



Textual Analysis of Media Propaganda in Local News Surrounding Post-Election Threats in Nigeria

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This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Media propaganda has been a common tool for political actors to influence public perception and opinion. In the aftermath of the 2023 general elections exercise held in Nigeria, the issue of post-election threats dominated local news coverage. This study has made use of textual analysis approach to analyse the media propaganda in local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria and the implications of such propaganda on the receiving audience. The study was anchored on the Media Framing Theory and is supported by the Agenda Setting Theory. A textual analysis of selected local news stories was conducted to identify dominant themes and the framing of the post-election threats from four online newspapers. The research showed that media propaganda played a significant role in shaping the public discourse and framing the post-election

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threats in Nigeria. From textual analytical submissions, the study concluded that when unchecked, media agenda and framing unnecessarily heat up the polity, deepen misunderstanding and inspire anarchy.

Keywords: Media; propaganda; post-election threats; local news; textual analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa with a protracted history of electoral violence. Since the return to democracy in 1999, the country has experienced post-election violence in almost every election cycle. Studies by AbdulRahman & Sesan [1]. and Angerbrandt [2] underscore this troubling reality, highlighting the consistent presence of electoral violence in Nigeria's recent democratic journey. In the previous general elections in 2023, there were reports of violence and reported threats of violence in other parts of the country. One of the contributing factors to this violence is the suspected use of media propaganda to spread false information and incite violence. Furthermore, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and can be used to incite or calm tensions. It is, therefore, imperative to examine the impact of media propaganda on local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria. Media propaganda has been a critical issue in the world today, especially in countries where political tensions are high [3]. Nigeria is no exception, as the country has experienced a rise in post-election threats in recent years. The media has been used to propagate false information and incite violence in the aftermath of elections, leading to social unrest and loss of lives and properties.

Hence, a need to look into the subject matter in order to avert war or any major crisis in Nigeria an already tense target social system. In the end, the study will contribute to a better understanding of the role of media propaganda in shaping local news coverage of post-election threats in Nigeria. It will also provide insights into the role of the media in shaping public opinion and its impact on social unrest. The findings of this study will be useful to media professionals, policymakers, and the general public in understanding the importance of responsible journalism and its impact on social stability, developing strategies to combat media propaganda, and promoting balanced and accurate reporting of local news during the post-election period. Media propaganda has been known to shape public opinion and perception of

events [4]. In the context of the post-election threats in Nigeria, media propaganda played a significant role in shaping local news coverage of the events. This analysis seeks to examine the impact of media propaganda on local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria.

Nigeria is currently tensed and bedeviled by all manner of challenges in almost every aspect of her economy. The situation can be described as one sitting on a timed bomb and as such need no dangerous propaganda from the media that may further affect the security and stability of the nation. The just concluded 2023 general elections exercise was characterized by political tension, violence, and threats, which are usually accompanied by an increase in media propaganda. Such propaganda often takes different forms and is disseminated through various media channels, including local news outlets [5]. Therefore, the impact of media propaganda on local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria has become a critical concern in recent times, especially with the rise of emerging media, including social media. Hence a growing need to examine how media propaganda influences the way local news is reported, interpreted, and consumed in the context of post-election threats.

Nigeria's recent elections highlight the urgent need to understand how media propaganda influences local news regarding post-election threats. The rise of social media amplifies this concern, as manipulated information during elections can have explosive consequences. To address this, we must examine how media propaganda shapes how local news reports, are interpreted and consumed during periods of post-election tension. But first, what are post-election threats in Nigeria? They're diverse, encompassing violence, intimidation, disinformation, electoral fraud, cyberattacks, and hate speech. These threats often intertwine, creating a complex and volatile environment. Therefore, exploring how media propaganda infiltrates this landscape is crucial. We need to understand how it shapes the local news narrative surrounding these threats, ultimately

impacting public perception and potentially fueling instability.

The following were the research questions raised for this study:

1. What are the elements of propaganda in local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria?
2. What are the types of propaganda that are prevalent in local news during the study period?
3. What is the implication of media propaganda on the interpretation and consumption of local news?

The study will be limited to news stories on alleged treason levied against Peter Obi of the Labour Party as published on 4th April 2023 across National dailies in Nigeria. The study will focus on the impact of media propaganda on local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria and will adopt qualitative textual analysis to analyse the news stories.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarification on Media Propaganda

Media propaganda has been identified as one of the contributing factors to post-election violence in Nigeria. The media has been used to propagate false information and incite violence, leading to social unrest and loss of lives. The media's role in shaping public opinion cannot be overemphasized, and it is imperative to ensure responsible journalism to prevent the spread of false information [6]. The media's responsibility to report accurately and objectively has been highlighted by various scholars. According to Broniatowski, Kerchner, Farooq, Huang, Jamison, Dredze, & Quinn [7] this further underscores the importance of distinguishing between disinformation content that is generated for malicious purposes by non-credible actors and misinformation that may come about due to the search for meaning in a legitimately uncertain environment. It is precisely when society faces these "meaning threats" that misinformation becomes plausible, possibly moving from the fringes (e.g., state-sponsored propaganda and conspiracist sites) into the mainstream). The media can be a powerful tool for political actors to manipulate public opinion, especially during periods of political instability and conflict In Nigeria, the use of media propaganda has been

prevalent, especially during election periods, where political actors use the media to frame issues and influence public opinion.

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election like the 2019 general elections was highly contested and characterized by allegations of irregularities and voter suppression Building on the observations of Omale, Fasasi, Muhammad & Ekhareafu [8] concerning allegations of irregularities in Nigerian elections, Uchenna's [9] study on repeated electoral irregularities provides further support. Uchenna posits that the continuous poor management of elections since 1999 contributes to the irregularities and violence witnessed during these exercises, thus confirming Omale et al.'s claim. The post-election period was marked by tension and threats of violence from various political groups, especially in the Northern part of the country. Local media organizations played a significant role in covering the post-election threats and shaping public opinion on the matter. Chaudhari & Pawar [10] submit that media propaganda exerts a profound influence on behaviour adjustment and whittling public opinion in a manner capable of stimulating social change across major divides that comprise society. In a nutshell, media propaganda is the use of various forms of media to shape and control public opinion in a particular way, often for political or ideological purposes. Propaganda has been used for centuries to influence people's beliefs and behaviours, and it is still commonly used today by governments, political parties, and other organizations.

Propaganda can take many forms, including print, radio, television, social media, and other digital platforms. The primary goal of propaganda is to manipulate people's opinions and emotions, often by using misleading or biased information. Propaganda can also be used to create fear, anxiety, and other negative emotions to influence people's behaviour. One of the key characteristics of propaganda is that it often presents only one side of a complex issue. It typically ignores or downplays information that contradicts its message, and it often uses emotional appeals and simplistic language to appeal to people's instincts and prejudices [11].

Propaganda's impact transcends mere intent, is shaped by the social and cultural context advanced (Wardle & Der Westenra, 2018). Unpacking its multifaceted nature through various disciplines reveals its complexity. For

instance, Political science (Bennett & Lawrence, 2003) highlights how propaganda molds public perception, influencing policy debates and political outcomes. From a Psychology perspective, (Allport & Postman, 1947) reveals its persuasive mechanisms, exploiting emotional appeals and pre-existing biases. Media studies scholars (Sreberny, 2019) examine how information gatekeeping, framing, and echo chambers can amplify or mitigate its reach. This understanding allows us to predict propaganda's effects and develop nuanced counter-manipulation strategies. It empowers individuals to navigate the information landscape critically, considering their pre-existing beliefs, cultural norms, media literacy, and historical memory. Propaganda isn't inherently negative. Nigerian public health campaigns effectively raised awareness during the Ebola outbreak using music and local influencers. However, harmful examples like hate speech targeting specific groups during elections highlight the dangers of unchecked manipulation, inciting violence, and undermining democracy.

Moving beyond awareness, action is crucial. Media literacy initiatives as posited by (Livingstone, 2004) can empower individuals to critically evaluate information, especially in contexts like Nigeria's recent election cycle, rife with misinformation campaigns. Addressing local tactics like weaponizing social media algorithms requires specific solutions. Collaborations between researchers, journalists, and tech companies can develop detection and disruption strategies for harmful content. By embracing this multifaceted approach, we can navigate the complexities of propaganda, both its potential for positive change and its dangers when misused. Fostering media literacy, responsible communication, and targeted solutions is key to building a more informed and resilient society in Nigeria.

2.2 Review of Empirical Studies

A study by Adebayo [12] on the role of social media in the amplification of post-election violence in Nigeria. The study examined the impact of social media on the escalation of violence following the 2019 Nigerian elections. The study finds that social media platforms were used to disseminate propaganda and misinformation, which contributed to the violence. This study is similar to the current study as it highlights the impact of media propaganda on

post-election threats, but it focuses specifically on online newspapers.

Adegoke, [13] carried out a study on journalism and propaganda: a comparative analysis of the coverage of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The study compared the coverage of the 2019 Nigerian elections by different news outlets and highlighted how propaganda influenced their reporting. The study finds that some media outlets were more biased than others, which contributed to the post-election violence. This study is similar to the current study as it examines the impact of media propaganda on post-election violence, but it focuses specifically on journalism.

Furthermore, Akpan, & Bassey, [14] conducted a study on Media Propaganda and the Nigerian State: A critical appraisal of the coverage of the 2019 general elections. The study critically appraised the coverage of the 2019 Nigerian elections by the media and how it contributed to the post-election violence. The study finds that media propaganda played a significant role in the escalation of violence. This study is similar to the current study as it examines the impact of media propaganda on post-election threats, but it focuses specifically on the Nigerian State and online print media.

Similarly, Alhassan, Afolabi & Adebayo, [15] did a study on Election propaganda and post-election violence in Nigeria: a historical perspective. The study provides a historical perspective on how election propaganda has contributed to post-election violence in Nigeria. Findings from the study reveal that propaganda has been used to manipulate public opinion, which has led to violence. This study is similar to the current study as it examines the impact of media propaganda on post-election threats, but it focuses specifically on the alleged treason levied against Peter Obi as reported in online newspapers on 4th April 2023.

Furthermore, Bello, [16] did a study on 'the media and election violence in Nigeria: a case study of the 2019 general elections. The study examined the role of the media in the escalation of violence following the 2019 Nigerian elections. The study finds that media propaganda contributed significantly to the violence. This study is similar to the current study as it examines the impact of media propaganda on post-election threats, but it focuses specifically on the role of the media.

Duru [17] did a study on Media propaganda and post-election violence in Nigeria: A case study of the 2019 presidential elections. The study examined the impact of media propaganda on post-election violence following the 2019 Nigerian presidential elections. The study finds that media propaganda played a significant role in the escalation of violence. This study is similar to the current study as it examines the impact of media propaganda on post-election threats, but it focuses specifically on the 2019 presidential elections, while this study specifically focuses on the alleged treason levied against Peter Obi as reported in online newspapers on 4th April 2023. In addition, Adeyanju & Olojede [18] examined the role of the media in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The study found that the media contributed to post-election violence through the propagation of false information. Another study by Ibrahim & Abdullahi [19] examined the impact of social media on post-election violence in Nigeria. The study found that social media played a significant role in spreading false information and inciting violence. Ihekaire, [20] conducted a study on the use of propaganda in the 2019 general elections and the implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. His findings aligned with that of Bello [16].

To establish the relevance between the review of the empirical study and this article, each reviewed study underscores the detrimental role of media propaganda in amplifying tensions and inciting violence following elections. This establishes the gravity of our investigation into local news content surrounding a potentially inflammatory event. While acknowledging studies on various media platforms and elections, we emphasize the novelty of focusing on local news in the context of a recent, specific event. This allows us to fill a critical gap in understanding the dynamics of propaganda within this particular sphere. Through examining the methodologies of previous research, we gain valuable insights into effective approaches for our textual analysis of local news articles. This ensures our chosen methods are rigorous and appropriate for uncovering specific propaganda techniques utilized.

By building upon these established findings and addressing the identified gap, our research delves deeper into the nuanced realm of local news propaganda, offering a timely and focused analysis of its potential influence on post-election threats in Nigeria.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Media Framing Theory and is supported by the Agenda Setting theory.

2.4 Media Framing Theory

Framing theory which was propounded by Erving Goffman in 1974 in his book "*Framing analysis*." But as term, "Frame" was first used by Bateson in 1955. His context of usage was that assumptions influence how humans interpret situations they find themselves. 19 years later—1974—, Erving Goffman's argument followed by showing how humans think and make decisions based on a myriad of consistent narratives that enable them to process such narratives they are exposed to Afulike & Okoro, [21] Ajetunmobi, [22]. Robert Entman modernized this definition by specifying that "to frame a communicating 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" [23].

In 1993, however, framing theory took another dimension when scholars began to observe that happenings around communication and its processes pointed in the direction of the non-static nature of communication. The main observation then was that as people communicated, they built and set frames around the messages they did communicate to media audiences. Concepts such as frame building and frame setting then emerged. Thus, when frames are built, some factors (like editorial policies/newsroom politics) influence the narratives the news media (journalists and media organizations) adopt to report news stories. On the other hand, frame setting involves "interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions" [24] that shape behavior at the individual or the societal level. It was around this time that Entman (2007) observed that frames could be identified in different four subsets: the communicator, the text (communicative messages), the receiver and the culture [24].

Previous research has provided sufficient evidence that mass media have the power to select and "pack" the events, and, thus, to influence the way audience/readers perceive the surrounding reality. Framing is one of the mass media effects theories, largely used to analyze

how the mass-media filters information and thus, influences the public's reactions to a whole range of external stimuli [24]. A recent study by Ajetunmobi [22] on framing has revealed that journalism practice of the Nigerian press, most times, aligns with the propositions of framing and identity construction theories, but largely disconnects from its ethical principles. Accordingly, media emphasis and selections of news frames on the activities of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the fight against terrorism could influence the perceptions and opinion of the residents' and citizens of Nigeria (Ajetunmobi, 2023). Cissel [23] has examined the relationship between media framing and the way both mainstream and alternative media sources portray similar news events and found that the portrayal of the movement differed greatly depending on the source. While mass media articles framed the movement as lack-luster, dismissive and confusing, alternative news emphasized the strength and diversity of its protesters and demonstrations. Azlan (2012) has analyzed how public attitudes are shaped as a result of media framing of a subject. He notes further that there are two factors that facilitate the adoption of frames "the accessibility of an issue, and the correlation between a subject and the audience' pre-existing opinions." In other words, framing effects are not independent (Azlan, 2012, p.320). Shuck & De Vreese [25] has established that attitudes and knowledge that exist before media exposure play an important role in determining the framing effects.

Media Framing Theory is relevant to this study because it guides it in understanding media propaganda in local news surrounding post-election threats. It guides the study in understanding the relationship between media framing during post-election and the implications of such frames on consumers of the news.

2.5 Agenda Setting Theory

The study is guided by the agenda-setting theory by Maxwell McCombs & Donald Lewis Shaw [26] and the framing theory propounded by sociologist Erving Goffman (1974). The media, according to the theory, highlights certain events and then places them within a particular context to encourage or discourage certain interpretations. In this way, the media whether broadcast or print exercises a selective influence over how people view reality. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson is credited with first positing the

theory in 1972. The theory is also relevant to this study because it suggests that how an issue such as mental health disorder is presented to the audience (called "the frame") influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning. The most common use of frames is in terms of the frame the news or media places on the information they convey. This is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can influence how it is understood by audiences.

Agenda-setting theory is highly relevant to this study because it explains how the media can influence what issues are considered important by the public. In the context of post-election threats in Nigeria, media outlets can use their power to frame the narrative around these threats in a way that emphasizes certain aspects while downplaying others. For example, they might focus on the threats made by one political party while ignoring threats made by others, or they might emphasize the potential for violence while downplaying efforts to prevent it. By doing so, the media can shape public opinion and influence the actions taken by individuals and institutions in response to the threats. Similarly, social responsibility theory is relevant to this study because it doesn't accommodate irresponsible media reporting and frowns at unbalanced, lack of fairness, and subjective reporting which is a catalyst to avoid fuelling tensions and conflicts in society.

In a nutshell, analysis of the impact of media propaganda on local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria requires an understanding of how agenda-setting theory and social responsibility theory can influence public opinion and shape the public's response to these threats. By examining how media outlets frame the narrative and how this affects public discourse, it is possible to identify ways to promote a more balanced and informed discussion of the issues at hand.

2.6 Brief Profile of Mr. Peter Obi

Peter Gregory Obi CON is a Nigerian businessman and politician who served as the Governor of Anambra State three separate times from 2006 to 2014. In May 2022, he became the Labour Party nominee for President of Nigeria in the 2023 Presidential Election but came third behind the All Progressive Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) [27].

Born in Onitsha in 1961, Obi graduated from the University of Nigeria in 1984. Afterwards he entered business and banking, eventually rising to hold several high-ranking executive positions at banks. By the early 2000s, Obi was the chairman of Fidelity Bank before leaving the position to enter politics. Obi ran for governor in 2003, as a member of the All Progressives Grand Alliance but his main opponent was unlawfully declared victor. After three years of legal battles, Obi was declared winner in 2006 and assumed office that March. He was then impeached that November before the impeachment was overturned and he returned to office in February 2007. Again, Obi was removed when a new election was held in April 2007 but the judiciary intervened again and ruled that he should be allowed to complete a full four-year term. In 2010, he won re-election to a second term. Obi's terms were marked by improvements in state finances, education, and healthcare [27].

After leaving office in 2014, Obi gained new status as an advocate for good governance and national political figure after decamping to the People's Democratic Party in 2014. In 2019, he was selected as the vice presidential nominee in the presidential election running alongside Atiku Abubakar, but lost to incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari and vice president Yemi Osinbajo [27].

On 24 March 2022, Peter Obi declared his intention to run for the position of President of Nigeria under the platform of the People's Democratic Party, but later pulled out and ran under platform of the Labour Party instead. According to the Peoples Gazette, Peter Obi wrote to the leadership of the People's Democratic Party on 24 May to resign his membership. Obi reportedly complained of massive bribing of delegates and vote buying at party's presidential primary, citing the existence of a party clique collaborating against him.

The 2023 Nigerian *presidential election* was held on 25 February 2023 to elect the president and Vice President of Nigeria. Mr. Peter Obi participated as Presidential Candidate of the Labour Party but came third by scoring 6,101,533 against Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress (APC) the winner of the 2023 presidential election who polled a total of 8,794,726 votes to defeat his closest rival, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), who scored 6,984,520 to emerge second [28].

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative textual analysis to examine propaganda in local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria. Textual analysis was used because it enabled us to gather valuable information from newspapers on the 2023 post-election threats in Nigeria and make sense out of such information [29]. As explained, textual analysis is a qualitative method used to examine content in media such as newspaper articles, television shows, websites, games, videos, and advertising. It is a type of qualitative analysis that focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text. In contrast to systematic quantitative content analysis, textual analysis reaches beyond manifest content to understand the prevailing ideologies of a particular historical and cultural moment that make a specific coverage possible [30].

Consequently, since it was practically impossible to select, study, and attempt a detailed analysis of all the newspapers, four national dailies were purposively chosen out of the Nigerian online newspaper landscape. They included *Vanguard*, *Leadership*, *Daily Post*, and *The Sun Newspaper* based on their perceived level of readership, integrity, and consistency in the online platform. The reason for the selection was based on the fact that they fall within the top ten Nigerian online newspapers in Nigeria as rated and published by allnetinfo.com cited in Ogunwande, Kur, & Babalola, [31].

This study therefore focuses on all online newspaper publications made on 4th April 2023 which falls within the post-election period and the peak of the post-election threats that made headlines in the dailies concerning treasonably felony levelled against Mr Peter Obi and the purported call interim government. Furthermore, the selected online newspapers have a daily circulation range of 100,000 copies and above which according to Udoakah (1996) cited in Omale, [8] is up to the standard requirement for a national newspaper. The circulation range mentioned here implies that the paper has a national spread and national audience appeal. In addition, the selected online newspapers have a very good online presence to their credit. To analyse how local news portrayed post-election threats, researchers selected 7 news stories published on April 4th and 5th, 2023, across 5 online newspapers: 3 from Vanguard, 2 from Daily Post, and 1 each from Sun Newspaper and

Punch Newspaper. These specific stories were chosen because they directly addressed the topic of post-election threats.

3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

3.1.1 Textual analysis

1. This is treason Federal Government of Nigeria warns Peter Obi against fanning insurrection

The Federal Government has admonished the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Mr Peter Obi from inciting people to violence over the outcome of the Presidential elections. The Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed ...said it was wrong for Obi on one breadth to seek redress in court over the outcome of the polls and on another breadth inciting people to violence... "Obi and his Vice, Datti Ahmed cannot be threatening Nigerians that if the President-elect, Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) is sworn in on May 29, it will be the end of democracy in Nigeria..." (Vanguard, 4/4/2023)

This is more of a biased and unbalanced reporting. It is more sensational and inciting capable of provoking violence from members of the public and supporters of the Labour Party in particular as the reporter failed to highlight any particular comment that is treasonable nor provided any comment to show Peter Obi's side of the story or reaction to such statements made by Lai Mohammed. Such a statement could have remained the way it is until the media gave it the caption which made headlines but succeeded in inciting tension to the already tensed and aggrieved by the outcome of the 2023 general elections exercise. It was skewed to service an interest that is not public interest-driven.

2. Dissociate yourselves from Peter Obi's alleged religious war Fani Kayode warns clerics

Director of New Media of the All Progressives Congress Presidential Campaign Council, Femi Fani-Kayode has warned religious leaders to shun religious bigotry, stressing that the country cannot allow sectarian and religious contemplations to determine its politics. Fani-Kayode made this known through a Twitter post on Tuesday, as he charged Nigerian Christian leaders not to be dragged into what he described as a 'religious war.' The APC chieftain said he was among the people who condemned the

killings of Christians in the country when the majority of those who could speak against them kept mute. "It is now left for the revered and respected leaders of the Body of Christ to disavow themselves of the hideous "religious war" agenda of Peter Obi and publicly disassociate themselves from his villainous, venal, venomous, vile and evil agenda," (Vanguard, 4/4/2023).

The study did not apportion blame per se on Fani Kayode for his post on his Twitter handle because he is not a media professional but the blame is on the media house that published such a story. A look at the story indicates a kind of lazy approach to reporting. This is because the news story looks more like a copied write-up from Fani Kayode's Twitter handle than an in-depth report which could have provided her readers evidence of comments from clerics in support of religious war as the headline claims. The phenomenon of Armchair journalism adopted by the reporter suggests a rather biased approach to the alleged claims therein submitted.

Furthermore, the report wasn't balanced because it failed to establish the fact that Mr. Peter Obi was fanning a religious war in his comments or public outings by failing to get Mr Obi's side of the story or response. This is why journalists should be careful of the kind of report they give because it will connote outright support for Fani Kayode's comment which is not in the interest of the peace hence inflaming the already tense political atmosphere in Nigeria.

3. Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN)- Obi trade words over treason allegation

Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi, has slammed the Federal Government over allegations that he was planning an insurrection, describing the claims as malicious and fictitious. Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, had accused Obi and his running mate, Baba Datti-Ahmed of inciting the citizens to revolt against the announcement of Ahmed Bola Tinubu as president-elect. He described their action as treasonable... (Sun Newspaper, 4/4/2023).

While the study regarded the above news story to be more of a responsible journalism practice where different sides of a story are considered and reported unlike previous attempts, the researchers were concerned with the tone

suggested by the choice of words. For instance, the phrase, 'Obi slammed the federal Government' conveys a tone that inspired deep-seated resentment from Labour Party loyalists and objective followers of the crisis. Given that the country is just coming out of a major election, a deep sense of social responsibility must be brought to bear on our journalist duties of framing and agenda-setting. On the other hand, the study saw that the report gave readers the power to judge for themselves and decide to draw whichever inference they wanted to draw from the story. However, the unspoken narratives hidden in the depth, focus, and framing of the representation of both sides could suggest where the writer's affection or sympathy resides. This in itself is unhealthy for journalism hence a violation of the core norms of objectivity and fairness.

4. Post-election threats: Obi, Datti risk treason charges, FGN warns

The Federal Government on Tuesday said the Labour Party presidential candidate, Peter Obi, and his running mate, Datti Baba-Ahmed, risked being prosecuted for treason over some of their utterances on the February 25 presidential election. The Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, who gave the warning in Washington, United States on Tuesday, said Obi and Baba-Ahmed's statements amounted to insurrection. He added that Obi and his running mate were inciting people to violence over the outcome of the poll. (Punch, 5/4/2023).

But the LP candidate and the People's Democratic Party refuted the allegations, describing them as reckless. The PDP and the LP warned the FG against toying with the idea of arresting the ex-governor of Anambra State.

3.1.2 'Minister reckless'

Also in a statement in Awka, the Anambra State capital, Obi described Muhammed's trip to the US and the statement as reckless. "Such reckless behaviour, sponsored with taxpayers' money, was among the reasons those countries often do not take Nigeria seriously," he said. While urging Nigerians to always remain law-abiding, Obi stated "I'm on record, as always, advocating peace and issue-based campaign, not a campaign based on ethnicity or religion."

In his reaction, the National Chairman of the Labour Party, Julius Abure, said he was disappointed with the minister's utterances.

While pointing out that only the LP candidate's campaign was issues-based, Abure described him as a 'peaceful and law-abiding person.' According to him, the FG's admonition which should have been directed at the ruling party.

Also, the PDP Deputy National Publicity Secretary, Ibrahim Abdullahi, warned the government not to flirt with the temptation of arresting the former Anambra State governor. According to Abdullahi, arresting Obi "will be detrimental to national peace and development. That line of thought (possible arrest) is as senseless as it is ill-advised." But speaking with our correspondent, the APC Director of Media, Bala Ibrahim, remarked that the LP standard bearer could not be bigger than the law of the land, saying he should be cautioned by the security agencies over his incendiary statements.

Ibrahim warned that if the United States, which is seen as the beacon of democracy could prosecute former president Donald Trump, "Why do people fear that Nigeria would burn if Obi is apprehended by security agencies? Speaking further, the APC publicity director noted, "People have been contesting and losing elections in this country, they didn't call for fire and brimstone. Why should Obi's case be different?"

On its part, the New Nigeria People's Party noted that Obi had the right to freedom of expression even as it challenged the Federal Government to charge him to court if they had sufficient evidence to support their allegation. Speaking with our correspondent, NNPP National Publicity Secretary, Major Agbo, said in a democracy, people shouldn't be scared of expressing themselves at any time. "We are in a democracy. Peter Obi has the right to say whatever he wants to say. Even if what he said is wrong, is that sufficient to call it treason and call for his arrest?"

The study found this report as being balanced and fair to the extent that it gave proper perspective on the different sides of the story and the tone of writing does not suggest support for any of the parties involved in the news story. This sort of reporting aligns with the provisions of the ethics guiding the practice of journalism in Nigeria. The specific ethical provision submits that in conflict situations, both sides be given a fair representation to show balance and good reporting. (Punch, 5/4/2023).

5. Alleged Treason: FGN should stop harassing people – Ayo Adebajo, Eleazu

Leader of the Pan-Yoruba socio-political organisation, Afenifere, Pa Ayo Adebajo, and Chairman, Board of Trustees of Anya Ndigbo, Dr. Uma Eleazu, on Tuesday, lampooned the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed for accusing the Labour Party presidential candidate, Mr. Peter Obi of making treasonable comments. They also frowned at the ethnic profiling and harassment of Igbo residents in Lagos noting that those playing up such cards are political rascals. The report read thus;

“We have had enough of these irresponsible statements coming from this Government and that is why the government has lost confidence of the people. Nobody can harass anybody because they are the government. It is the same thing they are doing by trying to gag the press. This country belongs to all of us and we are going to be judged by the rule of law and not by the rule of Lai Mohammed or Buhari. If they have evidence, arrest him, prosecute him, and jail him.” (Vanguard, 4/4/2023).

The study suspects a dangerous dimension to the impact of propaganda as it further deepens the ethnic crisis and religious lines separating the Nigerian people posing a great threat to national security. This is a dimension of reporting that contradicts the norm of social responsibility which prescribes journalistic obligations to society. Post-election reportage should be focused on peace-building and reconciliation towards creating an enabling environment for mutual understanding, development, and social stability. The framing of a news story and the quality of reportage are capable of setting an agenda for a target social system and significantly shaping the policy direction of such subjects.

6. Insurrection accusation: Lai Mohammed’s statement malicious, fictitious - Peter Obi replies Federal Government of Nigeria

Labour Party’s presidential candidate, Peter Obi has denied inciting Nigerians to violence over the outcome of the February 25 presidential elections. Lai Mohammed, Minister of Information and Culture, had made the allegation on Tuesday He said it was wrong for Obi to seek redress in court over the outcome of the polls and, in another breath, incite people to violence.

Reacting, Peter Obi, in a statement on his Twitter page on Tuesday, said there have been various campaigns of calumny against him in the last few days. Obi said Lai Mohammed’s accusation that he was stoking insurrection was malicious and fictitious. He maintained that he has never discussed or encouraged anyone to undermine the Nigerian state and has never sponsored or preached any action against the Nigerian state.

Obi tweeted: “I am on record as always, advocating for peace and issue-based campaigns and never campaigned based on ethnicity or religion. I am committed to due process, and presently seeking redress in the Court. “I urge those engaged in this demarketing process to stop presenting Nigeria in such bad light.” (Daily Post, 4/4/2023).

Reviews of the above excerpts show how propaganda, accusations, and counter-accusations between opposing political interests trailed our post-election processes. Thus, heating the polity and awakening divisive tendencies capable of threatening national peace and frustrating genuine efforts to build a formidable path to national unity. The social responsibility philosophy should prevail on key journalism actors to restrain from black-market adjectives as well as skewed agenda-setting initiatives that are partisan and downright divisive, hence the negative global perceptions of Nigeria’s image. The reports fell short of core ethical norms on many fronts for political reporting. You don’t report conflicting opinions as spitefully presented because the projected frames are capable of worsening the conflicts largely.

7. Labour Party Accuses Lai Mohammed of Misinforming International Community

The Labour Party (LP) has accused the Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, of misinforming the international community. Leadership reports that the Federal government, through the Minister of Information and Culture, had accused Peter Obi and his running mate, Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed, of treason, during an engagement with journalists in the US. But, reacting to the Minister’s position, the national chairman of the Labour Party, Barrister Julius Abure, said that it was the All Progressives Congress (APC) spokesmen that were heating the polity and not LP.

“My attention has been drawn to a media report accredited to the Minister of Information and

Culture, Alhaji Lai Muhammed to the effect that the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Peter Obi is inciting people to violence," (Leadership, 4/4/2023).

From the above presentation, it is obvious that mischief and propaganda have unfortunately been imported as elements to shape approaches to the news preparation and presentation amidst selfish personal interests and other sectional biases targeted at misleading and or heating the polity unnecessarily. That pattern of reportage is skewed to amplify frames that are ultimately injurious to public interest.

8. Research Question One: what are the elements of propaganda in local news surrounding post-election threats in Nigeria?

Based on the news stories analyzed from the selected online editions of the newspapers, the researchers identified the following as elements of propaganda, they include: labeling, false dichotomy, loaded language, appeal to authority, self-serving statement, and omission of context. For instance, in one of the stories published by Vanguard on 4/4/2023, the use of labeling, was spotted. Calling Peter Obi's statements "threatening" without providing specific evidence could be considered labeling to discredit him and his supporters. Also, False Dichotomy is another element of propaganda in the report. This is because presenting Obi's legal challenge and criticism of the election as mutually exclusive to seeking peace might be a false dichotomy, ignoring the possibility of both advocating for legal recourse and peaceful dissent. In addition, terms like "skewed narratives" and "inciting violence" carry negative connotations and aim to evoke specific emotions without necessarily providing objective evidence. Therefore, the researchers see it as a loaded language which the study regarded as an element of propaganda. Appeal to Authority is another element of propaganda used in the report. The Minister's position as government representative might be used to lend undeserved weight to his claims, without addressing potential biases or conflicting viewpoints. Declaring the elections "fairest, most transparent and authentic" without independent verification could be a self-serving statement to the government's narrative. Omission of Context is another element of propaganda. The story omits Obi's actual statements and only presents the

Minister's interpretation, potentially creating a biased representation of his position.

Furthermore, elements of propaganda such as labeling was noticed in the news story by Vanguard. For instance, Fani-Kayode labels Peter Obi's agenda as "hideous," "religious war," "villainous," "venal," "venomous," "vile," and "evil" without providing evidence to support these claims. This aims to discredit Obi and his supporters through negative connotations. He labels Obi's supporters as those crying out against a "stolen mandate" without acknowledging differing perspectives on the election's legitimacy. Omission of Context. The story omits Obi's specific statements or actions regarding a "religious war" agenda, making it difficult for readers to assess the claim's accuracy. Fani-Kayode's political affiliation with the APC and potential biases are not mentioned, potentially influencing his interpretation of events. Elements of Appeal to Authority were used as propaganda as Fani-Kayode appeals to his past condemnations of Christian killings as evidence of his concern for religious peace, potentially deflecting from his current accusations against Obi. There was a false dichotomy in the report. The statement "disavow themselves or be associated with Obi's evil agenda" presents a false dichotomy, ignoring the possibility of opposing the elections' irregularities without endorsing a "religious war" agenda.

In a story published by Sun newspaper, Minister Lai Mohammed labels Obi's statements as "inciting insurrection" without providing specific evidence. This aims to discredit Obi through negative connotations and potentially evoke fear among readers. Obi counters by labeling Mohammed's statements as "provocative utterances" intended to cause chaos. This reframes the narrative and attempts to portray the Minister as the instigator.

In terms of the false dichotomy used in the report, Mohammed presents Obi's legal challenge and criticism of the election as mutually exclusive to seeking peace. This ignores the possibility of advocating for legal recourse while simultaneously promoting peaceful dissent.

The story contained an element of omission of context, this is because the specific statements made by both Obi and Mohammed made it difficult for readers to assess the claims independently. This allows each side to control

the narrative without scrutiny of their exact statements. Neither Obi's qualifications for challenging the election nor the extent of Mohammed's "official engagements" are mentioned. This potentially influences how readers perceive the legitimacy of their respective positions.

Mohammed utilizes his government position as Minister of Information to lend authority to his claims. The researchers opined that this may give his accusations undeserved weight, especially without acknowledging potential biases or conflicting viewpoints. Obi counters by highlighting his commitment to legal redress through the courts. This implicitly appeals to the legitimacy of the legal system as a pathway for addressing concerns. Terms like "insurrection," "chaotic," and "inciting violence" are loaded language used without objective justification. This aims to evoke negative emotions and sway readers without providing concrete evidence..

9. Research question two: what are the types of propaganda that are prevalent in local news during the study period?

Sought to identify the types of propaganda that were prevalent in local news during the study period. A look at the news stories surrounding the subject matter shows that three major types of propaganda were used in the news reports concerning the alleged treasonable felony levied against Peter Obi. They include loaded language, fear-mongering, and name-calling.

Loaded language: this involves the use of emotionally charged language, buzzwords, and slogans to evoke strong reactions from the audience and influence their perceptions. This is evident in part of the news story published.

"Obi and Datti-Ahmed cannot be threatening Nigerians that if Tinubu of All Progressives Congress (APC) is sworn in on May 29, it will be the end of democracy in Nigeria. This is treason. You cannot be inviting insurrection, and this is what they are doing. Obi's statement is that of a desperate person, he is not the Democrat that he claimed to be. A democrat should not believe in democracy only when he wins the election," he said. (Vanguard 4/4/2023)

This news report alone can evoke strong reactions from the audience and provoke a form of riot and political clash among supporters of the

ruling and opposing parties. The words *threatening Nigerians...treason, inciting insurrection*, and describing Obi as a desperate person who is not a democrat is demeaning or emotionally charged language, bearing in mind the state of the nation and popular opinion concerning the results of the just concluded presidential election.

Fear mongering: the study observed from the news stories published that fear mongering which is the deliberate spreading of fear and panic among the public by highlighting negative events or exaggerating threats was used in the report. The use of the word "Treason" can cause fear and panic. The use of the word treason in a news report without concrete evidence or in-depth investigation before publication is wrong which could misinform the society and may disrupt the relative peace in the country.

Name-calling: This is the use of derogatory terms or labels to vilify a particular individual or group and create a negative perception of them. In this case, the use of the word Peter Obi may be charged with treason to create a negative perception of him which makes the news report look one-sided.

10. Research Question Three: what is the impact of media propaganda on the interpretation and consumption of local news?

The third objective of the study sought to find out the impact of media propaganda on the interpretation and consumption of local news on the alleged treason. From the news stories on the subject matter, the study observed that Media propaganda can have a substantial impact on the interpretation and consumption of news by shaping the way people perceive events and issues. This is because when media outlets present biased or misleading information, it can influence the way people understand and react to current events. The study identified four main impacts of media propaganda on news interpretation and consumption of the alleged treason levelled against Peter Obi,

Confirmation Bias: When Nigerians are exposed to information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs, they are more likely to accept it as true. Media propaganda can play on confirmation bias by presenting information that supports a particular viewpoint or agenda.

Polarization: Media propaganda can contribute to polarization by presenting extreme viewpoints and demonizing opposing views. This can lead to an "us vs. them" mentality that makes it difficult to have productive conversations about important issues. In this case, the "us vs. them" will be between the ruling party and the opposition parties.

Misinformation: When media outlets present information that is deliberately false or misleading, it can hurt society. People who consume this information may make decisions based on inaccurate information, which can have serious consequences. One can only imagine if war or riot had resulted from the news headline alone only for people to later realize that they were being misinformed by the media.

Reduced Trust in Media: the study noted that in the long run, when people become aware of media propaganda, they may begin to question the credibility of all news sources from such online newspaper organizations. This can lead to a general distrust of the media, which can make it difficult for people to make informed decisions.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis revealed that media propaganda played a significant role in shaping local news coverage of the post-election threats in Nigeria. This finding validates previous themes on the potency of media propaganda for instance in the work of Adebayo, [12] on the role of social media in the amplification of post-election violence in Nigeria. However, the current study delves into a different topic scope – textual analysis of selected online print media contents to show the threat of skewed reportage of post-election matters and the impact it portends to the Nigerian state. Adebayo was concerned with showing how those social media platforms were used to disseminate propaganda and misinformation, which contributed to the violence in the aftermath of the 2019 general elections. This study is similar to the current study as it highlights the impact of media propaganda on post-election threats, but it focuses specifically on online newspapers and approaches from a critical analytical perspective hence the findings.

The dominant themes and narratives presented in the news articles were largely influenced by the political affiliations of the media houses. For instance, newspapers known to be aligned with the ruling party tended to downplay the severity

of the threats, while those aligned with the opposition presented a more alarmist perspective. This finding enhanced further understanding of the previous submissions on the same subject by Adegoke, [13] who in seeking to understand journalism and propaganda in a comparative analysis of the coverage of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, compared the coverage of the 2019 Nigerian elections by different news outlets and highlights how propaganda influenced their reporting. Like this current research, the study found that some media outlets were more biased than others, thus, leading to the post-election violence witnessed. This study specifically examined the impact of media propaganda on post-election violence, focusing scrupulously on journalism.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed a prevalence of fake news and misinformation, which further reinforced the polarized narratives presented in the news articles. Furthermore, Akpan, & Bassey, [14] in a study on Media Propaganda and the Nigerian State: A critical Appraisal of the coverage of the 2019 General Elections, appraised the coverage of the 2019 Nigerian elections by the media and found that media propaganda played a significant role in the escalation of violence. Though the study is similar to the current study to the extent that it examines the impact of media propaganda on post-election threats, the current attempt is different because it carefully investigates textual presentation to identify propaganda elements in the selected reports (news stories) with severe threats to the collective peace and unity of the Nigerian state.

In a nutshell, the analysis of the selected local news stories revealed that media propaganda played a significant role in shaping the public discourse and framing of the post-election threats in Nigeria about how news stories about alleged treason levelled against Peter Obi were published. Similarly, Alhassan, Afolabi & Adebayo [12] studied Election propaganda and post-election violence in Nigeria: a historical perspective and found that propaganda has been used to manipulate public opinion, which has led to violence. While both studies present submissions ascribe enormous powers to media propaganda as a spur of violence, the major point of divergence is that the current research can show how media propaganda on post-election threats, impacts a multilingual and multi-ethnic society like Nigeria focusing specifically on

the alleged treason levied against Peter Obi as reported in online newspapers of 4th April, 2023. Thus, it was recommended that more in-depth stories as well as balanced positive or negative frames be emphasized rather than biased frames.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the analysis for this study highlighted the need for media houses in Nigeria to uphold ethical standards in their coverage of events. Media propaganda, particularly in the context of post-election threats, can have a detrimental effect on democracy and fuel social unrest. Therefore, media houses should strive to present balanced and objective coverage of events to promote national unity and stability.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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