

PERISCOPING PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN'S ADMINISTRATION ON SELECTED ISSUES IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT: *This study used content analytical method to examine two selected Nigerian newspapers' reports on Fuel Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P); Nigeria's Governors Forum (NGF) Crisis, Governor Rotimi Amaechi –President Goodluck feud and Obasanjo-President Goodluck feud from January 1, 2013- March 31, 2013 giving a total of 78 issues. The selected newspapers are The Guardian and Vanguard. The findings revealed that three out of the four issues were well reported in the Nigerian press. Fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment was ranked first in terms of favourable coverage, while Nigerian Governors Forum crisis ranked first in terms of unfavourable coverage. Obasanjo-Goodluck feud came second in terms of unfavourable coverage. Majority of the issues were reported as news stories, accounting for 21 (34.6 %) and were placed on the front page which shows that Nigerian press attached importance to national issues. It was recommended that a further study should be carried out using another research method.*

KEYWORDS: Government, Press, President Goodluck Jonathan, SURE-P

INTRODUCTION

The complimentary role of the press in contemporary democratic society cannot be over emphasised. The role of the press as the watchdog of the democratic system has always been the concern of many particularly those who have keen interest in politics and how the political institutions function. This group of persons share in the belief that the press is a powerful institution capable of setting agenda for the public by bringing the issues to the front burner of public opinion. Political scientists as well as media experts equally assert that issues that appear constantly in the media are rated as important issues.

In addition to the above claims, in every political system, it is the right of citizens to know how government of the day spends tax payer's money. This boils down to the fact that the citizens must have a channel through which information bordering on governance gets to them (public domain). The press is usually looked up to as the fourth estate of the realm to champion this crusade. Looking at the relationship between the press, the governed and the government, McQuail (2005,p.523) opined:

There has always been an intimate connection between mass communication and the conduct of politics, in whatever kind of regime. In totalitarian or authoritarian societies, ruling elites use their control of the media to ensure conformity and compliance and to stifle dissent by one means or another. In democracies, the media have a complex relationship with sources of power and the political

system. On the one hand, they usually find their *raison d'être* in their service to their audiences, to whom they provide information and views according to judgements of interest and need.

The above thesis lies in the fact that no political regime can operate without the mass media of communication; it could be that the ruling elites want to use the media to achieve and entrench their ideologies or it could be that the mass media exist to checkmate the government as an independent institution. The import is that the activities of government must come to the public domain whether good or bad.

Statement of Problem

The power of the press in shaping opinion and holding the government accountable is no longer a debate. The reason is that many depend on the media for daily information through the news programme of the media, more so, in a democratic system, citizens are always inquisitive to know what is going on around them particularly as it concerns the day-to-day running of government. In Nigeria since May 29, 1999, Nigerians have become more interested in the affairs of the nation because of the enthronement of democracy which gave them opportunity to participate actively in the political arena. This active participation has been attributed to media focus on the new dispensation and the open arena given to many to air the views about the government. While this is seen as a positive political development, the administration of Goodluck Jonathan has been criticized in some quarters as been weak, while those in power particularly the image handlers of political office holders claimed that it is not so. It is on this premise that, the researchers try to find out how Nigerian media mirror President Goodluck administration on certain issues of national importance. The point here is that, the mass media in any true democratic dispensation serve as an open arena where opinions of the governed and the governors are welcome. It is in this light that this study seeks to investigate the administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan on four selected issues: Fuel subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P), Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) Crisis, Governor Chibuike Amaechi of Rivers State -President Goodluck Feud, and Olusegun Obasanjo - Goodluck Feud from *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers of January 1-March 31, 2013.

Objective of Study

The objectives of this study include finding out:

1. The direction of the selected issues under study in the newspapers
2. The frequency of the issues under study
3. The nature of issues under study
4. The position of coverage/prominence of issues under study

Research Questions

1. What is the direction of issues under study?
2. How often do the selected newspapers cover the issue under study?
3. What is the nature of coverage of issues under study?

4. What are the positions of issues under study?

Scope of Study

The study examined four political issues of national importance to Nigerians, from January 1, 2013- March 31, 2013 from two selected Nigerian newspapers.

Theoretical Imperative

This study finds relevance in Public Sphere theory with the assumption that as humans, we are communicative beings that should exercise rights in an open space where equal opportunities are granted to members of the society. Public Sphere theory is the theory that looks at the political life of the society. According to McQuail (2005, p.181), “Public Sphere theory refers to a notional space which provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate”. Similarly, it is expected that the Nigerian press should support the political agenda by providing free access to all political actors in Nigeria to sell their agendas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed content analysis for research design, which entails the study of the manifest contents of the two selected newspapers- *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard* newspapers respectively. The use of content analysis to measure social and political trends has proved to be most effective. Wimmer and Dominick (2003, p.142), describe content analysis as an effective method for the study of social and political trends. An analysis of relevant media contents is necessary in order to determine the importance of some topics. Subsequently, audience research looks at the correspondence between the media agenda and the audience’s agenda.

Population of Study

The study population was three months of January, February and March 2013 (178) issues from the two selected newspapers.

Sampling Technique

The research adopted convenient sampling technique. The researchers considered Monday to represent the beginning of the week, Wednesday to represent the midweek and Saturday to represent weekend editions of the issues studied.

Sample Size

The sample size of this study was 78 issues:

January 14 x 2 = 28 issues

February 12 x 2 = 24 issues

March 13 x 2 = 26 issues

Instrument of Data Collection

This study used code sheet and coding guide as the instrument for data collection since the research method was content analysis.

Validation of Research Instrument

This has to do with testing the efficiency of the entire coding system. In this study, face validity was adopted. Two researchers employed independent coding system to ensure that the instrument used adequately measured what it purpose to measure.

Reliability of the entire method employed in this research work was calculated using Holsti's formula (as cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2003,p. 157).

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2m}{N_1 + N_2}$$

Where M is the number of coding decision on which two coders agree, and N₁ and N₂ are total numbers of coding decision by the first and second coder, respectively. Twenty coding decisions were taken by the two coders on twenty manifest items randomly selected from January 1, 2013 – March 31, 2013 editions of the two selected newspapers studied). The coders agreed on sixteen decisions, the data were used to calculate the inter coder reliability thus:

$$\frac{2(16)}{20 + 20} = \frac{32}{40} = .80 \qquad \frac{2(16)}{20 + 20} = \frac{32}{40} = .80$$

With a reliability coefficient of .80, it could be said that the study has an acceptable level of reliability.

Method of Data Collection

Coding system was employed in this study, since the study entails the study of the manifest content of the press. Code guide was developed to enable the gathering of data on coding sheet.

Content Categories/unit of Analysis

The content categories for this study were defined based on the direction – favourable, if the story encourages the public to support government. Fuel Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme [SURE-P], a call on stakeholders in the Nigerian Governors Forum to be careful with the way they handle political issues bordering on their internal political skimming, again, if it encourages peace between Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State and President Goodluck Jonathan and Former President Obasanjo and President Goodluck Jonathan; unfavourable, if it doubts the possibility of Nigerians embracing the SURE-P project or discourages the public from embracing the project or exposing some hidden agenda detrimental to the economy of the country, or supporting a section of the members of the Governors Forum, or exposing President Goodluck as directly interfering in the affairs of the group. Again, the study categorized stories as unfavourable if they revealed that Governor Amaechi has personal problems with President Goodluck or the President has personal problems with Governor Amaechi, or if Obasanjo has personal problems with Goodluck administration. The summary here is that any story that paints any public officers in bad light is viewed as unfavourable. Neutral if the story refuses to take a stand on the subjects understudy.

The units of analysis were classified as news feature, opinion, editorial and cartoon. Placement, where the story appears is a major determinant of the importance attached to issue. They were considered in this order; front page, inside page and back page.

Method of Analysis and Presentation of Data

In this study, the data that were generated were analysed in tables using simple percentages.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1.0: Direction of Issues under study

Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
Favourable	4	3	7	8.9
Unfavourable	2	Nil	2	2.6
Neutral	1	Nil	1	1.3
Nil	32	36	68	87.2
Total	39	39	78	100%

Table 1.1.1 above showed the direction of issue on subsidy removal and reinvestment programme of President Goodluck. The findings showed that, *The Guardian* newspaper gave the issue favourable coverage 4 times, 2 times unfavourable and remained neutral 1 time. *Vanguard* covered the issue 3 times and they were all favourable.

Nigerian Governors Forum Crisis

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total
Favourable	Nil	1	1(1.3%)
Unfavourable	2	2	4(5.1%)
Neutral	Nil	Nil	-
Nil	37	36	73(93.6%)
Total	39	39	78(100 %)

Table 1.1.2 above showed the direction of issue on Nigerian Governors Forum crisis. *The Guardian* newspaper covered the issue 2 times and was unfavourable; *Vanguard* newspaper covered it 3 times, 1 favourable and 2 unfavourable.

Amachi-Goodluck Feud

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total
Favourable	Nil	Nil	-
Unfavourable	1	Nil	1(1.3 %)
Neutral	Nil	Nil	-
Nil	38	39	77(98.7 %)
Total	39	39	78(100 %)

Table 1.1.3 above showed the direction of issue on Governor Amaechi-Goodluck feud. *The Guardian* covered the issue 1 time and recorded as unfavourable. *Vanguard* did not cover the issue within the period of study.

Obasanjo-Goodluck Feud

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total
Favourable	1	1	2(2.6 %)
Unfavourable	2	1	3(3.8 %)
Neutral	1	Nil	1(1.3 %)
Nil	35	37	72(92.3%)
Total	39	39	78(100%)

The *Guardian* newspaper covered the issue in table 1.1.4 above, 4 times; 1 favourable, 2 unfavourable and 1 neutral; *Vanguard* newspaper covered it, 2 times; 1 favourable and 1 unfavourable.

Frequencies of Issues

Variable	The Guardian	Vanguard	Total	Percentage
Fuel Subsidy Reinvestment	7	3	10	12.8
NGF Crisis	2	3	5	6.4
Amaechi-Goodluck Feud	1	Nil	1	1.3
Obasanjo-Goodluck Feud	4	2	6	7.7
Nil	25	31	56	71.8
Total	39	39	78	100

Table 1.2 showed the entire breakdown on the number of times each issue occurred in the study. Out of the 78 editions studied, 10 (12.8 %) issues were on fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment programme of the Federal Government. 5 (6.4%) issues were on Nigerian Governors Forum crisis, 1(1.3%) issue was on Amaechi-Goodluck feud, 6 (7.7 %) issues were on Obasanjo-Goodluck feud and 56 (71.8%) editions were recorded as nil.

Nature of Issues

Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
News Feature	6	3	9	11.5
Opinion	1	Nil	1	1.3
Editorial	Nil	Nil	-	-
Cartoon	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	32	36	68	87.2
Total	39	39	78	100

The findings on table 1.3.1 showed that, *The Guardian* newspaper presented the issue on fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment programme, 6 times as news feature and 1 on opinion column, nil for editorial and cartoon. *Vanguard* newspaper presented the issue as news feature.

Nigerian Governors Forum

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
News Feature	2	3	5	6.5
Opinion	Nil	Nil	-	-
Editorial	Nil	Nil	-	-
Cartoon	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	37	36	73	93.6
Total	39	39	78	100

Table 1.3.2 presented the data on nature of issue on Nigerian Governors Forum crisis. The findings revealed that, *The Guardian* newspaper presented the issue 2 times as news feature, nil for opinion, editorial and cartoon. *Vanguard* presented the issue 3 times as feature stories, nil for opinion, and cartoon within the scope of the study.

Amaechi- Goodluck Feud

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
News Feature	1	Nil	1	1.3
Opinion	Nil	Nil	-	-
Editorial	Nil	Nil	-	-
Cartoon	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	38	39	77	
Total	39	39	78	98.7

Table 1.3.3 presented the findings on the direction of issue bordering on Amaechi-Goodluck feud. The study showed that only *The Guardian* newspaper covered the issue and presented it as news feature.

Obasanjo- Goodluck Feud

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
News Feature	4	2	6	7.7
Opinion	Nil	Nil	-	-
Editorial	Nil	Nil	-	-
Cartoon	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	35	37	72	92.3
Total	39	39	78	100

Data presented on table 1.3.4 showed that Obasanjo-Goodluck feud was presented 4 times as news feature in *The Guardian* and 2 times in *Vanguard* newspapers respectively. Nil for opinion, editorial and cartoon.

Placement of Issues**Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme**

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
Front page	3	3	6	7.7
Inside page	4	Nil	4	5.1
Back page	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	32	36	68	87.2
Total	39	39	78	100

Table 1.4.1 presented the placement of issue on fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment programme and revealed that *The Guardian* newspaper placed the issue 3 times on front page, 4 times on inside page and *Vanguard* newspaper placed all the issues covered on the front page (3 times).

Nigerian Governors Forum

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
Front page	2	3	5	6.4
Inside page	Nil	Nil	-	-
Back page	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	37	36	73	93.6
Total	39	39	78	100

Table 1.4.2 showed that, *The Guardian* placed the issue on Nigerian Governors Forum crisis 2 times on front page and *Vanguard* placed it 3 times on the front page. The two newspapers covered the issues 2 and 3 times respectively.

Amachi- Goodluck Feud

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
Front page	Nil	Nil	-	-
Inside page	1	Nil	1	1.3
Back page	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	38	39	77	98.7
Total	39	39	78	100

Table 1.4.3 showed the placement of Amaechi-Goodluck feud and revealed that only *The Guardian* newspaper covered the issue and presented it on inside page.

Obasanjo- Goodluck Feud

Variable	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total	Percentage
Front page	1	1	2	2.6
Inside page	3	1	4	5.1
Back page	Nil	Nil	-	-
Nil	35	37	72	92.3
Total	39	39	78	100

Table 1.4.4 showed the placement of Obasanjo-Goodluck feud by the selected newspapers. The findings revealed that *The Guardian* newspaper covered the issue 4 times and placed 1 item on the front page, 3 items on the inside page. *Vanguard* placed the issue on the front page and inside page, 1 and 1.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings of this study was done in relation to the four research questions formulated to guide the proper investigation of this work.

Research question 1: What is the direction of issues under study?

The study revealed that, *The Guardian* newspaper gave favourable coverage to issue of fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment of the Federal Government within the scope of this study. Findings also revealed that *The Guardian* covered the issue 7 times, 4 favourable, 2 unfavourable, 1 neutral, while *Vanguard* gave the issue favourable coverage in its 3 times coverage. *The Guardian* again gave the Nigerian Governors Forum unfavourable coverage in its 2 times coverage, *Vanguard* in the other hand gave Nigerian Governors Forum, 1 favourable coverage and 2 times unfavourable coverage. *The Guardian* covered the issue on Governor Amaechi-Goodluck feud 1 time and recorded as unfavourable. *Vanguard* did not cover the issue within the period of study. On Obasanjo-Goodluck feud. *The Guardian* newspaper covered the issue in table 1.1.4 above, 4 times, 1 favourable, 2 unfavourable and 1 neutral; *Vanguard* newspaper covered it, 2 times; 1 favourable and 1 unfavourable. The study rating revealed that, fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment recorded the highest favourability of coverage, while Nigerian Governors Forum crisis received the highest unfavourable coverage followed by Obasanjo-Goodluck feud. These were some of the headlines and lead paragraphs that revealed the direction of stories:

Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme

Headline: "SURE-P To Recruit 10,000 Youths Yearly in Adamawa"

Lead: "3000 youths were said to be recruited in Adamawa in January"

The Guardian, Saturday, January 12, 2013.

Headline: SURE-P programme will Reduce Poverty, Says Ekiti Obas, *The Guardian*, Monday, January 7, 2013.

Nigerian Governors Forum

Headline: "Intrigues as governors pick leader today.

- Opposition governor may emerge as NGF Chairman
- Presidency arm twists PDP state helmsmen
- Amaechi's fate depends on 20 colleagues"

Lead: "Rotimi Amaechi's crime is his perceived ambition to be the running mate to northern presidential aspirant in 2015". *The Guardian*, Monday, February 25, 2013.

Headline: "Botched coup against Amaechi, Jonathan in peace move, meets governors

- Governors set to hold NGF election today
- Call Tukur to order, PDP governors tell Jonathan"

Lead: "The presidency was last night jittery following the collapse of plans to remove Governor Amaechi". *Vanguard*, Monday February 25, 2013.

Headline: "NGF Election: How Presidency's plot to unseat Amaechi failed

- We were forced to work against him-Governors
- As presidency goes back to drawing board"

Lead: "Details of the political coup' carefully plotted and executed by the presidency to oust Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State from leadership of the influential Nigerian Governors Forum, NGF, emerged yesterday claiming they were put under pressure to work against the governor". *Vanguard*, Wednesday, February 27, 2013.

Obasanjo- Goodluck feud

Headline: "Former Senator Berates Obasanjo over comments".

Lead: "Senator Ahmed Zakari has berated former president Olusegun on his recent comments that the corruption in Nigeria is assuming an un- imaginable proportion while president Goodluck stays aloof", *The Guardian*, Saturday, January 5, 2013.

Headline: "Boko Haram, reasons for Jonathan, Obasanjo rift, says Sani," *The Guardian*, Monday, January 21, 2013.

Headline: "Blame Jonathan for Security- Obj", *Vanguard*, Saturday, February 2, 2013.

Research question 2.How often do the selected newspapers cover the issue under study?

Table 1.2 showed the entire breakdown on the number of times each issue occurred in the study. Out of the 78 editions studied, 10 (12.8 %) issues were on fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment programme of the Federal Government. 5 (6.4%) issues were on Nigerian Governors Forum crisis, 1(1.3%) issue was on Amaechi-Goodluck feud, 6 (7.7 %) issues were on Obasanjo-Goodluck feud and 56 (71.8%) editions were recorded as nil.

Research question 3.What is the nature of coverage of issues under study?

The findings showed that, *The Guardian* newspaper presented the issue on fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment programme, 6 times as news feature and 1 on opinion column, nil for editorial and cartoon. *Vanguard* newspaper presented the issue as news feature. On Nigerian Governors' Forum crisis the findings revealed that, *The Guardian* newspaper presented the issue 2 times as news feature, nil for opinion, editorial and cartoon. *Vanguard* presented the issue 3 times as feature stories, nil for opinion, and cartoon within the scope of the study. Amaechi-Goodluck feud was presented 1 time by *The Guardian* as news feature. Data presented on table 1.3.4 showed that Obasanjo-Goodluck feud was presented 4 times as news feature in *The Guardian* and 2 times in *Vanguard* newspapers respectively, nil for opinion, editorial and cartoon. Statistically, news features took 21(34.6%) stories from the 78 issues studied, meaning that majority of the issues were reported as news feature.

Research question 4. What are the positions of issues under study?

The study revealed that, the 4 issues under study were given prominence by *The Guardian and Vanguard* newspapers. Table 1.4.1 presented the placement of issue of fuel subsidy removal

and reinvestment programme and revealed that *The Guardian* newspaper placed the issue 3 times on front page, 4 times on inside page and *Vanguard* newspaper placed all the issues covered on the front page (3 times). Table 1.4.2 showed that, *The Guardian* placed the issue of Nigerian Governors Forum crisis 2 times on front page and *Vanguard* placed it 3 times on the front page. The two newspapers covered the issues 2 and 3 times. Table 1.4.3 showed the placement of Amaechi-Goodluck feud and revealed that only *The Guardian* newspaper covered the issue and presented on its inside page. Table 1.4.4 showed the placement of Obasanjo-Goodluck feud by the selected newspapers. The findings revealed that *The Guardian* newspaper covered the issue 4 times and placed 1 item on the front page, 3 items on the inside page. *Vanguard* placed the issue on the front page and inside page, 1 and 1. Since position of issue and its consistency over time determine the importance attached to such issue, it could be deduce here that Nigerian press attached importance the four issues investigated in this study in this order: Fuel Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme SURE-P, 6 (7.7%) on front page; Nigerian Governors Forum Crisis 5 (6.4%) on front page; Obasanjo-Goodluck feud 2 (2.6%).

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study used content analytical method to examine two selected Nigerian newspapers on four topical issues from January 1, 2013- March 31, 2013. The study findings revealed that, three out of the four issues were well reported in the Nigerian press. Fuel subsidy removal and reinvestment was ranked first in terms of favourable coverage, while Nigerian Governors Forum crisis ranked first in terms of unfavourable coverage. Obasanjo-Goodluck feud came second in terms of unfavourable coverage.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study the researchers came to the conclusion that, President Goodluck SURE-P project was a welcome development to many Nigerians, also that, President Goodluck is a poor political actor because of his level of interference in the Nigerian Governors Forum election. The researchers also concluded that Obasanjo- Goodluck feud was trigger off by Obasanjo concern for the state of security of the nation.

Recommendations

Looking at the scope of the study, it will not be totally correct to pass a perfect judgement as to how well the Nigerian press covers the issues under study, so the researchers therefore recommended that, a further study should be carried out. More months and newspapers should be added in any other study to be carried out.

The researchers equally recommended that, another research method should be adopted other than content analysis in investigating the problems.

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