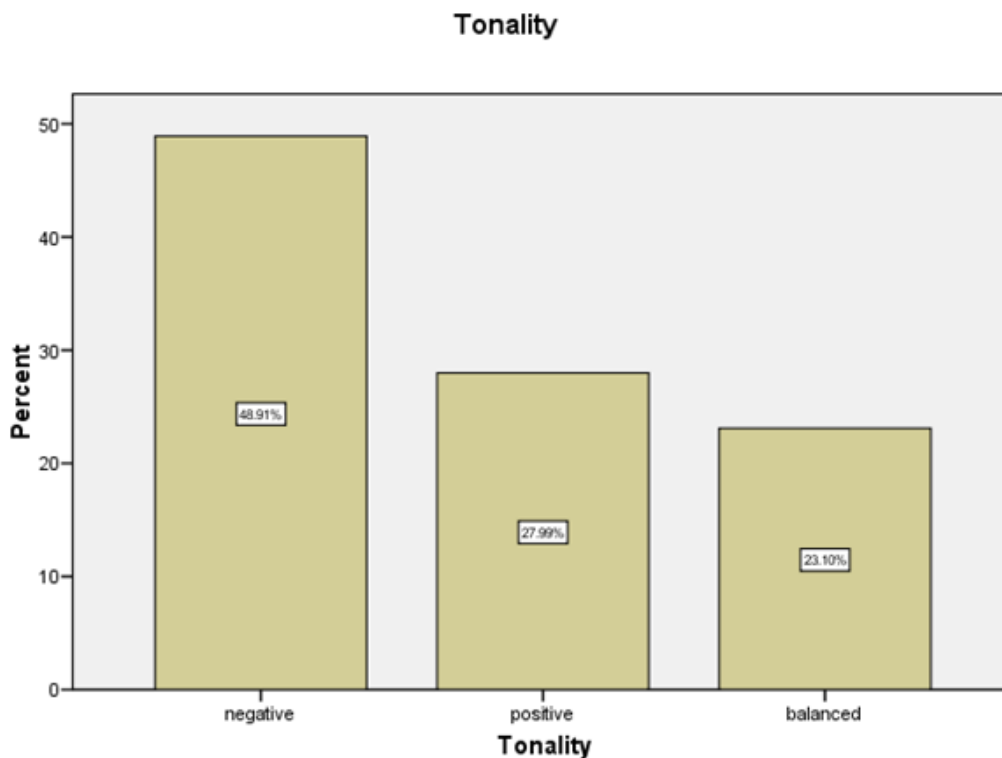
newspaper \* Tonality Crosstabulation

			Tonality			Total
			negative	positive	balanced	
newspaper	Sahara reporters	Count	125	17	26	168
		Expected Count	82.2	47.0	38.8	168.0
		% within newspaper	74.4%	10.1%	15.5%	100.0%
	Premium Times	Count	61	19	34	114
		Expected Count	55.8	31.9	26.3	114.0
		% within newspaper	53.5%	16.7%	29.8%	100.0%
	Punch	Count	103	37	22	162
		Expected Count	79.2	45.3	37.4	162.0
		% within newspaper	63.6%	22.8%	13.6%	100.0%
	The Nation	Count	44	40	11	95
		Expected Count	46.5	26.6	21.9	95.0
		% within newspaper	46.3%	42.1%	11.6%	100.0%
	The Sun	Count	116	134	82	332
		Expected Count	162.4	92.9	76.7	332.0
		% within newspaper	34.9%	40.4%	24.7%	100.0%
	Vanguard	Count	21	22	47	90
		Expected Count	44.0	25.2	20.8	90.0
		% within newspaper	23.3%	24.4%	52.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	470	269	222	961	
	Expected Count	470.0	269.0	222.0	961.0	
	% within newspaper	48.9%	28.0%	23.1%	100.0%	

Table1. Level of tonality

### Overall Tonality in the coverage of Nigeria Presidential Election

*H1*, postulates that coverage of Nigerian 2015 Presidential election will be positively and significantly negative. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a cross tabulation analysis and a chi-square test to compare negativity scores on the frame level and the significant relationship therein amongst news outlets. The Results are significant, indicating that news outlets were ultimately more negative towards politics than positive or neutral in the coverage of the presidential election. Percentage of negativity settled at 49% against 28.0% positive and 23.1% balanced/neutral tone (see Table 1 & Figure1). The Results also indicate that a difference exists amongst news outlets. Whereas *Sahara Reporters* has more negative frame score with 74.4% and less positive 10.1%, *Punch* is second with 63.6%, followed by *Premium Times* with 55.8%. The results indicate that *The Sun*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard* have relatively equal distribution of negativity and positivity stories. For example, whereas the Nation has 46.3% negative frames and 42.1% positive frames, the Sun and Vanguard has 35% and 23.3% negative frames, and 40.4% and 24.4% positive frames respectively. The results indicate that *The Nation* and *The Sun* are slightly more positive towards politics than they are negative. A chi-square statistics indicates that significant differences exists on how news outlets framed negative, positive or balanced stories during presidential election in Nigeria ( $\chi^2 = 158.292$ , d.f =10, p. = 0.001).



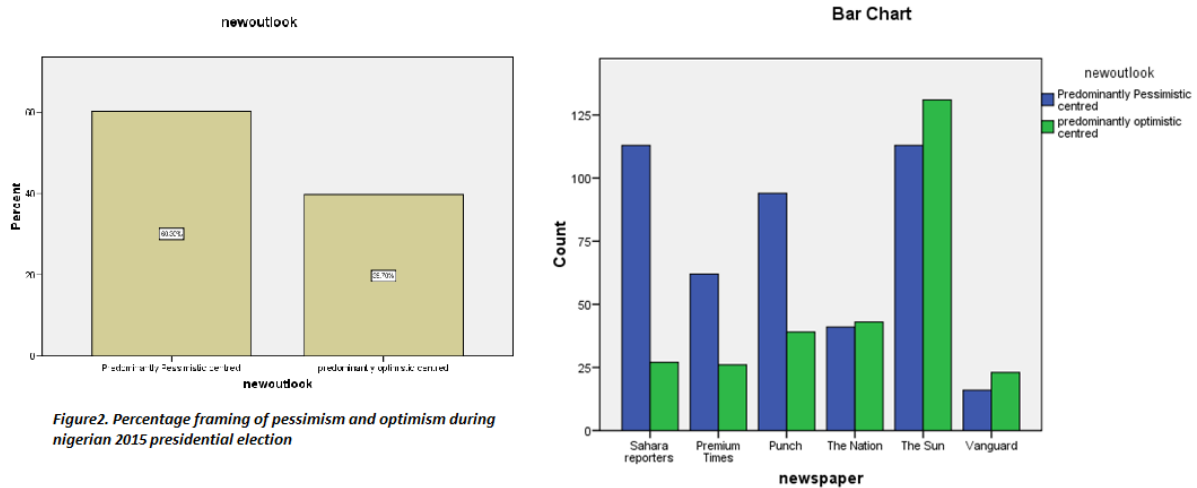
**Figure1. percentage level of tonality**

### Level of Pessimism Towards politics

Presumably, people's hope and expectations are fertile ingredients for negative and positive framing of news towards politics. To determine how predictions and hope in politics are reflected in news stories, we substantiated between *overall negativity* and *outlook*, thus we distinguished between *pessimistic-centred* view and *optimistic-centred* view. The result indicates that a significant difference exists between *pessimistic-centred* stories and *optimistic-*

centred stories and how they are manifest amongst news outlets. Again *Sahara Reporters* has the highest with its 81% pessimistic-centred stories against only 19.3% optimistic-centred stories. *Premium Times* and *Punch* has slightly the same amounts of pessimistic and optimistic centred stories with 71% pessimistic-centred stories each, and 30% and 29.3% optimistic centred stories respectively. *The Nation*, *The Sun* and *Vanguard* are slightly more balance in framing pessimistic and optimistic stories. Whereas *The Nation* has 49% and 51.2% pessimistic and optimistic-centred stories respectively, *The Sun* and *Vanguard* has 46.3% and 41.0% pessimistic-centred and 54% and 59.0% optimistic-centred respectively. In all, 60.3% of stories are pessimistically centred, while 40% of stories are optimistic centred (see figure 2 below). Chi-square tests show a significant relationship ( $\chi^2 = 64.775$ , d.f. = 5, p. = 0.001).

Given the hype for ‘change’ within Nigeria political discourse and the expected violence therein as well as the fact that the incumbent could be judged by the overall strengths and weaknesses of his administration, these results are expected. Although previous studies could not hold the claim that news coverage during election is increasingly negative, even with obvious indications (David Nicolas Hopmann et al., 2011), this result finds a significant indication that news coverage during election could be predominantly negative, especially under certain factors.



**Figure 2: Negativity towards Political Actors or Institution**

The second hypothesis postulates that PDP candidate is likely to receive more negative coverage than the APC candidate. Again we tested this hypothesis by comparing the percentage tonality of each outlet towards individual actors. The Results show that news coverage was significantly more negative towards President Jonathan and PDP than General Mohammadu Buhari and APC. Whereas a total of 45.3% stories reflect negativity towards President Jonathan against 11.4% directed to his opposition – General Mohammadu Buhari, positive stories were also higher towards GMB than GEJ with 17.9% and 15.3% respectively (see table2). Only 10% of all the stories were balanced or neutral. Again the difference amongst news outlets is significant. *Sahara Reporters* predominantly focused its news strengths on negativity towards President Jonathan/PDP with 76% of its stories reflecting negativity towards GEJ and 6% reflecting negativity towards Buhari. This is followed by *Punch* with 57% negative towards GEJ and 12% towards GMB. Also, while *The Nation* devotes its 53% stories framing negativity towards GEJ/PDP, it obviously has 0% negative stories towards GMB, and has 36% positive towards GMB against only 8.4% towards GEJ/PDP. Given that the paper is believed to be

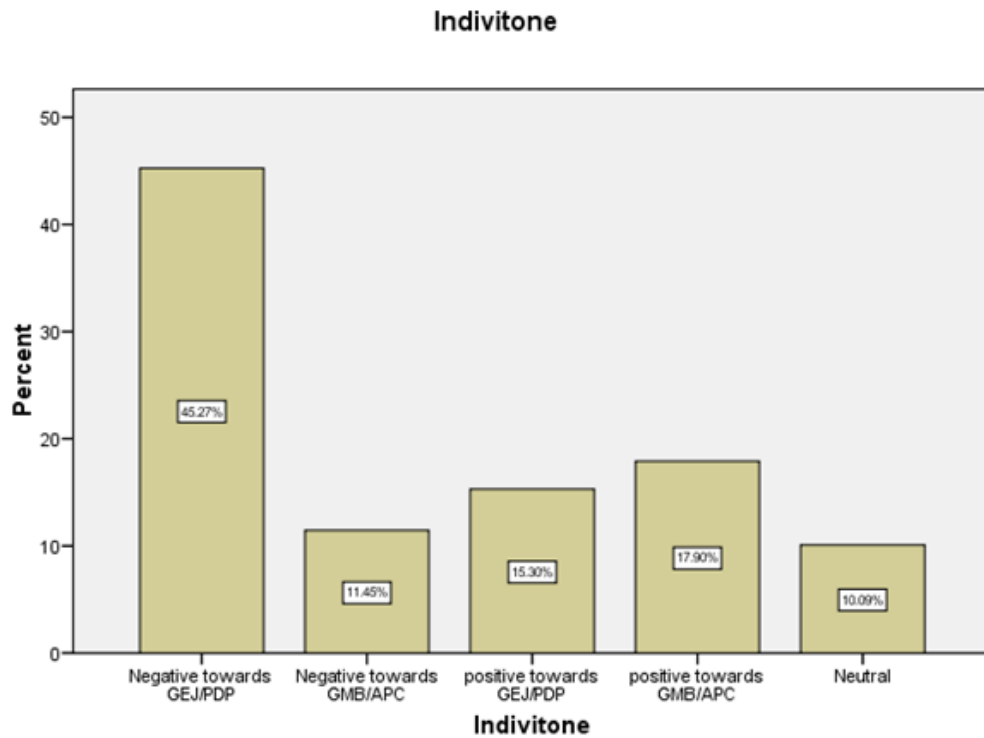
owned by a staunch APC national leader – Asiwaeju Bola Tinubu – the result is expected. *Premium Times* also offers the same evidence with 44% negative stories towards GEJ against 17% for GMB. Although *Vanguard* has 36% negative stories towards GEJ/PDP, it offers equal positivity stories to both actors with 19% each.

**newspaper \* Indivitone Crosstabulation**

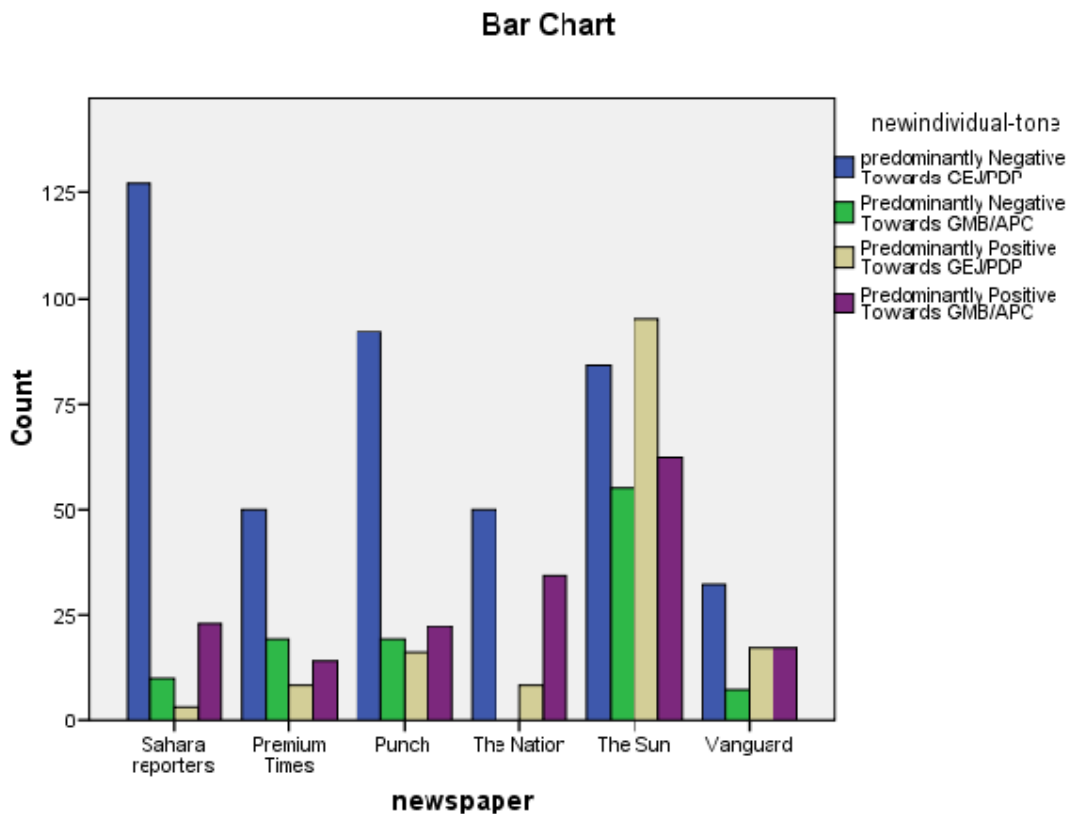
newspaper	reporters	Count	Indivitone				Total
			Negative towards GEJ/PDP	Negative towards GMB/APC	positive towards GEJ/PDP	positive towards GMB/APC	
Sahara reporters	Count	127	10	3	23	5	168
	Expected Count	78.0	19.2	25.7	30.1	17.0	168.0
	% within newspaper	75.6%	6.0%	1.8%	13.7%	3.0%	100.0%
Premium Times	Count	50	19	8	14	23	114
	Expected Count	51.6	13.0	17.4	20.4	11.5	114.0
	% within newspaper	43.9%	16.7%	7.0%	12.3%	20.2%	100.0%
Punch	Count	92	19	16	22	13	162
	Expected Count	73.3	18.5	24.8	29.0	16.4	162.0
	% within newspaper	56.8%	11.7%	9.9%	13.6%	8.0%	100.0%
The Nation	Count	50	0	8	34	3	95
	Expected Count	43.0	10.9	14.5	17.0	9.6	95.0
	% within newspaper	52.6%	.0%	8.4%	35.8%	3.2%	100.0%
The Sun	Count	84	55	95	62	36	332
	Expected Count	150.3	38.0	50.8	59.4	33.5	332.0
	% within newspaper	25.3%	16.6%	28.6%	18.7%	10.8%	100.0%
Vanguard	Count	32	7	17	17	17	90
	Expected Count	40.7	10.3	13.8	16.1	9.1	90.0
	% within newspaper	35.6%	7.8%	18.9%	18.9%	18.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	435	110	147	172	97	961
	Expected Count	435.0	110.0	147.0	172.0	97.0	961.0
	% within newspaper	45.3%	11.4%	15.3%	17.9%	10.1%	100.0%

**Table: 2. Determination of negative tonality towards individual actors/Institution.**

Also, the results indicate that *The Sun* has 25.3% negativity towards Jonathan as against 16.6% towards Buhari, but slightly more positive towards President Jonathan (29%) than General Buhari (18.7%). Overall, more negative stories were targeted towards President Jonathan/PDP than General Buhari/APC. Significantly, the *Nation* was more focused on projecting the APC candidate and making him acceptable to voters rather than framing negativity generally. In contrast, *Sahara Reporters* focused on the bad news reflecting PDP and GEJ and seemingly intended to sway voters' positive perception of Goodluck Jonathan. For example, *electricity is not even available in Otuoke, says ex Bayelsa Gov. Silva, and calls Jonathan a fox in sheep's clothing* (*Sahara Reporters*, 13 January 2015). The story headlines from *Sahara Reporters* are charged with words and tones that expressively indicated its political leaning. The headline above targets voters from the President's main constituency with other follow-up stories as: *MEND endorses Buhari for President, says voting Jonathan was biggest mistake Niger Deltans ever made; MEND calls President Jonathan a clueless, inept and bare faced liar, urges Nigerians to vote him out* (*Sahara Reporters*, January 9, 2015). A Chi-square test confirms President Jonathan and PDP received more negative news than General Mohammadu Buhari and APC with a moderate significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 223.060$ , d.f. = 20, P. =0.001).



**Figure3. Newspaper tone toward individual actors**



**Figure3B. percentage level of outlets' tonality towards actors**

Q1 sort to know the relationship between the *type-of-news* (as operationalized in this study) and individual actor's portrayal of positivity or negativity. We conducted a trivariate statistical analysis and chi-square tests to understand whether there is a relationship. We first recoded

'individual tone' variable by removing value five - *Balance/neutral* label – to account for values needed for determining this relationship. The results indicate that 47.4% negative news stories towards President Jonathan/PDP against 15.4% for General Buhari/APC were from *political events and press releases*, whereas 19.3% and 17.9% of positive news stories towards GEJ/PDP and GMB/APC respectively also come from *political events and press releases*. *Opinion* and *Feature articles* account for the 64.4% negativity towards GEJ/PDP as against only 5.0% towards GMB/APC. Also, President Jonathan and PDP receives only 6% of positive news from *opinion/feature* news against 25% for GMB/APC. Stories from *interview* account for 46.2% of negativity towards GEJ/PDP but slightly equals the positivity towards the two actors with 20.0% (GEJ) and 27% (GMB). All news stories shared from another news outlets were overtly negative towards GEJ, with 75.8% alone coming from *Sahara Reporters*. However, Chi-square tests indicates that *straight news/press Release* and *interview* have significant contribution to how much negative or positive news are framed towards individual actors but suggests no relationship for *Opinion/feature* and *Shared news*; indicating that although opinion articles and shared news contribute 64.4% negativity towards GEJ/PDP, it could not be generalised due to the evident being prominent in one out of the six news outlets. (*News Event/press Release*,  $\chi^2 = 113.825$ , d.f. = 15, p. 0.001; *Opinion/Feature article*,  $\chi^2 = 23.610$ , d.f. 15, p. = 0.072; *Shared news*,  $\chi^2 = 8.828$ , d.f. = 4, p. = 0.066; *Interview*,  $\chi^2 = 45.056$ , d.f. = 15, p. = 0.001). However, a cross-tabulation analysis that shows overall percentage relationships between news outlets and newstype indicates a significant relationship ( $\chi^2 = 386.125$ , d.f. = 15, p. = 0.001).

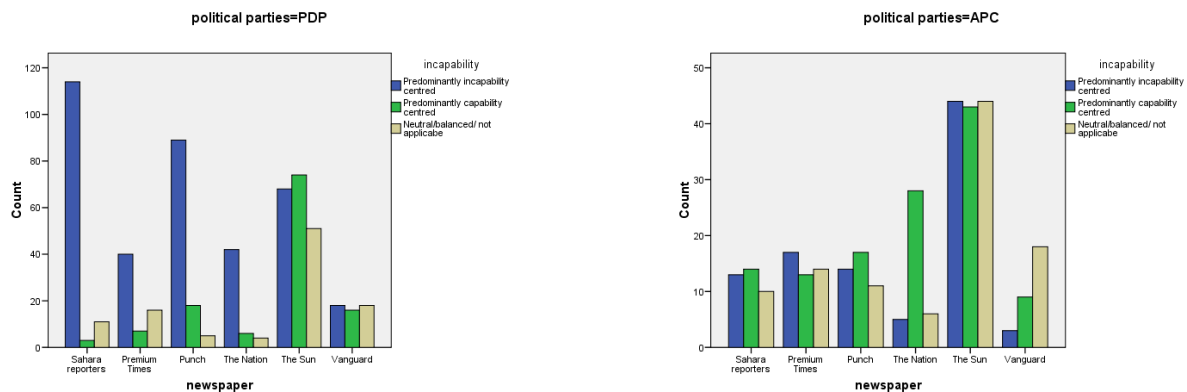
### News Source and Framing of conflict and incapability towards PDP or APC

Q2 asked the extent news source influenced framing of *conflicts and incapability* towards political actors or institution. We conducted a frequency check to understand how outlets depended on either the PDP, APC or others for its news. Results indicate that *The Nation* scored high with 83.2% of its stories sourced from *APC Chieftains/ Supporters* against 8.4% offered by *PDP chieftain/supporters*. *Sahara Reporters* and *Punch* had relatively equal amount of stories from *APC chieftains/supporters* with 55.4% and 54.3% against 11.3% and 24.1% sourced from *PDP chieftains* respectively. *The Sun* is slightly balanced in its dependence on PDP or APC source with 43.4% from *PDP Chieftains*, 39.2% from the *APC chieftains* and 18% from *others*. The results also show that *Vanguard* depended more on *other* sources (50.0%) than from source identified as *PDP* (22.2%) or *APC* (28%). *Premium Times* also has 29% from *PDP* source, 44% from *APC* source and 27.2% from *other* sources (see table 3 below). Chi-square tests indicate a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 149.134^a$ , d.f. = 10, P. = 0.001). This finding demonstrates that news outlets depended more on politicians affiliated to the 'change' campaign than those canvassing for the continuation of 'transformation' agenda of the incumbent.

**newspaper \* Source Crosstabulation**

			Source			Total
			PDP chieftain/ supporter	APC chieftain/ Supporter	Not Applicable	
newspaper	Sahara reporters	Count	19	93	56	168
		Expected Count	46.0	31.3	40.7	168.0
		% within newspaper	11.3%	55.4%	33.3%	100.0%
Premium Times	Premium Times	Count	33	50	31	114
		Expected Count	31.2	55.2	27.6	114.0
		% within newspaper	28.9%	43.9%	27.2%	100.0%
Punch	Punch	Count	39	88	35	162
		Expected Count	44.3	78.4	39.3	162.0
		% within newspaper	24.1%	54.3%	21.6%	100.0%
The Nation	The Nation	Count	8	79	8	95
		Expected Count	26.0	46.0	23.0	95.0
		% within newspaper	8.4%	83.2%	8.4%	100.0%
The Sun	The Sun	Count	144	130	58	332
		Expected Count	90.9	160.6	80.5	332.0
		% within newspaper	43.4%	39.2%	17.5%	100.0%
Vanguard	Vanguard	Count	20	25	45	90
		Expected Count	24.6	43.5	21.8	90.0
		% within newspaper	22.2%	27.8%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	Total	Count	263	465	233	961
		Expected Count	263.0	465.0	233.0	961.0
		% within newspaper	27.4%	48.4%	24.2%	100.0%

**Table3. level of dependence on party faithfuls**



**Figure 4. percentage level of incapability framing toward political actors/institution**

To determine whether source of news influence news framing of conflicts and incapability towards political actors/institution, we first examined the percentage framing of conflicts and incapability amongst news outlets and conducted chi-square tests. In all, a total of 58% and 18% stories reflect conflicts and consensus in PDP respectively, whereas 27.2% and 35.3% reflect conflict and consensus in APC respectively. On the incapability dimension, a total of 62% reflects incapability of GEJ/PDP against 21% capability. Also, a total of 30% stories reflect incapability of the APC and 38.4% capability (see table 3B below, see figure 4 to understand how they are manifest in the news outlets). Chi-square tests indicate that there are more stories reflecting *conflict* and *incapability* in PDP than the APC (conflict-PDP,  $\chi^2 = 139.794$ , d.f. =10, p. = 0.001, APC,  $\chi^2 = 41.870$ , d.f. 10, p. = 0.001; Incapability – PDP,  $\chi^2 = 150.169$ , d.f. 10, p. = 0.001, APC,  $\chi^2 = 35.536$ , d.f 10, p. =0.001).

Crosstab

			incapability			Total
			Predominantly incapability centred	Predominantly capability centred	Neutral/balanced/ not applicable	
political parties	PDP	Count	371	124	105	600
		Expected Count	303.6	161.2	135.2	600.0
		% within political parties	61.8%	20.7%	17.5%	100.0%
	APC	Count	96	124	103	323
		Expected Count	163.4	86.8	72.8	323.0
		% within political parties	29.7%	38.4%	31.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	467	248	208	923	
	Expected Count	467.0	248.0	208.0	923.0	
	% within political parties	50.6%	26.9%	22.5%	100.0%	

			conflict			Total
			Predominantly conflictual	Predominantly consensus centred	neutral/balanced	
political parties	PDP	Count	346	107	147	600
		Expected Count	282.1	143.0	174.9	600.0
		% within political parties	57.7%	17.8%	24.5%	100.0%
	APC	Count	88	113	122	323
		Expected Count	151.9	77.0	94.1	323.0
		% within political parties	27.2%	35.0%	37.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	434	220	269	923	
	Expected Count	434.0	220.0	269.0	923.0	
	% within political parties	47.0%	23.8%	29.1%	100.0%	

**Table 3B. framing of conflict and incapability toward political parties**

Having obtained this data, we further recoded *source* variable to eliminate the third value – *others* – to account for PDP and APC sources only. This is to enable us examine specifically the relationship between *source* from both parties and framing of *conflict* and *incapability*. On the dimension of conflict, the results indicate that 44% of stories from *PDP chieftains/supporters* demonstrate consensus and reconciliations in PDP while 20.1% of the same source indicating PDP in crises, and 36.4% were balance or neutral. Also, the results indicate that 72.2% of news framing APC in crises comes from PDP chieftains, with only 1.3% suggesting consensus in APC. On the other hand, *APC Chieftains/supporters* account for 86.0% of stories reflecting crises in PDP and only 1.1% show consensus. The results also show that 57% of news framing agreement and reconciliations in APC come from APC *Chieftains/Supporters* against 12.0% (see Table 4). A chi-square tests confirm that source of news has implication for framing news that are conflict-centred towards political parties or actors with APC showing stronger relationship (PDP Chieftains/ Supporters,  $\chi^2 = 75.457$ , d.f. =2, p. =0.001; APC Chieftains/Supporters,  $\chi^2 = 273.914$ , d.f. 2, p. = 0.001).

On the dimension of *incapability* variable, the results indicate that 72.2% of stories framing incapability towards PDP come from *APC chieftains* while 92% of stories framing incapability towards APC come from *PDP Chieftains/Supporters*. The results also demonstrate that *PDP chieftains/supporters* and *APC chieftains* also contributed to stories that reflect incapability in the party with 23% and 13% respectively. Significantly, *APC chieftains/supporters* account for 62% stories that reflect the *capability* frame of their party, while *PDP Chieftains/ Supporters* account for 51% influence. Chi-square tests confirm that source of news has influence on the framing of capability or incapability toward political actors/ institution with *APC chieftain/supporters* assuming stronger relationship (PDP =  $\chi^2 = 76.396$ , d.f =2, p = 0.001; APC =  $\chi^2 = 302.957$ , d.f =2, p. =0.001). This findings support the notion that media endorsement significantly affect both the tone and the number of criticisms published about the incumbent (Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008).



**Crosstab**

source recoded				conflict			Total
				Predominantly conflictual	Predominantly consensus centred	neutral/balanced	
PDP chieftain/supporter political parties	PDP	Count	37	80	67	184	
		Expected Count	65.8	56.7	61.6	184.0	
		% within political parties	20.1%	43.5%	36.4%	100.0%	
	APC	Count	57	1	21	79	
		Expected Count	28.2	24.3	26.4	79.0	
		% within political parties	72.2%	1.3%	26.6%	100.0%	
	Total	Count	94	81	88	263	
		Expected Count	94.0	81.0	88.0	263.0	
		% within political parties	35.7%	30.8%	33.5%	100.0%	
APC chieftain/supporter political parties	PDP	Count	240	3	36	279	
		Expected Count	157.9	64.5	56.6	279.0	
		% within political parties	86.0%	1.1%	12.9%	100.0%	
	APC	Count	22	104	58	184	
		Expected Count	104.1	42.5	37.4	184.0	
		% within political parties	12.0%	56.5%	31.5%	100.0%	
	Total	Count	262	107	94	463	
		Expected Count	262.0	107.0	94.0	463.0	
		% within political parties	56.6%	23.1%	20.3%	100.0%	

**Crosstab**

source recoded				incapability			Total
				Predominantly incapability centred	Predominantly capability centred	Neutral/balanced/ not applicable	
PDP chieftain/supporter political parties	PDP	Count	42	93	49	184	
		Expected Count	70.7	65.8	47.6	184.0	
		% within political parties	22.8%	50.5%	26.6%	100.0%	
	APC	Count	59	1	19	79	
		Expected Count	30.3	28.2	20.4	79.0	
		% within political parties	74.7%	1.3%	24.1%	100.0%	
	Total	Count	101	94	68	263	
		Expected Count	101.0	94.0	68.0	263.0	
		% within political parties	38.4%	35.7%	25.9%	100.0%	
APC chieftain/supporter political parties	PDP	Count	256	2	21	279	
		Expected Count	168.7	69.9	40.4	279.0	
		% within political parties	91.8%	.7%	7.5%	100.0%	
	APC	Count	24	114	46	184	
		Expected Count	111.3	46.1	26.6	184.0	
		% within political parties	13.0%	62.0%	25.0%	100.0%	
	Total	Count	280	116	67	463	
		Expected Count	280.0	116.0	67.0	463.0	
		% within political parties	60.5%	25.1%	14.5%	100.0%	

**Table 4. Relationships between news source and framing of conflicts and incapability towards political actors/ institution**

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Dimensions of negativity

Relying on data from six online news channels, this study aimed to examine dimensions of negativity during the Nigerian 2015 Presidential election. Our results suggest that different

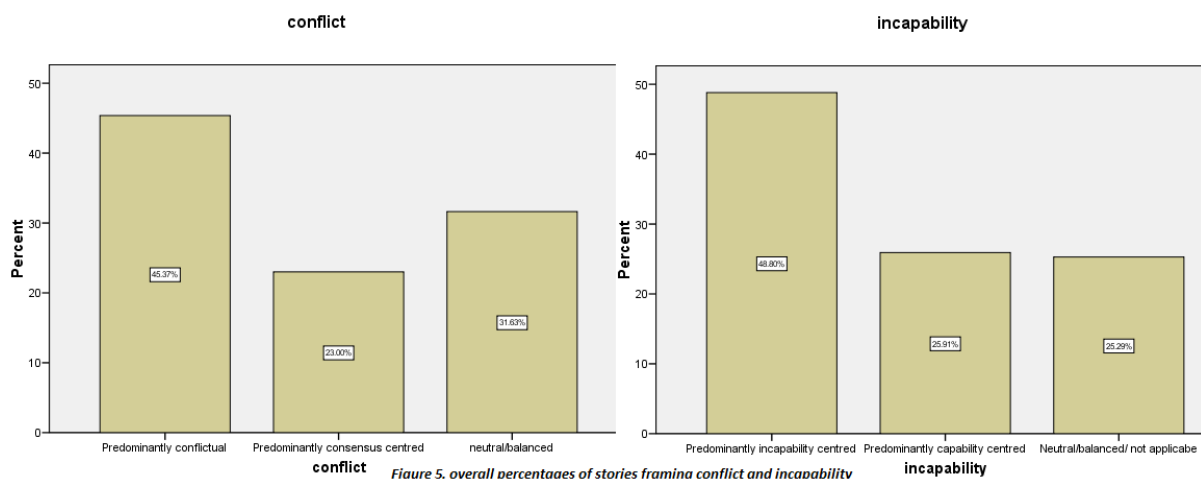
dimensions exist and all of them, to a large extent, contribute to increasing level of negativity toward politics. Previous studies have demonstrated different approaches to determining negative tonality of news story in aggregation of individualized tone towards candidate or parties (Dunaway 2013; David Nicolas Hopmann et al. 2010; Niven, 2001) or derive levels of negativity directly from conflict measurement (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans 2011). In this study traits of negativity are examined to establish (a) whether the story is denotatively negative (i.e. without interpretation), (b) whether the story is *pessimistic* – i.e. suggests potential danger or likelihood of defeat or crises, (c) whether the story is *conflict-centred* – i.e. reflects disagreement or dispute or (d) whether the story suggest *incapability* (Lengauer et al. 2011). We first tested H1, which predicts that coverage of Nigerian 2015 Presidential election will be positively and significantly negative. We substantiated levels of negative tone with pessimistic outlook and we found that not only was news coverage entirely negative toward the election, pessimistic view on politics strongly dominated optimistic view. This finding confirmed H1. Previous studies have found that news media focus more on failures, bad news, or pessimistic view on politics than good news or optimistic view on politics (see Jill Gabrielle Klein 1998; Lengauer et al. 2011; Niven 2001; Rozin & Royzman 2001). Kepplinger (1998) finds, for example, that German quality press consistently focused more on failure than success in German politics between 1951 and 1995. Also, a comparative assessment of TV election news in the USA, Germany and Austria shows that the negative tone clearly outweighs the positive tone with a ratio of about 10 to 1 (see Lengauer et al. 2011:187). Psychologists affirm that negative properties are more salient, potent, dominant in combination, and generally efficacious than positive properties, especially when both are strong (Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

Individual news outlets are influenced by different factors in framing negativity and can use different methods. Such methods, as this paper shows, are the selection of like-minded sources, publication of ideologically based opinion articles and republication of news items from other news channels that aptly supports specific agenda frame. We coded *news-type and news source* to capture how news outlets are able to engage like-minded sources in order to frame messages that strengthen the connection between the objects and the attribute. *News-types* (defined here as *straight news/press release, opinion/feature news, shared news and interview news*) are thought to be positively associated with how much negative or positive stories are manifest in the news and how they target political actors or parties (Q1).

News outlets have a way of maintaining objectivity and professionalism while at the same time slanting much more favourably towards left or right, liberal or conservative, PDP or APC. Apart from news events (like party campaigns, meetings and rallies) and press releases, the media can focus on opinion articles favouring a specific candidate or publish stories from other media organisations that reflect some negativity towards opposing candidate. The result of this paper suggest this was the case with strategy much more evident in *Sahara Reporters*, and the *Nation*. However, the results indicate that none of the *shared news* reflects positivity towards GEJ. News headlines of *Sahara Reporters* were laded with words and sentences that denotatively reflect the paper's position against the incumbent and his party. You need not read through the storyline to decode whether such stories are negative, pessimistic, and conflict-centred or reflect incapability or the individual political actors being targeted.

Interviews and press releases are clear source of news in political communication. As political events is considered a fertile ground for engendering political support and/ or expressing political dissonance, which increases the level of news framing that reflect positive or negative tonality, pessimistic or optimistic view, conflict or incapability, Journalist is at liberty to decide

who get interviewed. Our results strongly support that there is some degree of association between news-type and how individual news outlets frame negativity or positivity towards politics with *news event/press release* and *interview variables* achieving stronger significance. Scholars have found that the more press releases a party releases the more salience the party becomes on national media (David N Hopmann et al., 2012). It is evident in our results that APC had more press releases and political events, supported by anti-Jonathan sentiments which mean that an APC group rally or communiqué will make news headline than relatively equal group rally of the PDP. News outlets seemingly captured these sentiments and ultimately had more news from APC reflecting incapability of the PDP and its candidate. This also supports finding that in election times party agenda effect the issue agenda in news media and not vice versa (Brandenburg, 2005). We observed that sharing news from other outlets and/ or consistent selection of like-minded opinion articles in support of the APC was strongly significant in *Sahara Reporters* with 29.2% (for *Opinion article*) and 21% (for *shared news*) and no substantial evidence in other newspapers.



**Figure 4B: Directional Framing of Conflict and Incapability**

Scholars have pointed to the fact that ‘bad times’ surpasses ‘good time’ when it comes to evaluation of political actors during electioneering period. As conflict and negativity predominantly feature in the debate of change in political communication, scholars have considered them an important news values (Vliegthart et al. 2011). Framing conflicts and incapability toward political actors or institution are viable approaches in which news media can tacitly set attribute for evaluating politicians. Research has shown that focus on candidate’s personal characteristics, such as success or failure appears to draw larger audience (Iyengar et al., 2004). Central to the mediatisation scholarship is the tendency to evaluate how contents of political news and the behaviours of political actors is product of media logic (Strömbäck 2008a). This changing relationship is shifting focus of journalism from descriptive model to interpretative approach in which “themes” and “fact” illuminate political reporting (Aalberg et al. 2011; Takens et al. 2013). The change underlines ‘strategic game’ frame which, according to Aalberg et al., (2011), reflects journalism’s enduring focus on “drama, conflict and negativity”, involving political elites and group (p.164). Strategic game frame reach from one-sided criticisms, attacks and scandal to inter-party disagreement, crises and manoeuvring.

Our results indicate strong significant score on media framing of conflict during the Nigerian 2015 Presidential elections and more news were framed to reflect crises in PDP than APC (see

figure 4&4B). Conflict has become a substantial part of news reporting as journalist's attitudes towards politics become increasingly cynical (Patterson 2009). Patterson argues that such attitude activate journalist's search for oppositional and *conflictual* information with little concern about the extent criticism is justified. On the incapability dimension, we also find that news that reflects incapability outweighs capability in the coverage of Nigerian 2015 Presidential election. And incapability frame was strongly significant toward President Jonathan/PDP than General Buhari/APC.

We predicted that *sources* of news is positively associated with framing of conflict and incapability (Q2). Our results confirm that hypothesis and demonstrate that over reliance on APC chieftains for stories not only increased the party's visibility, but, also, the levels of conflicts and incapability framed towards President Jonathan/PDP. Previous study suggests party visibility is a prelude to voter party preference (David Nicolas Hopmann et al. 2010). With the media consistently priming attribute of incompetence and corruption within the ruling party, voters can change their personal opinion and can indirectly be swayed towards the opposing side. In Nigeria, Democratic Party politics has always been divisive because people's primary allegiance follows ethno-geopolitical lines and politicians perceived to be representing their own ethnic group (Ette 2013). The chicanery that surrounded primary elections in PDP added to our results showing significant level of conflict and incapability towards the party. The decision of the President to run for a second term and the manner the Governorship and National Assembly primaries of the party were conducted raised serious conspiracy amongst party men in addition to the deepening geo-ethnic sentiments.

We also found that sources closer to APC or PDP responded in favour of their party candidate. The typical political strategy is to connect a proposal to the values or opinion that is widely available in the population (Chong & Druckman 2007), thus, the hype for change among many Nigerians played a huge role on how much news were negative towards the PDP. Also, news outlets reflected the feelings of their owners and slanted towards identified problems within geo-political population. A Study has found that distribution of the coverage of stories is strongly correlated with geographical regions (Saez-Trumper, Castillo, & Lalmas 2013)

Our results present good statistical indices for evaluating news media capacities for maintaining objective journalism and their seeming political leanings. Apart from *The Sun* and *Vanguard* that has relatively balanced reportage towards PDP and APC, *Sahara Reporter* significantly published stories that were negative, pessimistic-centre, and ultimately suggest incapability towards Jonathan and PDP. However, this is also expected given that the news channel has an obvious record of anti-Jonathan journalism. The nation ultimately focused on attributes that promoted the candidacy of the APC rather than focusing on negativity towards GEJ. Although *Premium Times* and *Punch* showed some level of positivity towards GEJ, they were predominantly negative towards GEJ/PDP. *The Sun* and *Vanguard* were slightly balanced in their coverage given their relative equal framing of negativity and positivity towards the two political actors. In all, we find that GEJ and PDP ultimately had more negative reports, indicating likelihood of potential danger if elected and reflecting incapability and misconduct than GMB and APC.

Implication of this result point to an increasing media cynicism and scepticism leading to audience's political disengagement (Gwinn Wilkins 2000). Recent research has demonstrated that increasing mistrust, negative tonality, cynicism or scepticism renders media's public agenda role very weak (Tsfati 2003; Tsfati and Cappella 2003; Carr et al. 2014). Results of these studies highlights that media scepticism and political cynicism interact. For example,

Carr et al. indicate that “cynics and sceptics perceive citizen journalism as more credible, while non-cynics and non-sceptics think mainstream journalism is more credible” (p.452).

The justification of this research is reflected in its ability to highlight different dimensions of negativity that characterize mass media coverage of political campaigns and present an important first effort for examining negativity in Nigerian news media. However, since negativity can manifest in diverse ways of media approach, this study may have missed other features in which negativity can manifest? The choice of outlets may have impacted on the results produced, thus items analysed may not accurately reflect the determinant frames of negativity in political news more generally.

Further research on this issue is recommended in order for the media institution to still maintain its public status as intermediary between government and the people, considering the alternatives being provided by the internet and social media.

The study concludes that the coverage of Nigeria’s 2015 Presidential election was overtly negative, conflict driven, reflects predominantly incapability and offers a pessimistic view or negative portrayal to political actors.

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