

CURSORY LOOK AT TYPES OF NEWSPAPERS' CONTENTS ON POLITICAL CRISIS SITUATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Newspapers are seemingly synonymous with news stories, most interestingly, during political crisis situations, anywhere in the world. However, there exist other types of newspapers' contents employable in any newspapers' coverage of issues or events. This paper therefore seeks to determine the major types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria; and ascertain the extent to which news stories are higher than other types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria. The media dependency theory frames the study, while the content analysis research design via coding sheet was adopted as the study design towards obtaining the needed primary data. The study concludes that newspapers in Nigeria are grossly but surprisingly lacking in editorials on political crisis situations; news stories are consistently the major type of newspapers' content on political issues or events; there is a significant difference between the newspapers contents that are news stories and other types of content; the three major types of newspapers' coverage of the selected political crisis situations that were studied are news stories; letters/text-to-the-editor; and features. However, there is no significant difference between the numbers of newspapers' news stories between each political crisis situations studied. Recommendations include: an improved interest in other types of newspapers' content in order to inculcate versatility which may help towards public opinion formation, especially, during political crisis situations; also newspaper editors should and must considered the voice of the newspapers (editorials) as a major or main stay of newspapers during, but not just political crisis situations.

Key terms: Newspapers' contents; Political crisis

Introduction

Newspapers are largely or seemingly understood to be synonymous with news stories. However, there exist several other types of newspapers' contents. In relation to the foregoing, newspapers are also seen as one of the most important mass media anywhere in the world. In Nigeria, the history and nature of newspapers are politically connected to Nigeria's colonial role. The Nigerian press history dates back to 1859 when the first newspaper *Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba*, established by an Anglican Missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend, was published in Abeokuta, South West of Nigeria (Duyile, 2007). Townsend, had in 1854, established a printing press and set up a printing school in Abeokuta prior to the publication of the newspaper which was first mainly in Yoruba (1859-1866), and later bilingual (1866-1867). Townsend had made it clear from the outset that the paper was established with the aim of providing information for the Egba people and the Yoruba community. This already shows that one of the primary aims of newspapers is the basic provision of information.

Today, newspapers are still a vital part of Nigeria information system. Nevertheless, the Nigerian political system which witnessed a lot of instability, until the return to democratic role in 1999, and yet continued to be experience some serious political crisis has had the newspaper publications all the way as part of the challenging democratic journey. While news is already synonymous with newspapers' coverage of events or issues, one can only imagine the level at which other types of newspapers' content are explored in the coverage of some of the political crisis situations. In view of the foregoing this paper takes a cursory look at types of newspaper contents on some political crisis situations in Nigeria. The political crisis situations are: the alleged third term agenda of President Obasanjo's; President Yar'adua's illness and resulting absence in office; and the post 2011 presidential election violent protests in the North.

President Obasanjo's alleged third term agenda: President Obasanjo's alleged third term bid, became public knowledge in the last quarter of 2005. As a result President Obasanjo's government constituted the National Political Reform Conference. After a thorough debate on the constitutional amendment bill, the National Assembly, on May 16, 2006 rejected the agenda, thus ending the third term ambition of the president as well as an amendment of other relevant clauses in the constitution. See (Oyebode, 2006; Olurode 2006; Momoh, 2006).

President Yar'Adua's absence and constitutional crisis: on May 29, 2007, Yar'Adua became Nigeria's president. Nevertheless, he became sick and left for medical treatment on November 23, 2009 in Saudi Arabia. The long absence from office created a vacuum, thus led the country into a constitutional crisis. The presidency was enmeshed in a controversy of whether the Vice President, Jonathan, should assume the office of the president in an acting capacity, pending Yar'Adua's return or steer clear of the office for lack of proper transmission of power. The National Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives), in what it dubbed as "the doctrine of necessity," jointly passed a resolution on February 9, 2010 that the vice president should become the acting president even without a written letter from the president transmitting such powers as enshrined in section 145 of the 1999 constitution. This sort of helped managed the political crisis. President Yar'Adua's finally died on May 5, 2010, thus putting an end to the political imbroglio.

Post 2011 elections violent protests in the northern part of Nigeria: after the 2011 Presidential election on April 16. Leading contenders for the exalted position were the incumbent, President Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP); Muhamodu Buhari of

the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Ibrahim Shekarau of the All Nigeria's Peoples Party (ANPP); except Jonathan, the rest are from northern Nigeria. After Jonathan was declared winner, there were violent protests in the North, with insinuations of election malpractices that favored Jonathan. Worst hit were the Northern states of Bauchi, Adamawa, Katsina and Kaduna (*Sunday Sun*, May 15, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The press in Nigeria and particularly, newspapers are a very essential aspect of the political landscape of the country. Since 1859, after the so called first newspaper was established, newspapers have been reporting about politics –particularly, political crisis situations, democracy, government and governance in Nigeria (Duyile, 2007). However, given the perceived or real popularity of news stories over other types of newspaper contents, one may yet wonder the extent to which other various types of newspapers' contents like editorials, features, pictorials, advertorials, tributes, cartoons, commentaries, opinions, as well as letters-to-the-Editor or Text-to-the Editor are reflected in newspaper coverage. With particular attention to political crisis situations, this paper therefore deems it pertinent to take a look, though, cursory in nature, at various types of newspaper contents there are on political crisis situations in Nigeria. This is with a view to understanding how other seemingly important, but possibly negligible types of newspapers' contents are used in their coverage of political crisis situation.

Research Questions

This study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the three major types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria?
2. To what extent are news stories possibly higher than other types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested, thus:

H₀₁: No significant difference exists between percentage of news stories and the percentage of other types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria.

H₀₂: No significant differences exist between the percentage of news stories on each of the political crisis situations in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the three major types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the extent to which news stories are higher than other types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

This paper simply takes a look at types of newspapers' content on political crisis situation in Nigeria with the expectation that it may be of scholarly benefit to student of mass communication, academics, media analyst, and others who may be interested in how newspaper editors may have explored or used various types of newspapers' content in their coverage of issues and events, especially, types of newspaper contents like editorials, news, features,

opinions, advertorials, pictorials, letter-to-the-editor/text-to-the-editor among others. Given the likely sensitivities related to political crisis situations, this paper hope to be of benefit to the general reading audience who may wish to participate more in politics through newspaper coverage.

Operational Definition of Terms

The following definitions are operationally provided:

Newspapers' contents: refers to the various ways or manner through which newspapers provide content about events and issues. As used through this paper, newspapers' contents are seen as types of text and pictures on political crisis in Nigeria.

Political crisis: refers to as an expressed struggle or differences between politicians, political parties and government, which affects the peaceful coexistence of the society. The term as used herein refers to violent and non-violent crises that have political implications.

Conceptual Review

According to Morris (2000, p.1) the society expects newspapers among other media to fulfill certain goals. Commentators commonly suggest that media such as newspapers should raise public awareness and stimulate community activism during campaigns. Many believe that the news media has a particular responsibility to strengthen democracy, through political coverage that should educate the public about major issues, inform citizens about the contenders for office, and mobilize people to turn out.

Accordingly, to Duyile (2007) says that newspapers are the first form of modern mass communication in Nigeria. Indeed, press and politics are mutually related because they both function in concert to structure and influence human societies. In democracies, the media have a complex relationship with sources of power and the political system, as they (the media) provide channels by which the state and powerful interests address the people, as well as provide platforms for the views of political parties and other interest groups (McQuail, 2010).

Just as the press is important to the political class, so is politics to the press as it cannot ignore political activities in its widest coverage. As a matter of fact, media content, the world over, is dominated largely by politics, economy and entertainment; and of these, politics tends to enjoy the widest coverage in most countries.

The Nigerian press, for example, cannot ignore politics because it is, as it were, the biggest and most lucrative industry or enterprise today. It is worthy of note that the bulk of the advertisements in the media in Nigeria today is from government and the political class. Thus, the press also needs government and political activities to survive. McQuail (2010, p.241) has summed it up thus: "Politics cannot do without the media, and the kind of (news) media we have would struggle without politics."

This implies that both political and media institutions have an independent power base in the society which can be traced to their respective relations with the audience. In other words, political institutions have communication aspects (the media), while media institutions also have political aspects.

The normative source of media power is better appreciated during conflict (between the media and the political class). When such arises, the recognition of the tenets of freedom of expression in competitive democracies is brought to the fore. This freedom empowers the

media and some other specialised organs to safeguard citizens against possible abuses by political authority.

In a similar vein, press and political crisis are birds of a feather because the press takes to huge coverage of political crisis. Abimbola (2008) sees political crisis as a product of unresolved political conflict. Political conflicts are expressed struggles or differences between politicians, political parties and government. Political crisis, therefore, is a situation in which there are lots of political problems threatening the coexistence of a society. Such problems often precipitate violence in a given society. Thus, political crisis can be said to be related to political violence.

Therefore, in relations to political crisis the press as a vital organ of the society is supposed to perform its traditional functions of information, education and sensitisation of the citizens. During crisis situations, the press is supposed to act as a catalyst for conflict resolution and peace building. This is what some scholars refer to as advocacy and peace journalism. Highlighting the significant role of the press in political crisis periods in Nigeria, Adedimeji (2005, p.121) says: "Among other agencies or social organs that have risen to the challenge of redressing the wounds of conflicts and addressing the problems engendering violence, the media tower high."

Atim (2010, p.24) quoted a former President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, as saying: "The press is capable of making or destroying governments given appropriate conditions: it can cause war, create conditions for peace. It can promote development or create difficulties in the way of development." The question of how the press like newspapers plays their roles in coverage of political crisis situations may almost immediately be answered in favour of news stories.

Nevertheless, there are other types of newspaper coverage that come to bear in relation to topical issues. This includes editorials, letters-to-editor/text-to-the-editor, advertorials, pictorials, cartoons, features, and commentaries.

The type of coverage employed by any newspaper other than news may therefore imply that the opinions of the public or those of the newspaper are allowed to hold sway. Though it is sometimes difficult to ascertain objective or balance, there appears to be a common thinking that news are facts and not opinion. Other than news stories, every other content of a newspaper is considered either as the opinion of the public or that of the newspaper.

Media Dependency Theory

This theory was developed by Sandra Ball-Rockeach and McIlan Defleur in 1976. The theory posits that the media dependent upon for information to meet variety of purposes. According to the theory there is an internal link between media, audience and large social systems. The audience learning from real life is limited so they can use media to get more information to fulfill their needs. The theory further suggests that an extensive use of the media generates dependent relation in audience and also media can create dependency relationship target audience to achieve their goal by using media power. The dependency theory is therefore seen to some extent as an extension of the uses and gratification, but with less focus on the effects (Baran, 2010).

The foregoing implies that the degree of dependency is dependent on individual information needs; the level of social stability, and the activism of the individual in relation to economic political and socio-cultural conditions. The theory is considered relevant to this study because the media, according to the theory, create dependency by offering contents which fulfill the readers or audience needs for understanding, entertainment /information; cognitive motivations towards attention to the media and affective motivation towards attention towards satisfaction with media

content; as well as the interaction of cognitive and affective motivations towards higher level of involvement of the readers/audience information process and processing.

Research Methodology

The content analysis research design via coding sheet was adopted. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2000) and Borden and Abbott (2008, p. 238) the content analysis research design is very applicable to this empirical paper. The population of study was editions of *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Sun*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* between November 1, 2005 and May 30, 2011. The newspapers were randomly selected among 10 national dailies in Nigeria. Through the systematic sampling technique, samples of newspaper editions were picked. The breakdown of the sampling process is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Breakdown of sample size of newspaper editions

S/ N	Political Crises	Periods of Study	Total Editions	Sampling Interval	Sample Size
1.	President Obasanjo's Third Term Agenda	November 1, 2005 to May 31, 2006	212 x 5 (1,060)	5.0	42 x 5 (210)
2.	Power vacuum created by President Yar'Adua's absence from office	November 23, 2009 to May 23, 2010	182 x 5 (910)	5.0	36 x 5 (180)
3.	Violent protests in the North over the declaration of Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of 2011 Presidential Poll	April 17, to May 30, 2011	44 x 5 (220)	2.0	22 x 5 (110)
	TOTAL		447 x 5 (2,235)		100 x 5 (500)

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

Furthermore, all like newspaper content types were considered as content categories, thus: news stories, feature articles, opinions, editorials comments, interviews, pictures, cartoons, letter/text messages to the editors as well as advertorials (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2005; Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). The test of validity and reliability of coders and the coding sheet was **0.6**; the test was done via the correlation coefficient **r**, According to Buda and Jarynowski (2010) **0.6** is a high validity and reliability score.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Table 2: Types of Coverage -OBJ third term agenda

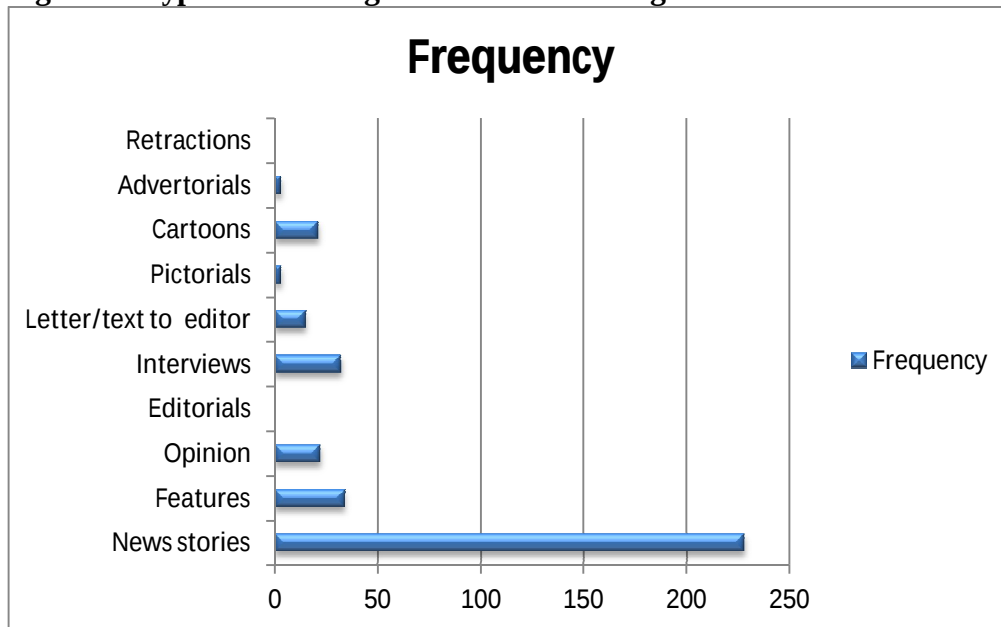
Type	Daily Trust	Punch	Sun	Guardian	Tribune	Frequency	(%)
News stories	52	38	67	35	36	228	63.7
Features	7	0	11	8	8	34	9.5
Opinion	7	3	4	0	8	22	6.1
Editorials	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviews	3	2	17	3	7	32	9
Letter/text to editor	5	5	1	1	3	15	4.2
Pictures	0	2	1	0	0	3	0.83
Cartoons	3	0	8	2	8	21	5.9

Advertorials	2	0	1	0	0	3	0.83
Retractions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	79	50	110	49	70	358	100

Source: Content Analysis, 2013

Table 2 depict that *The Sun* newspaper had 110 items -the highest number of coded items on the President Obasanjo's third term bid. This is followed by 79 items from the *Daily Trust*; 70 items from *Tribune*; 50 from *The Punch* and 49 from *The Guardian*. Table 4.5 further shows that news items accounted for 228 (63.7%), features accounted for 34 (9.5%), opinions accounted for 22 (6.1%), interviews accounted for 32 (9%), letter/text to-the-editor accounted for 15 (4.2%), pictures accounted for 3 (0.83%), cartoons accounted for 21(5.9%), while advertorials accounted for 3 (0.83%). There were no editorials and retractions. These data show that the majority of the press items on President Obasanjo's third term bid, just like the other political situations studied, were significantly news stories. This implies that news stories still hold a significant sway in newspapers' coverage of significant contemporary issues such as politics. The details of the data in Table 2 are graphically illustrated in Figure 1 thus:

Figure 1: Types of Coverage -OBJ third term agenda



Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

Table 3: Types of Coverage -Yar'Adua's illness

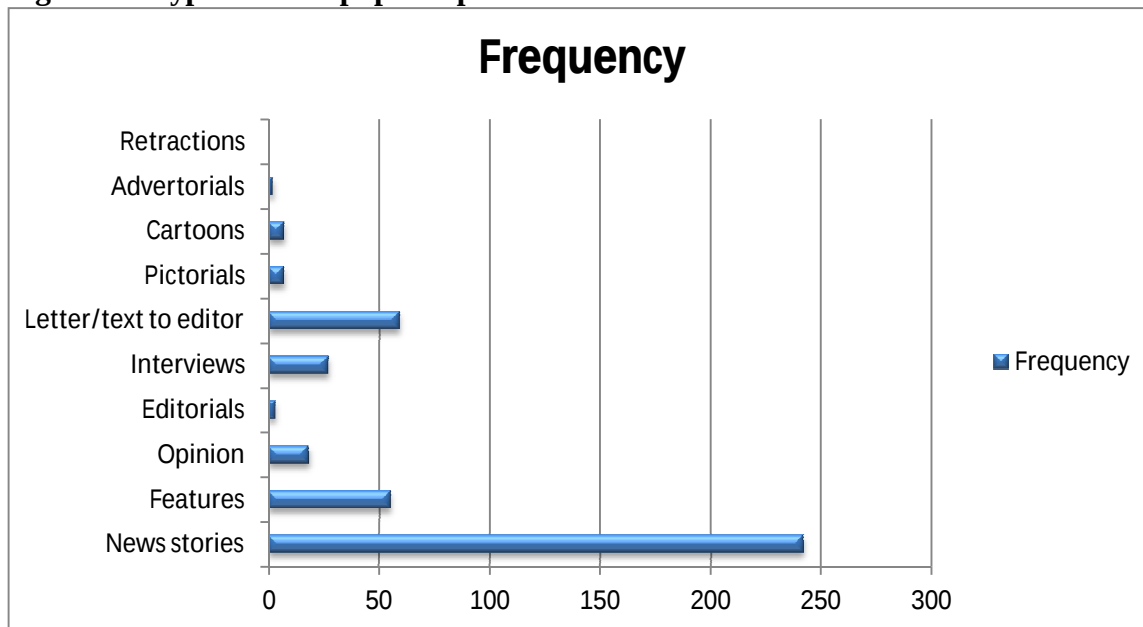
Type	Daily Trust	Punch	Sun	Guardian	Tribune	Frequency	(%)
News stories	73	42	35	40	52	242	57.6
Features	3	04	22	9	17	55	13.1
Opinion	4	0	5	4	5	18	4.3
Editorials	0	1	0	0	2	3	0.7
Interviews	2	03	9	11	2	27	6.4
Letter/text to editor	53	0	4	1	1	59	14

Pictures	1	0	1	2	3	7	1.7
Cartoons	0	0	3	1	3	7	1.7
Advertorials	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.5
Retractions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	138	50	79	68	85	420	100

Source: Content Analysis, 2013

Table 3 depict that *Daily Trust* had 138 items -the highest number of coded items on the issue of Yar'Adua's illness. This is followed by 85 items from *Tribune*; 79 from *The Sun* newspaper; 68 items from *The Guardian*, and 50 from *The Punch*. Table 4.6 further shows that news items accounted for 242 (57.6%), features accounted for 55 (13.1%), opinions accounted for 18 (4.3%), editorials accounted for 3 (0.7%), interviews accounted for 27 (6.4%), letter/text to-the-editor accounted for 59 (14%), pictorials accounted for 7 (1.7%), cartoons accounted for 7 (1.7%), while advertorials accounted for 2 (0.5%). there were no retractions. These data show that majority of the press items on the Yar'Adua's illness, just like the other political situations studied, were significantly news stories. News stories are therefore shown to still hold sway in newspapers' coverage of significant contemporary issues such as politics. Details of data in Table 3 are graphically illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Types of newspaper reports -Yar'Adua's illness



Source: Content Analysis, 2013

Table 4: Types of Coverage –Post election protests

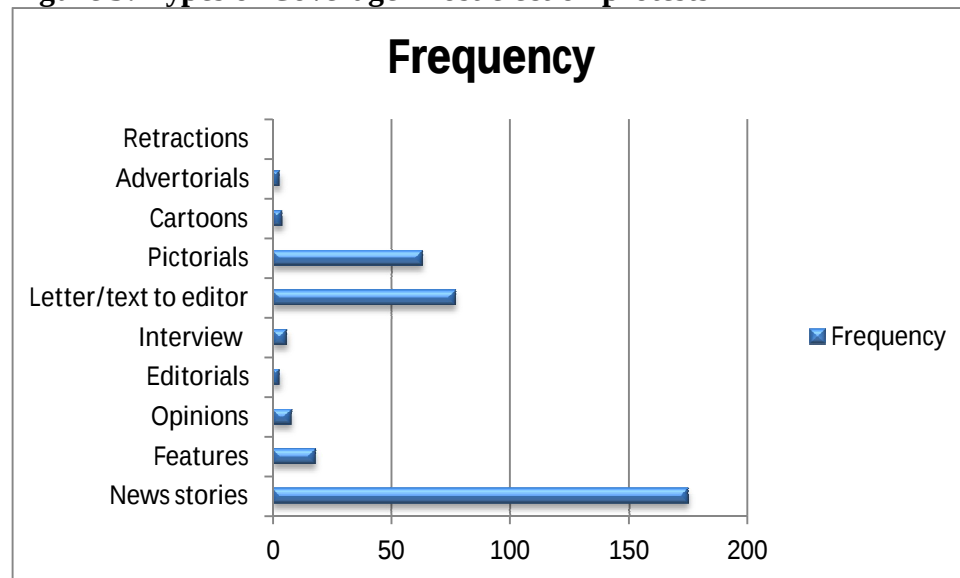
Type	Daily Trust	Punch	Sun	Guardian	Tribune	Frequency	(%)
News stories	85	21	47	14	8	175	49.1
Features	6	1	8	03	0	18	5
Opinions	2	1	2	2	1	8	2.2

Editorials	0	1	1	0	1	3	0.8
Interview	1	0	5	0	0	6	1.7
Letter/text to editor	73	2	2	0	0	77	21.6
Pictorials	8	0	47	8	0	63	17.7
Cartoons	2	1	1	0	0	4	1.1
Advertorials	2	0	0	1	0	3	0.8
Retractions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	179	27	113	28	10	357	100

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

Table 4 shows that *Daily Trust* had 179 items -the highest number of coded items on the post-election protests. This is followed by 113 items from *The Sun* newspaper; 28 items from *The Guardian*; 27 from *The Punch*, while *Tribune* had 10 coded items. Table 4.7 further shows that news items accounted for 175 (49.1%), features accounted for 18 (5%), opinions accounted for 8 (2.2%), editorials accounted for 3 (0.8%), interviews accounted for 6 (1.7%), letter/text to the editor accounted for 77 (21.6%), pictorials accounted for 63 (17.7%), cartoons accounted for 4 (1.1%), advertorials accounted for 3(0.8%), while there were no retractions. These data show that the majority of the press items on the post-election protests, just like the other political situations studied, were significantly news stories. News stories are therefore, shown to still hold sway in newspapers' coverage of significant contemporary issues such as politics. The details of data in Table 4 are graphically illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Types of Coverage –Post election protests



Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

Table 4: Cumulative Data- Types of Coverage on Selected Political Crisis Situations in Nigeria

Types	Third Term Agenda	Yar'Adua Illness	Post Election Violence	Total	(%)
News stories	228	242	175	645	56.9
Features	34	55	18	107	9.4

Opinions	22	18	8	48	4.2
Editorials	0	3	3	6	0.5
Interview	32	27	6	65	5.7
Letter/text to editor	15	59	77	151	13.3
Pictorials	3	7	63	73	6.4
Cartoons	21	7	4	32	2.9
Advertorials	3	2	3	8	0.7
Retractions	0	0	0	0	0.0
Grand Total	358	420	357	1135	100

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

The cumulative data shows that out of the 1135 items contained in the newspapers' coverage of selected political crisis situations in Nigeria, the top three were news stories -56.9%; letters/text-to-the-editor -13.3%; and features -9.4%. The others, according to descending order are pictorials -6.4%; interviews -5.7%; opinions -4.2%; cartoons -2.9%; advertorials -0.7%; editorials -0.5%; and retractions -0%.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho₁: No significant difference exists between percentage of news stories and the percentage of other types of newspapers' contents on political crisis situations in Nigeria. The test of hypothesis one showed that significant difference exist between the percentage of news stories and the percentage of other types of newspapers' contents: ($X^2 = 4.2$; $P < 0.05$). Hence, hypothesis one (**Ho₁**) is rejected.

Ho₂: No significant differences exist between the percentages of news stories on each of the political crisis situations in Nigeria. The test of hypothesis two showed there are no significant differences exist between percentages of news stories on the Obasanjo's Third term Bid and Yar'Adua's illness: ($X^2 = 0.0001$; $P > 0.05$); Obasanjo's Third term Bid and Post Election Violence: ($X^2 = 0.001$; $P > 0.05$); as well as Yar'Adua's illness and Post Election Violence ($X^2 = 0.0004$; $P > 0.05$). Hypothesis two is therefore accepted.

Conclusion

The study concludes as follows:

1. The major types of newspapers' coverage of the three selected political crisis situations are news stories -56.9%; letters/text-to-the-editor -13.3%; and features -9.4%.
2. News stories are consistent the major type of newspapers' content on political issues or events. In the selected political crisis situations –the third term agenda, Yar'Adua's illness, and the post election violence, news stories respectively accounted for 63.7%; 57.6%; and 49.1%
3. Irrespective of the cumulative data, the study found out that features are also a main stay of newspapers' content. **Features** came second to news stories in two of the selected political crisis situations –the third term agenda and Yar'Adua's illness, with 9.5% and 13.1% respectively.
4. News stories are consistently far higher than almost all other newspapers content types. They accounted for almost half of the entire newspapers content. It therefore reasonable to conclude that the term “newspaper” is synonymous with news stories.
5. Nigeria's national dailies are grossly but surprisingly lacking in editorials towards political crisis situations in Nigeria. While the overall total for editorials is 0.5%, there

five newspapers –Daily Trust, Punch, Sun, Guardian and Tribune all did not have any single editorial among the contents analysed.

Recommendations

This paper therefore recommends thus:

1. Newspapers may still continue to consider news stories as there may stay but should also develop more interest in other types of content in order to inculcate versatility of content. This is expected to encourage other types of contents like features/columns, opinions, commentaries, responses and editorials which may be help towards public opinion formation, especially, during political crisis situations.
2. Press professionals, the Nigerian Press Council, Nigeria Guide of Editors, other government and non-governmental organisations and relevant international bodies interested in government and governance, politics, as well as political crisis resolutions should encourage further and similar researches on a larger scale. This considered relevant viz-a-viz the inroads of other digital technology in broadcasting and the social/internet based media.
3. This study encourages readers to further analyse the data in relation to the various political crisis situations in Nigeria and beyond. This is expected to lead towards an enhanced understanding and motivation towards similar studies in Nigeria and beyond.
4. Based on the conclusion that editorials were gross lacking in the newspapers content or types on the selected political crisis situations in Nigeria, this study therefore recommends also that newspaper editors should and must considered the voice of the newspapers (editorials) as a major or main stay of newspapers during, but not just political crisis situations.

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