

Newspaper Framing of 2023 Fuel Subsidy Removal Policy in Nigeria

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Abstract

The media is saddled with the responsibility of informing the public about government policies and decisions. It is the lens through which individual sees issues and events outside their immediate life space. Since people form their reality through the contribution of others, the media through frame influences the way audience determine their social and political environment, by shaping their views and opinions. Framing theory provided the theoretical framework for this study while quantitative content analysis research design was adopted. Three national newspapers (*The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*) were purposively selected for content analysis. Findings show episodic 72.5% as the dominant frame type used in reporting the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. Also, human interest 40%, attribution of responsibility 15%, and morality 15% frame typologies were mostly adopted. In addition, the selected newspapers gathered majority of their contents from the government 37.5% and their own media correspondence 22.5%. Findings further reveal news story format 72.5% and positive tone 55.0% as the dominant editorial format and tone respectively. It was inferred that the Nigerian media through frames types, typologies, news sources, editorial formats, and tone downplays the complexities of fuel subsidy removal policy. This may suggest that the media in Nigeria are strong instruments in the hands of the government as they often represent government policies as important, necessary and inevitable even when such policies bring hardship on the masses.

Keywords

Newspaper framing, fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria, Nigerian newspapers, Framing theory

Introduction

Mass media is a communication channel for passing information to large heterogeneous group of people (Apeloko & Olajide, 2017). It is saddled with

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the responsibility of informing, educating, and enlightening the public about government policies and decisions (Okon, 2020). The media is tied to democracy; it enables interactions between citizens and their representatives (Mbamalu, 2020). In addition, the media defines reality as it shapes the way people view the economic, social and political environment around them (Ojebuyi & Kolawole, 2016). Since people depend on the media for clarifications and suggestions, the media, through frames often influence public perception and reception of issues and events - culture, gender, race, policy, etc. (Ezeah & Abodurin, 2016).

Media framing is a powerful tool used by the journalists and news outlets to shape how audience understand and interpret media messages. Framing is defined as a process in which some aspects of reality are selected, and given greater emphasis or importance, so that a problem is defined, its causes are diagnosed, moral judgments are suggested and appropriate solutions and actions are proposed (Folarin, 2002). This means that by emphasising certain aspects of an issue and de-emphasising others the media draw attention to some aspects of reality at the expense of others (Milojević & Milić, 2022). Framing focuses not on which issues are selected for media coverage, but instead on the specific ways these issues are presented (Ogbodo *et al.*, 2020). The key aspect of framing is the way an issue or event is described, as well as the interpretive schema that has been activated to process it (Amenaghawon, 2018). It thus means that framing is how the media present an issue and how the audience interpret such an issue (Egbunike, 2015).

The media, through frame helps audience to locate, perceive, identify, and label the information around them (Ogbodo *et al.*, 2020). Since people form their reality through the contribution of others, the media uses frame to influence how audience determine their social and political environment, by influencing their views, ideas, and opinions (Milojević & Milić, 2022). This assertion is in line with the submission of Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) that a frame is built through selection, emphasis, and exclusion. It is believed that a particular frame makes people to focus their attention on some messages (those that are included in it) and ignore other ones (those that are excluded from it). Hence, the media, through images, videos, written and spoken words organises stories in ways that audience perception and reception of issues under discourse is shaped (Ezeah & Abodurin, 2016; Mbamalu, 2020).

The issue of fuel subsidy removal reoccurs in Nigeria and often resurfaces on pages of national dailies, with several newspapers covering and reporting it differently and each setting distinct agendas (Ocheni, 2015; Shagali & Yusuff, 2022). For example, an earlier study by Jimoh, Ademoye, Odesanya, and Abubakar (2014) reveal that *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers through prominence, story direction, and tone, set agenda for the public in the reportage

of the 2012 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. This study found an interaction between the priority accorded to the fuel subsidy removal crisis by the press (media agenda), and the importance attached to it by the public through their reaction (public agenda), as well as subsequent government policy reversal (policy agenda).

Scholars (Jimoh *et al.*, 2014; Aderogba, 2017; Apeloko & Olajide, 2017) who have examined media representations of fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria predominantly focused on press coverage and reportage with little attention given to framing. Specifically, after the recent fuel subsidy removal policy by the federal government, media scholars have not adequately explored how national newspapers frame this issue, one that has a far-reaching economic and social implications for the country. This gap highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the media's role in shaping public debates and decision-making processes. This study therefore aims to fill this scholarly gap by investigating the framing of 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in some selected national newspapers. Five research objectives guided this study: (1) To investigate the frames employed by the selected newspaper in reporting the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. (2) To explore the frame typologies used by the selected newspaper in reporting the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. (3) To examine the sources of frames used by the selected newspaper in reporting the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. (4) To explore the editorial formats adopted by the selected newspaper in reporting the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. (5) To discover the tone used by the selected newspaper in reporting the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The Issue of Fuel Subsidy in Nigeria

Subsidy is money paid by the government to reduce the actual amount people pay for a particular commodity (Ocheni, 2015). It is a sum of money allocated to keep the price of commodity low and affordable for people (Aderogba & Gbenga, 2017). It can also be seen as the price incentive given to an industry to reduce the price of its product and achieve competitive power. The main objective behind subsidy is to keep the price below the normal market price (Ezeah & Abodunrin, 2016). It is a deliberate effort to support a chosen economic agent and it is usually seen in sectors that deal mainly with buying and selling of goods and services (Economic Intelligent Unit, 2013).

Fuel subsidy is a policy established by the Nigerian government to cushion the effect of hardship on the masses (Evans *et al.*, 2023). It is the difference between the actual market price of petroleum product per litre and the amount final consumer pays for the same product (Obasi, Ezenkwa, Onwa & Nwagbaga, 2017). It is a kind of grants provided by the government to lower the amount citizen pay for petroleum product. It exists when people are

assisted by the government to pay less than the actual pump price (Shagari & Yusuf, 2022). It is also created to assist the masses financially and balance market failure (Economic Intelligent Unit, 2013).

The earliest increase in pump price dated back to 1973, when Gowon increased the fuel price from 6Kobo to 8.45Kobo. Also, Murtala Mohammed adjusted the price to 9Kobo in 1976. Additionally, in 1978 Olusegun Obasanjo reviewed the pump price from 8.4kobo to 15.3Kobo, while Shehu Shagari, moved the price to 20Kobo. On 31st of March, 1986, Ibrahim Babangida increased it to 39.5Kobo while on 10th April 1988, the Babangida government raised the price to 42Kobo per litre and 60K for private cars on 1st January, 1989 (Aderogba & Gbenga, 2017). In 1991, Babangida increased fuel price to 70kobo, while Ernest Shonekan's interim government raised the price to #5. On 2nd of October, 1994, Sanni Abacha who took over from Ernest Shonekan subsidized the fuel to ₦3.25Kobo but later increased it to ₦15.00 on 2nd October, 1994 and reduce it to ₦11.00 after two day. Abdusalami Abubakar also increased the price on 2nd December, 1998 to ₦25.00 before he reduced it to ₦20.00 on 6 January, 1999. On 1st of January, 2012, Goodluck Jonathan announced the removal of fuel subsidy removal, increasing it from ₦65 to ₦141, a 116% increase, while later pegging the price at ₦87 per litre (Economic Intelligent Unit, 2013). More so, in 2016, Muhammadu Buhari removed the fuel subsidy, raising it high to ₦145 and declaring the end of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. Very recently, on the 29th of May, 2023, the newly elected president, Bola Tinubu triggered a national crisis after he declared that the fuel subsidy was gone. He made this statement in his very first hour in office, raising the pump price by 250% (*The Punch*, June 9, 2023 p. 14).

The issue of fuel subsidy removal usually generates heated debates among the government and citizen (Egbunike, 2015). While citizens argue that fuel subsidy is the only avenue to enjoy dividend of democracy or natural resources endowment, economists maintain that fuel subsidy is unnecessary, and its removal would boost and grow the economy (Obasi *et al.*, 2017). So, any attempt to remove fuel subsidy by the Nigerian government always triggers a nationwide crisis (Economic Intelligent Unit, 2013).

Several scholars in the area of media uses and effects have examined media representations of issues and events (economic issues and policies, crisis, war, protests etc.). However, the framing of the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy by the Nigerian government has received little attention from scholars. For example, Egbunike (2015) examined media framing of the "Occupy Nigeria Protests" in newspapers and social media following government's removal of subsidy on premium motor spirits. Findings reveal that newspapers were better than social media in framing the motivation, diagnosis and prognosis of the protest as the selected newspapers presented a

more heterogeneous narration of the protest. Similarly, Aderogba (2017) carried out a retrospective examination of 2012 fuel subsidy removal crisis in Nigeria. Findings of the study show that 63% of the stories published in the newspapers were against the removal of fuel subsidy. This implies that the selected newspaper condemned the policy and the hardship it placed on the general public. This study further reveals that corruption which seems to be among the major problems in the Nigeria oil industry was under reported (1.8%). In addition, the study of Apeloko and Olajide (2017), "Newspaper Coverage of Oil Subsidy Removal Remonstrations: A Thoughtful Analysis of 2012 Experience in Nigeria" reveal that more than 70% of the total reports published by the selected newspapers on the 2012 fuel subsidy removal crisis took the news story format. The study concludes that news stories are not the best approach for policy reports as they are always devoid of adequate investigation and analysis. Most times, the episodic frame downplays the complexities and the effects of issues under discussion.

In 2018, using framing theory, Amenaghawon carried out a study, "Newspaper Framing of the Niger Delta Conflict". The study observed that the main sources of frames were media correspondents and government sources. In addition, news format was the dominant editorial format. The study argued that by using episodic frames, the selected newspapers did not provide adequate historical angle to the reports or provide the information that would assist the readers in understanding the events (policy, crisis, riot and conflict). More so, Okon (2020) carried out a study to ascertain the contextualization of news reports on the oil and gas sector by some selected Nigerian newspapers. Findings show that the predominant theme in terms of contextualization was economy with little attention given to other themes.

Furthermore, Mbamalu (2020) examined the themes, frames, and actors in renewable energy stories to ascertain whether newspapers are changing in their reportage of critical issues. Findings reveal that the newspapers did not address formerly held negative perceptions of renewable energy in Nigeria. It was indicated that newspapers covered a wide range of themes, however, framing of themes and actors reflected more of pessimism than progress. Government was the most dominant actor, and newspapers frame it as an influencer and policy driver in renewable energy. The study concludes that too much use of news as content sacrifices the interpretive frames needed to contextualize renewable energy events and actors to influence public perception. Also, Talabi, Bello, and Lamidi (2022) examined Newspapers Reportage of Nigeria Economic Issues from January to August 2020. Findings showed that the volume of coverage for economic issues was low compared to other stories in the selected newspapers. There was also not much significance attached to the coverage of economic issues in the period under study. The study opine that the press should give adequate attention to the coverage of economic issues in the country and provide a human interest angle to stories to tackle the poor state of the economy by the government and relevant bodies.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Framing theory was first introduced by Goffman in 1974. According to Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2022), framing a communication text or message is to promote certain facets of a perceived reality and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or a treatment recommendation. This implies that the manner in which information is presented influences audience perception, reception and interpretation. Littlejohn and Foss (2008) view framing as a second level agenda setting, as it does not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda setting), but also how to think about an issue (second level agenda setting, framing theory).

Basically, there are two ways in which framing can be applied in communication research; individual and media frames. Individual framing is the understanding of a given situation while media frame is the use of words, images, phrases, and styles to communicate issue (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). According to Apeloko and Olajide (2017, p. 132), “Framing is useful in analysing the role of the media in reporting and managing conflict”. This implies that framing can be employed to organise and synthesize social meanings, as it defines how individuals digest and interpret social issue. The theory explains the media’s ability to persuade audience to accept one meaning more than the other (McQuail, 2005). Framing is more than just bringing up certain issues, it summarizes the way in which the issues are brought up and interpretation given to it by the public (Folarin, 2002). In all, framing allows media to construct social, economic, political issue and other realities for media audience (Asemah *et al.*, 2022).

Framing theory allows media researchers to explore how media representations shape public perception and influence policy debates (Folarin, 2002). It enables media researchers to explore language, imagery, themes, and tones employed by the selected newspapers, and its influence on public perception, reception and interpretation (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). The relevance of framing theory in the context of this research lies in its ability to analyse how the media can shape public discourse through the selective presentation of information. Using framing theory, this study investigates the frame types, frame typologies, story sources, editorial formats and tones employed by *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* in reporting 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to achieve the stated objectives, the study adopted quantitative content analysis design. This method is appropriate for this study because of its reliability in analysing relevant media contents as well as giving accurate and dependable results.

Research Instrument

The instrument used was coding sheet containing the content analytical categories which allowed the researcher to examine (1) Frame types (2) Frame typologies (3) Frame sources (4) Editorial format and (5) Tone of stories. According to Amenaghawon (2018), the frame type can be examined using episodic and thematic frames. Also, story sources can be determined using government sources, media correspondence, expert sources, civil society, public opinion, international sources, business sources, local media sources, and political sources. Furthermore, editorial formats can be examined using news stories, features, opinion essays, photo series, editorials, cartoon, and interview, while tone can be measured in relation to whether the reports were positive, negative or balanced. Additionally, based on the studies of Neuma, Just and Crigler (1992) and Sametko and Valkenburg (2000), the framing typologies adopted for this studies include, human interest, morality, conflict, economic, powerlessness, and attribution of responsibility. The content analytical categories are further shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Content Analytical Categories

S/N	Frame types	Frame Typologies	News Sources	Editorial Formats	Tone of Stories
1.	Episodic	Human Interest	Government Sources	News Story	Positive
2.	Thematic	Attribution of Responsibility	Media Correspondence	Feature	Negative
3.		Morality	Expert Source	Opinion Essay	Balance
4.		Conflict	Civil Society	Photo series	
5.		Economic	Public Opinion	Editorials	
6.		Powerlessness	International Sources	Cartoon	
7.			Business Sources	Interview	
8.			Local Media Sources		
9.			Political Sources		

Source: Researcher, 2023

Population

The population of this study comprised all Nigerian newspapers that were in circulation during 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy.

Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling technique was used to select three foremost Nigeria newspapers – *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust*. They were selected because of their ownership patterns, popularity, circulation strength, and their wide range of coverage of both national and international issues (Egbunike, 2015; Okon, 2020). Specifically, *The Punch* is known for its critical and investigative prowess, while *The Guardian* is associated with its progressive viewpoints. With a focus on Northern Nigeria, *Daily Trust* can provide insights into the regional viewpoints regarding fuel subsidy removal policy and its potential impacts on the population. Also, convenience sampling was then used to select forty (40) editions relevant to the issue under study.

Sample Size

A total of forty (40) editions covering the months of June to August, 2023 were taken from all the selected newspapers. This study period was informed by the wide coverage of fuel subsidy removal policy by national newspapers during this period.

Validity and Reliability

To achieve validity and reliability, one additional coder was trained for two days for the pilot study. Specifically, fifteen (15) editions were purposively selected from *tribune* newspaper for the reliability test. The inter coder reliability tests was carried out using the Krippendorff Alpha formula yielded 0.86 for situation one (frame type), 0.8 for situation two (frame typology), 0.8 for situation three (frame sources), 0.9 for situation four (editorial format), and 0.8 for situation five (tone).

Method of Data Collection

The data was collected using a coding sheet which contains the content analytical categories. The unit of analysis includes news stories, reports, features, editorials, cartoons, letters to editors, interviews, and opinion essays on fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using simple frequency counts and percentages.

Findings

The five earlier stated research objectives guided the presentation of the results of this study. The objectives are as stated below:

Objective One: To investigate the frames employed by the selected newspapers in reporting 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy.

Table 2: Frame Types Employed by the Selected Newspapers

Frame type	<i>The Punch</i> F (%)	<i>The Guardian</i> F (%)	<i>Daily Trust</i> F (%)	Total F (%)
Episodic	10(25)	10(25)	9(22.5)	29(72.5)
Thematic	3(7.5)	4(10)	4(10)	11(27.5)
Total	13(32.5)	14(35)	13(32.5)	40(100)

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 2 shows that episodic framing style 72.5% is predominant in all the selected newspapers. According to the findings, out of the stories selected from *The Punch*, 25% employed episodic while only 7.5% employ thematic frame. Also, out of the stories selected from *The Guardian*, 25% employed episodic while only 10% employ thematic frame. Additionally, out of the stories selected from *Daily Trust*, 22.5% employed episodic while only 10% employ thematic frame. The use of episodic frame indicated that adequate background information needed for better understanding of the policy was not provided by Nigerian newspapers. By reducing the issues of fuel subsidy removal policy to individual stories (episodic frame), Nigerian newspapers belittle the policy's long term effects, historical background, and complex economic forces. This action can lead to limited understanding of the policy's causes, consequences, and implications.

Objective Two: To explore the frame typologies used by the selected newspapers in reporting 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy.

Table 3: Frame Typologies Adopted by the Selected Newspaper

Frame Type	<i>The Punch</i> F(%)	<i>The Guardian</i> F(%)	<i>Daily Trust</i> F(%)	Total F(%)
Human Interest	1(2.5)	6(15)	9(22.5)	16(40)
Attribution of responsibility	2(5)	3(7.5)	1(2.5)	6(15)
Morality	2(5)	2(5)	2(5)	6(15)
Conflict	3(7.5)	2(5)	0(0)	5(12.5)
Economic	4(10)	1(2.5)	0(0)	5(12.5)
Powerlessness	1(2.5)	0(0)	1(2.5)	2(5)
Total	13(32.5)	14(35)	13(32.5)	40(100)

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 3 shows that out of the stories selected from *The Guardian*, 15% and 7.5% employ the human interest and attribution of responsibility frame typologies, while out of the stories selected from *Daily Trust*, 22.5% and 5% employ human interest and morality frames respectively.

However, *The Punch* frame the stories differently, 10% and 7.5% use economy and conflict frames respectively. From the above, it can be deduced that the selected newspaper mostly adopts human interest 40%, Attribution of responsibility 15%, and Morality 15% frame typologies while conflict 12.5%, economic 12.5%, and powerlessness 5% are not mostly used. This implies that Nigerian newspaper present an incomplete picture of the fuel subsidy removal policy. This action can hinder public understanding of the policy's complexities, and effects on different stakeholders. Lack of adequate emphasis on conflict and powerlessness frames suggests that Nigerian newspapers trivialise the inherent conflicts and power imbalances surrounding fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. Also, the minimal use of economic frame may show lack of in-depth analysis of the economic implications of the policy on the masses. Notably, without employing diverse frames, Nigerian newspapers may have hindered constructive debates on the issue of fuel subsidy removal.

Objective Three: To examine the frame sources used by the selected newspapers in reporting 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy

Table 4: Sources of Frames used by Selected Newspapers

Sources	<i>The Punch</i> F(%)	<i>The Guardian</i> F(%)	<i>Daily Trust</i> F(%)	Total F(%)
Government source	5(12.5)	3(7.5)	7(17.5)	15(37.5)
Newspaper correspondence	3(7.5)	4(10)	2(5)	9(22.5)
Expert source	1(2.5)	5(12.5)	0(0)	6(15)
Civil society	2(5)	2(5)	1(2.5)	5(12.5)
Public opinion	2(5)	0	3(7.5)	5(12.5)
International sources	0	0	0	0
Business sources	0	0	0	0
Local source	0	0	0	0
Political sources	0	0	0	0
Total	13(32.5)	14(35)	13(32.5)	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

In reporting fuel subsidy removal policy in Table 4, the selected newspapers gathered majority of their contents from government 37.5% and their media correspondence 22.5%. The findings reveal that only *The Guardian* newspaper

gathered contents from expert 12.5%. This implies that Nigerian newspapers may have presented one-sided narrative that reflected the government's perspectives and agendas. This action may lead to a narrow and inaccurate understanding of the long term impacts of the policy on the general public. Also, without including alternative voices and critical analysis, the government faces less pressure to be accountable for the policy's consequences. This can hinder public oversight, and make it hard to hold authorities responsible for their failures and inadequacies. Similarly, the habit of gathering information from only government sources raises concerns about transparency. This habit can erode public trust in both the government and the media.

Objective Four: To explore the editorial formats adopted by the selected newspapers in reporting 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy

Table 5: Editorial Formats Employed by Selected Newspapers

Editorial Format	<i>The Punch</i> F(%)	<i>The Guardian</i> F(%)	<i>Daily Trust</i> F(%)	Total F(%)
News story	10(25)	10(25)	9(22.5)	29(72.5)
Feature	1(2.5)	1(2.5)	1(2.5)	3(7.5)
Opinion Essay	0	2(5)	3(7.5)	5(12.5)
Photo stories	0	1(2.5)	0	1(2.5)
Editorials	2(5)	0	0	2(5)
Cartoon	0	0	0	0
Interview	0	0	0	0
Total	13(32.5)	14(35)	13(32.5)	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 5 reveals that the selected newspaper mostly employs news story format 72.5% in reporting fuel subsidy removal policy. Other formats like opinion essay 12.5%, feature 7.5%, editorials 5% and photo stories 2.5% were minimally employed. The implication of this is that the selected newspapers prioritise brevity and objectivity for deep analysis and critical examination of the policy's complexities, causes, and impacts. It also suggests that the selected newspapers neglect alternative viewpoints and experiences that can create a broader picture of the policy's consequences and implications. The absence of other editorial formats like opinion essay, feature, editorials and photo series may limit the public's understanding of the policy's broader social and economic implications.

Objective Five: To discover the tone used by the selected newspapers in reporting 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy.

Table 6: Tone given to Stories on Fuel Subsidy removal by the Selected Newspapers

Tone	<i>The Punch</i> F(%)	<i>The Guardian</i> F(%)	<i>Daily Trust</i> F(%)	Total F(%)
Positive	4(10)	7(17.5)	11(27.5)	22(55.0)
Negative	6(15.0)	2(5)	1(2.5)	9(22.5)
Balanced	3(7.5)	5(12.5)	1(2.5)	9(22.5)
Total	13(32.5)	14(35.0)	13(32.5)	40(100)

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 6 reveals that the selected newspapers mostly employed positive 55.0% tone in reporting stories on fuel subsidy removal policy. According to the findings, out of the stories selected from *The Guardian*, 2 stories (5.0%) were reported with negative tone as well as *Daily Trust*, only 1 story (2.5%). Also, *The Punch* reported 6 stories (15.0%) with negative tone out of 13(32.5%) stories. Notably, only 9 stories (22.5%), out of the 40 editions selected from the three newspapers were reported with balanced tone. The heavy reliance on positive tone suggests that the selected newspapers give an unrealistic expectation and false hope to the public. The use of positive tone shows that the Nigerian newspaper sold the idea of fuel subsidy removal policy without acknowledging its complexities and long term effects.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study show that majority of the selected newspaper adopted the episodic frame type. The implication of using episodic frame is that the Nigerian newspapers downplay the complexities of the fuel subsidy removal policy. They oversimplified the issue by reducing it to individual stories, thereby diverting audience attention from its importance and long term effect. In addition, the use of episodic frame depicts inaccurate and imbalance reporting. This practice may create panic or confusion among the public and ultimately undermine constructive dialogue about the policy. This use of episodic frame also suggests that Nigerian newspapers lack in-depth analysis and critical evaluation in their reportage. Since detailed information is not provided, the policy is subjected to mere speculations and assumptions. This finding corroborates the findings of Amenaghawon (2018), which show that the use of episodic frames in the reportage of salient issues like conflict, policy, riot and crisis does not allow critical examination, interpretation and evaluation.

In addition, findings reveal that the selected newspaper mostly adopt human interest, attribution of responsibility, and morality frame typologies.

This implies that Nigerian newspapers mainly focus on the effect of the policy on individual (human interest); attribute blame on specific institutions (attribution of responsibility); and showcase the ethical implication of the policy (morality), without exploring the economical implication (economy frame); tension surrounding the policy (conflict frame); and the effect of the policy on the vulnerable masses (powerlessness). The fuel subsidy removal policy is a multifaceted issue with economic, social, and political implications. So, focusing only on individual stories, moral judgments, and assigning blames simplify the long-term effect of the policy on the masses. Also, ignoring conflict and powerlessness frames prevents the public from understanding the broader social dynamics at play, such as potential protests or power imbalances affecting different communities. In addition, overemphasizing attribution of responsibility without acknowledging broader systemic factors places blame on individuals without addressing the structural inequalities that contribute to the need for subsidy removal. The above findings confirm framing theory which maintains that the media through frames can colour the importance given to certain events by making the event salient in the manner that endorses a particular definition, explanation and interpretation.

Furthermore, findings reveal that the dominant source of news employ by the selected newspaper are government and media correspondence. This implies that the selected newspaper presented one-sided narrative that align with the policy formulation. This action raises concerns about inaccurate and incomplete reportage. This finding supports the findings of Amenaghawon (2018) which reveal the Vanguard and Compass newspapers mostly employed media correspondents and government as the main sources of frames in the reportage of Niger Delta Conflict in Nigeria. Amenaghawon aver that over reliance on government and media correspondence as sole source for contents depicts bias reporting which undermines the newspapers' credibility and public trust.

More so, findings show that the selected newspaper relied on news story format when reporting fuel subsidy removal policy. Overreliance on news stories while neglecting other formats like features, opinion essays, photo stories, editorials, cartoons, and interviews depict lack of deep examination. In addition, news story format primarily presents factual information and official statement, but ignores diverse viewpoints and critical voices. Opinion essays, editorials, and interviews which are not employed by the selected newspaper may offer platforms for experts and public to share their perspectives, thereby enriching the public discourse. These findings corroborate the findings of Apeloko and Olajide (2017) which contends that news stories are not the best format for reporting policy because they are devoid of adequate investigation and analysis needed for proper comprehension and interpretation. It is also in line with the findings of (Mbamalu, 2020) which aver that news format sacrifices the interpretive frames needed to contextualize economic issues and policies.

Lastly, findings reveal that the selected newspaper mostly employed positive tone when reporting fuel subsidy removal policy. The use of overly optimistic tone might discourage critical examination of the policy's excesses and inequalities. This action limits the space for constructive dialogue about alternative solutions or potential strategies for mitigating the effect of the policy. This finding negates the findings of Aderogba (2017) which reveal that 63% of the stories published in the newspapers were against the removal of 2012 fuel subsidy removal and condemned the policy and the hardship it placed on the general public.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the framing of 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in some selected national newspapers. The frame types, typologies, frame sources, editorial formats and tone were examined. Findings show that the media through frames types, typologies, frame sources, editorial formats, and tone coloured the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy in Nigeria. This confirms the framing theory which maintains that the media through frame can set agendas for the public. The study therefore concludes that the Nigerian newspapers belittle the complexities of fuel subsidy removal policy. This may suggest that the media in Nigeria are strong instrument in the hand of the government, representing government policies as the best even when such policies bring hardship on the masses.

It is recommended that in reporting salient issues, Nigerian media should provide adequate background information needed for better understanding. They should employ frames, voices and editorial formats needed for a constructive, rich and robust debates. In addition, Nigerian media should desist from selling specific narrative by using overly positive tone. They could employ balance tone to ensure all sides of arguments are well represented. Furthermore, the press should ensure that the coverage of economic issues comes from the human-interest angle as this would make the government and other relevant bodies know the current economic situation of the masses.

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