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**ONLINE NEWSPAPERS REPORTING OF HOMELAND  
POLITICS TO DIASPORIC NIGERIANS DURING  
THE 2011 NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:  
A PERSPECTIVE FROM MALAYSIA**

*by*

*Lambe Kayode Mustapha &  
Saodah Wok*

**ABSTRACT**

*This study presented what Nigerian newspapers on the Web beamed to Nigerian foreign resident citizens during the 2011 Nigerian presidential election. Premised on the importance of diasporas to homeland political development and the centrality of the web media to the migrants in today's globalized world, the paper explored how homeland online newspapers connected the diasporas with Nigerian political transition. By content analyzing three major Nigerian online newspapers, the Daily Trust, the Punch, and the Vanguard, the paper concentrated on the supply side of information to Nigerians in diasporas, thus inundating them with what to think and how to think about the election and the candidates. Beyond presenting the key issues and candidates' attributes covered in the online newspapers (the predictor variable in agenda-setting study) during the presidential election, this study found that Nigerian online newspapers prioritised election issues and candidates' attributes differently for the main contenders in the election. The paper thus challenged the Nigerian media to consider their diasporic audience in their news production and distribution, particularly in the light of increasing agitations for direct political participation among Nigerians in diaspora.*

**Keywords:** Online newspapers, Homeland politics, Election issues, Candidates' attributes, Nigerian 2011 presidential election

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## INTRODUCTION

Citizens of many nations today take advantages inherent in the globalization currents to explore and exploit opportunities beyond the frontiers of their geographical places of birth. The increasing integration of global economic systems, aided by advances in information and communication technologies, facilitates the ease with which these cosmopolitan global citizens move back and forth in their sojourns for better life and greener pasture. While migration from *push* nations and diasporic attraction *pull* nations **are inherently laden with prospects and challenges**, they have been recognised as a means to acquisition of soft power, which, in today's global political economy relations, remains an important strategic tool in the pursuance of global peace.

Soft power, premised on the use of nation's cultural, ideological and institutional resources to seek attractiveness from other international actors, provides a strategic branding option for nations interested in increasing their net worth within and without their shores (Fan, 2008; Li, 2009; Nye, 1990). While soft power has been considered a fluid concept (Fan, 2008), it is identified as an instrument that could change international institutions and agendas (Li, 2009). Although soft power could be gained via many sources, the role of migrants in nations' appropriation of soft power has attracted limited attention.

By their presence in host nations, migrants constitute future ambassadorial resources for nations hosting them. In their period of transnational residency, however, migrants depend on their homeland media system to maintain bound with their home countries. This transnational media dependency becomes more important during political transition in the homeland. The role of media in general and the homeland ones in particular has received great attention of migrants and transnational studies' scholars. More importantly, the centrality of media to migrants' identity construction has been given much attention (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Chan, 2005; Macri, 2011; Tanikella, 2009). Most of these studies examined how immigrants create diasporic public sphere on the cyberspace to maintain linkage with their homeland and

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network with other diasporas across the world. However, little attention has been accorded the relevance of homeland media on the Web to the migrants.

The role of migrants in today's cosmopolitan world, their contributions to and expectations from their host nations and homeland respectively, vis-à-vis their homeland media use have also received paltry attention. In view of the potential of online newspapers to engender diasporic nationalism, which is capable of fueling the interests of the migrants in their host nations' and homelands' political trajectories, this paper presents the dominant election issues and candidates' attributes presented by Nigerian online newspapers to Nigerian in diaspora during the 2011 Nigerian presidential election. Besides, the paper explicates the agenda-setting potential of online newspapers for political cognitions, attitudes and behaviours of diasporic Nigerian and urges homeland news media organizations to evolve mechanisms that can harness contributions of Nigerian foreign residents. The other parts of the paper include literature review, methodology, discussion of findings and, conclusion.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Agenda-setting Theory**

Agenda-setting, pioneered by McCombs and Shaw (1972), holds that the mass media influence public opinion through transfer of salience from media agenda to the public agenda. Agenda-setting research operationalises the abstract notion contained in Lippmann's (1922) *Public Opinion*, a treatise that borders on the role of the mass media in connecting members of the public to the realities in their external environment.

Beginning from the premise of cognitive media effects, agenda-setting has produced a corpus of reports evidencing the power of the media in shaping public opinion through positioning and framing of news (Coleman, McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2009; Kioussis, 2004; McCombs, 2004, 2005). In *Setting the Agenda*, a compendium of path-breaking researches in agenda-setting, McCombs (2004) submits that agenda-setting has been validated in a series of studies covering several social issues in many locales across the world, using different media

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platforms and analytical tools

The emergence of *new media*, however, precipitated a new search in the potency of media to set agenda for public discourse, opinion and action. Beginning with pessimistic notions that the news media, particularly online newspapers, are incapable of influencing public opinion via the mechanisms of agenda-setting (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; de Waal, 2008; de Waal & Schoenbach, 2007), a number of studies have documented agenda-setting effects of new media in general and online newspapers in particular (Jeon, 2005; Maier, 2010; Mustapha & Wok, 2013; Roberts, Wanta & Dzwo, 2002; Yu & Aikat, 2005). Being a local media on a global platform, online newspapers are not only poised to serve audience beyond the frontiers of their production base, but also have potential to influence their audiences' perception of issues and events covered. Hence, transnational migrants are today likely to be inundated with agenda of issues in their homeland from their foreign residences.

### **HOMELAND ONLINE NEWSPAPERS AND THE MIGRANTS**

Nations' online newspapers serve as repositories of homeland information for the migrants and general public. Today, advances in information and communication technologies have globalizing consequences for events happening in any part of the world. Hence, geographical proximity has reduced the importance for people to know about events happening in any part of the world. The technological advances, which have led to deterritorialization of news, assist migrants in staying connected with events happening in their homeland (Chan, 2005; Qiu, 2003; Sharma, Kashyap, Montes & Ladd, 2011; Tanikella, 2009). This homeland attachment, through online newspapers, fills the void of homeland nostalgia usually experienced by the migrants in their new locations (Kim, 2011; Macri, 2011; Skogerbo & Winsvold, 2011).

Online newspapers also provide platforms through which migrants acquire knowledge of political, social and economic development in their countries of origin. These media are consumed mainly to keep in touch with what happens in the homeland as well as other parts of the world (Alshehri & Gunter, 2002; Hashim,

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Hasan&Sinnapan, 2007; Macri, 2011). The opportunity of the migrants to offer comments via the online newspapers' comment forum gives the diasporas a sense of belonging and confers on them a passive political participatory instincts. If well appropriated, the online discussions and comments from the diasporas could set as political agenda for the homeland government (Brinkerhoff, 2009). Therefore, accessing local newspapers online could assist the migrants in building community and connecting with political representatives (Mersey, 2010; Skogerbo & Winsvold, 2011). Consideration of comments posted by the diasporas in subsequent news production and distribution could also amount to contribution of huge political capital to the homeland from afar.

### **MIGRANTS, HOST NATIONS AND THE HOMELAND**

Generally, migrants are believed to be great assets in assisting capacity utilization of developed and emerging nations. Brinkerhoff (2009), for example, describes migrants as "important actors in global and domestic affairs." From the imperial epoch to the globalization era, transnational migrants have contributed to global relations among the people of the world. Migrants have capacity to secure global network and transnational affiliations for their host and homeland (Bailey, Georgiou, Haridranath, 2007). The recognition of migrants as agents of development has thus attracted the attention of multinational organisations, including the United Nations (Sharma, Kashyap, Montes & Ladd, 2011).

According to Levitt (1998), migrants are vectors of cross-border spread of ideas, identities, beliefs, knowledge and behaviours (cited in Perez-Armendariz & Crow, 2010). "Migrants are always already embedded in power relationships with at least two nation-states - the host state and the homeland (Chan, 2005: 347). The dual loci of migrants in origin and residency confer on them a utilitarian role for the host nation and the home country. While migrants can contribute to economic development of the host nations and offer other intangible benefits, they also remit economic, social and political capitals to their homeland (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Akinrinade&Ogen, 2011; Perez-Armendariz& Crow, 2010). However, the process of migration is usually dynamic, complex, and confounding to the migrants (Elias

important resources in helping migrants to cope with various forms of adaptation and integration (Bernal, 2006; Elias & Lemish, 2011; Tanikella, 2009).

## **NIGERIANS IN MALAYSIA AND HOMELAND NEWSPAPERS**

Like many countries of the world, Malaysia hosts quite a number of Nigerians, majority of who are students in Malaysian tertiary institutions. By the records of Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, Nigeria ranks fourth among nations whose students patronise Malaysian higher education service (MOHE, 2011). These Nigerians rely on homeland newspapers on the Web not only to keep abreast of happenings in Nigeria, but to be acquainted with how their kith and kin are affected by the nation's socio-economic and political trajectories (Mustapha & Wok, 2011). Nigerians in Malaysia, like their contemporaries in other parts of the world, perceive the representation of socio-economic and political situations back home and worry about citizens back home. This informs their appreciation of challenges facing the nation and the willingness to contribute their quotas in both tangible and intangible forms. The media on the Web also provide cues on the interventional initiatives that the migrants could offer to help in addressing the nation's challenges. While such initiatives represent the contributions of foreign resident Nigerians to the nation's development, sparse attention has been paid to such effort. Hence, a dearth of documentation on the role of homeland online newspapers to a nation's transnational migrants exists in media, migrants and transnational studies' literature.

Using a modified agenda setting theory, this study presents the salient election issues and candidates' attributes that coloured the online newspapers' coverage of Nigerian 2011 presidential election. The theory of agenda setting presupposes the transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; McCombs, 2004, 2005; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Hence, members of the public are expected to pick cues of important public issues from the media, with such cues underlining public perceptions, opinions, attitudes and behaviours.

Based on the assumption that immigration process creates informational and communicative needs (Elias & Lemish, 2011), and

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the fact that media responses to stakeholders' heightened need for orientation during political transitions (Coleman, McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2009; Kioussis, 2005; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), we asked the questions: What are the basic information in the online newspapers coverage of Nigerian 2011 presidential election? What are the issues given much attention in the online newspapers? And finally, what are the salient candidates' attributes covered in the online newspapers during Nigerian 2011 presidential election?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted quantitative content analysis. Quantitative content analysis entails "the systemic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005: 3). Hence, the content of three Nigerian online newspapers, bordering on 2011 presidential election, were coded into eight issues and six attributes categories. The issues category includes corruption, credible election, economy, infrastructure, power supply, security, social welfare, and unemployment and poverty alleviation. The candidates' attributes coded are credibility, discipline, experience, patriotism, political will, and vision. These issues and attributes are the prominent themes that emerged from examination of the online newspapers selected.

### **Data Collection**

Online editions of the *Daily Trust*, the *Punch*, and the *Vanguard* provided the data for this study. The print editions of these newspapers are among the most elitist, with huge readership, in Nigeria (BBC World Service Trust, Retrieved 11 October, 2010). Daily download, copying and pasting of the homepage and index stories relating to 2011 presidential election was done between February 1 and March 31, 2011. One of the researchers checked and downloaded election stories from the Web page of the selected online newspapers between 2am and 5am Malaysian time (7PM-10PM Nigerian time) during the data collection period. Two people, one of the researchers and another PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia, coded the news. Inter-coder reliability of relevant

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section of the coding, using *Coh12.5en Kappa*, attained an average 0.96, which is more than 0.70, benchmark for inter-coder agreement. The data were entered into SPSS 19.0 for eventual analysis.

## DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the data that answer the questions raised in the study. It included basic information about the online newspapers coverage of the election, election issues covered and the candidates' attributes covered in the online newspapers during the 2011 Nigerian presidential election. Using individual coding sheet for each news article, which is the unit of analysis of this study, coding categories, consisting of basic information about election coverage, main issues, candidates' issues emphasis, tone of candidates' issues, candidates' attributes and tone of candidates' attributes, were documented and entered into SPSS for final analysis.

## FINDINGS

### BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT ELECTION NEWS COVERAGE

In this section, the results of basic information on campaign coverage of the three newspapers are presented. The information includes election study period, newspaper studied, origin of the stories, and sources of the stories. Results of basic information about election news coverage are presented in the Table 1.

**Table 1: Basic Information about the Election News Coverage**

| Basic Information about the election news coverage | Frequency  | Percentage   |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Election study period</b>                       |            |              |
| February 2011                                      | 110        | 42.3         |
| March 2011                                         | 150        | 57.7         |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>260</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| <b>Newspaper studied</b>                           |            |              |
| The Daily Trust                                    | 105        | 40.4         |
| The Punch                                          | 86         | 33.1         |
| The Vanguard                                       | 69         | 26.5         |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>260</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| <b>Story origin</b>                                |            |              |
| Newspapers' reporters                              | 213        | 81.9         |
| News agency                                        | 19         | 7.3          |
| No byline                                          | 28         | 10.8         |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>260</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| <b>Source of the story</b>                         |            |              |
| Political rally                                    | 152        | 58.5         |
| Speech                                             | 85         | 32.7         |
| Interview                                          | 23         | 8.8          |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>260</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

More news stories (57.7%) concerning the 2011 Nigerian presidential election in the online newspapers selected for the study were published in the month of March than in the month of February (42.3%). Since the election was conducted in April 2011, the increasing number of campaign stories in the month of March is consistent with the usual campaign coverage during the election period. Scholars have posited that more attention is usually accorded the election campaign in the media as the election draws nearer (Johnson, Davis & Cronin, 2009; Kiouisis & McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

### **Newspapers Studied**

Of the three newspapers content analysed, the *Daily Trust* published most of the news on the election. Four in ten of the total news stories (40.4%) were published by this paper. One-third of the entire stories (33.1%) originated from the *Punch* online newspaper, while the *Vanguard* published the least stories with a little above a quarter (26.5%) of the total news stories. Two reasons that may explain the *Daily Trust*'s dominance of news coverage are the age and operational base of the newspaper. Being the youngest newspaper among the three, the *Daily Trust* may be struggling for relevance in the market. Also, the *Daily Trust* is the only newspaper operating from the Federal Capital of the country, where the headquarters of the political parties are located. The proximity of the newspaper to the parties' headquarters may thus confer the advantage of getting the first-hand news on the *Daily Trust*. The other newspapers are headquartered in Lagos; hence their presence in the Federal Capital Territory is minimal compared to the *Daily Trust*.

### **Story origin**

Story origin concerns story byline. Substantial majority (81.9%) of the entire news stories was written by newspapers' reporters, while one in ten (10.8) of the total stories was without byline. The stories from news agency accounted for only 7.3%. This shows that most of the campaign news stories were written by reporters who perhaps were covering candidates' campaign activities as the beats assigned to them.

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### Source of the story

This deals with the locales or events from which campaign stories originated from. Almost six in ten stories (58.5%) of the entire stories were obtained from candidates' political rallies. Speeches of the candidates were the next major source of campaign news, accounting for almost a third (32.7%) of the total news stories. Interviews with candidates (8.8%) were the least means of obtaining election campaign news. Since political rallies provided opportunity for candidates to reach out to a multitude of supporters and intending voters, it is not surprising that most of the news stories were obtained from these avenues in the 2011 Nigerian presidential elections.

### ISSUES EMPHASIS IN THE ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

Issues emphasised in the online newspapers consisted of main election issues and issues emphasised by the candidates. Main election issues dealt with the number of articles that were devoted to each of the eight issues identified in this study. The issues that were tangential to candidates' campaigns in the 2011 Nigerian presidential election included corruption, credible election, economy, infrastructure, power supply, security, social welfare, and unemployment and poverty alleviation. Each of these issues was accorded different degree of emphasis in the overall campaign coverage. Table 2 details the results.

**Table 2: Main Issues in the Online Newspapers**

| Main Issues                          | Frequency  | Percentage   | Rank |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|------|
| Corruption                           |            |              |      |
| Credible election                    | 46         | 17.7         | 2    |
| Economy                              | 35         | 13.5         | 3    |
| Infrastructure                       | 26         | 10.0         | 6    |
| Power supply                         | 29         | 11.2         | 5    |
| Security                             | 53         | 20.4         | 1    |
| Social welfare                       | 19         | 7.3          | 8    |
| Unemployment and Poverty alleviation | 21         | 8.1          | 7    |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>260</b> | <b>100.0</b> |      |

In the selected online newspapers, considerable amount of presidential election campaign news focused on the issue of security, attracting one-fifth (20.4%) of the total campaign coverage. Other issues that were well emphasised in the online newspapers were credible election (17.7%), economy (13.5%) corruption (11.9%).

Social welfare (7.3%) and unemployment and poverty alleviation (8.1%) received less attention. These issues fell within the magical minimal issues usually given attention in the media, given the scarce space and time and well as limited audience capacity to grapple with many issues at a time (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar & Rey, 1997; Shaw & Martin, 1992).

### **Issues Emphasised by the Candidates**

This part deals with the issues given much emphasis in the campaign coverage of each of the three candidates selected for this study. Different emphases of each candidate's issues provide the basis for the media agenda of candidates' issues (Table 3).

The results showed that online newspapers prioritised credible election in the coverage of Goodluck Jonathan. This issue attracted almost one-fifth (19.5%) of his campaign coverage. Other issues given much attention by this candidate's coverage were security (18.8%) and economy (16.1%). Corruption (8.0%), social welfare (6.7%) and unemployment and poverty alleviation (7.4%), however, ranked low among the issues emphasised in Jonathan's coverage.

**Table 3: Candidates' Issues Coverage in the Online Newspapers**

| Issues                             | Candidates        |              |      |                  |              |      |             |              |      |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|------|------------------|--------------|------|-------------|--------------|------|
|                                    | Goodluck Jonathan |              |      | Muhammadu Buhari |              |      | Nuhu Ribadu |              |      |
|                                    | F                 | %            | Rank | F                | %            | Rank | F           | %            | Rank |
| Corruption                         | 12                | 8.0          | 6    | 12               | 17.6         | 2    | 7           | 16.3         | 2.5  |
| Credible election                  | 29                | 19.5         | 1    | 8                | 11.8         | 4    | 9           | 20.9         | 1    |
| Economy                            | 24                | 16.1         | 3    | 7                | 10.3         | 5    | 4           | 9.3          | 6    |
| Infrastructure                     | 15                | 10.1         | 5    | 9                | 13.2         | 3    | 2           | 4.7          | 8    |
| Power supply                       | 20                | 13.4         | 4    | 6                | 8.8          | 6    | 3           | 7.0          | 7    |
| Security                           | 28                | 18.8         | 2    | 18               | 26.5         | 1    | 7           | 16.3         | 2.5  |
| Social welfare                     | 10                | 6.7          | 8    | 3                | 4.4          | 8    | 6           | 14.0         | 4    |
| Unemployment & poverty alleviation | 11                | 7.4          | 7    | 5                | 7.4          | 7    | 5           | 11.5         | 5    |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>149</b>        | <b>100.0</b> |      | <b>68</b>        | <b>100.0</b> |      | <b>43</b>   | <b>100.0</b> |      |

With regards to the second candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, the online newspapers highlighted security as his first campaign priorities. This issue commanded more than a quarter (26.5%) of his campaign coverage. Corruption (17.6%) and infrastructure (13.2%) were the other issues considered important in the coverage of Buhari's campaign. Like Jonathan, the issues of social welfare (4.4%) and unemployment and poverty alleviation (7.4%) did not surface on the

top issues covered in respect of this candidate.

Issues that received significant attention in Nuhu Ribadu's coverage were credible election (20.9%), corruption (16.3%) and security (16.3%). By this, Ribadu seemed to share issue priorities of the other two candidates. Unlike the Jonathan and Buhari, however, he placed better emphasis on social welfare (14.0%) as well as unemployment and poverty alleviation (11.5%). Issues that were given little priorities in Ribadu's campaign were power supply (7.0%) and provision of infrastructure (4.7%).

Overall, Jonathan and Ribadu emphasised credible election the most, while security was the issues emphasised the most by Buhari. Security also featured prominently in the coverage of Jonathan and Ribadu, while Buhari and Ribadu gave corruption considerable attention. Only Jonathan emphasised economy, just as only Buhari raised the salience of infrastructure, according to the news coverage. Different candidates' issues emphases in this study were consistent with the findings of previous studies where each candidate promoted issues based on their experience and capability (Golan & Wanta, 2001; King, 1997; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

### **Tone of Candidates' Issues Emphasis**

Besides attention to and prominence of different issues in the media coverage of the candidates, the slant used in reporting issues or objects of the news could also of great influence in the media agenda (Golan & Wanta, 2001; Kioussis, 2004; McCombs, Llamas & Lopez-Escobar, 2000). The tone of issues linked to the candidates in this study was content analysed along unfavourable, neutral and favourable dimensions. Table 4 presents the results.

Online newspapers favourably covered Goodluck Jonathan's emphasis on credible election (12.1%). Other issues where this candidate received favourable coverage were security (8.1%) and economy (6.7%). His emphases on issues of corruption (0.0%) and social welfare (2.7%) were, however, not couched in the favourable tone. This shows that candidate was more favourably reported on the issues he emphasised the most.

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Corruption (17.6%) was the most favourably covered issue regarding Buhari. This was followed by his emphasis on security (16.2%). Economy and infrastructure followed suit with 8.8% favourable coverage each. Social welfare (3.0%) and unemployment and poverty alleviation (1.5%) that were less emphasised by this candidate were also less favourably covered.

In the case of Ribadu, corruption (11.9%) received the most favourable coverage in the online newspapers. This candidate also received favourable coverage of his emphases on security (9.5%) and social welfare (9.5%). Issues that were less favourably covered for this candidate were infrastructure (4.8%) and power supply (2.4%).

**Table 4: Tone of Candidates' Issues Emphasis**

| Candidates' issues Emphasis          | Tone       |             |             |             | Rank* |
|--------------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
|                                      | F          | 1<br>%      | 2<br>%      | 3<br>%      |       |
| <b>Goodluck Jonathan</b>             |            |             |             |             |       |
| Corruption                           | 12         | 7.4         | 0.7         | 0.0         | 8     |
| Credible election                    | 29         | 5.4         | 2.0         | 12.1        | 1     |
| Economy                              | 24         | 2.0         | 7.4         | 6.7         | 3     |
| Infrastructure                       | 15         | 2.0         | 2.7         | 5.4         | 4.5   |
| Power supply                         | 20         | 1.3         | 6.7         | 5.4         | 4.5   |
| Security                             | 28         | 7.4         | 3.4         | 8.1         | 2     |
| Social welfare                       | 10         | 0.7         | 3.4         | 2.7         | 7     |
| Unemployment and poverty alleviation | 11         | 1.3         | 2.7         | 3.4         | 6     |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>149</b> | <b>27.5</b> | <b>29.0</b> | <b>48.8</b> |       |
| <b>Muhammadu Buhari</b>              |            |             |             |             |       |
| Corruption                           | 12         | 0.0         | 0.0         | 17.6        | 1     |
| Credible election                    | 8          | 1.5         | 3.0         | 7.4         | 5     |
| Economy                              | 7          | 1.5         | 0.0         | 8.8         | 3.5   |
| Infrastructure                       | 9          | 0.0         | 4.4         | 8.8         | 3.5   |
| Power supply                         | 6          | 0.0         | 4.4         | 4.4         | 6     |
| Security                             | 18         | 3.0         | 7.4         | 16.2        | 2     |
| Social welfare                       | 3          | 0.0         | 1.5         | 3.0         | 7     |
| Unemployment and poverty alleviation | 5          | 1.5         | 4.4         | 1.5         | 8     |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>68</b>  | <b>7.5</b>  | <b>25.1</b> | <b>67.7</b> |       |
| <b>Nuhu Ribadu</b>                   |            |             |             |             |       |
| Corruption                           | 7          | 0.0         | 4.8         | 11.9        | 1     |
| Credible election                    | 8          | 4.8         | 7.1         | 7.1         | 5     |
| Economy                              | 4          | 0.0         | 2.4         | 7.1         | 5     |
| Infrastructure                       | 2          | 0.0         | 0.0         | 4.8         | 7     |
| Power supply                         | 3          | 0.0         | 4.8         | 2.4         | 8     |
| Security                             | 7          | 0.0         | 7.1         | 9.5         | 2.5   |
| Social welfare                       | 6          | 0.0         | 4.8         | 9.5         | 2.5   |
| Unemployment and poverty alleviation | 5          | 0.0         | 4.8         | 7.1         | 5     |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>42</b>  | <b>4.8</b>  | <b>35.8</b> | <b>59.4</b> |       |

1=Unfavourable; 2=Neutral; 3=Favourable

\*Rank applies to favourable tone only

Overall, candidates were better framed in the issues they emphasised well. Since substantial majority of the campaign news emanated from political rallies of the candidates, it is possible that the candidates used the platform to promote their issues agenda and set the tone that defined their stand on issues. Increased favourability of the candidates' most emphasised issues in this study corresponds with the findings in Golan and Wanta's (2001) study of the presidential candidates in the 2002 Republican primaries in the United States.

### CANDIDATES' ATTRIBUTES COVERAGE

Candidates' attributes coverage deals with the overall attributes of each candidate that were covered in the online newspapers. The attributes content analyzed include credibility, discipline, experience, patriotism, political will, and vision. Table 5 details the ranking of attributes associated with each candidate in the online newspapers selected for this study.

**Table 5: Candidates' Attributes Coverage in the Online Newspapers**

| Attributes     | Candidates        |              |   |                  |              |      |             |              |      |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------|---|------------------|--------------|------|-------------|--------------|------|
|                | Goodluck Jonathan |              |   | Muhammadu Buhari |              |      | Nuhu Ribadu |              |      |
|                | F                 | Rank         |   | F                | %            | Rank | F           | %            | Rank |
| Credibility    | 23                | 16.5         | 2 | 16               | 23.9         | 1    | 7           | 18.4         | 2    |
| Discipline     | 13                | 9.4          | 6 | 9                | 13.4         | 5    | 5           | 13.2         | 3    |
| Experience     | 15                | 10.8         | 5 | 14               | 20.9         | 2    | 4           | 10.5         | 4.5  |
| Patriotism     | 49                | 35.3         | 1 | 7                | 10.4         | 6    | 3           | 7.9          | 6    |
| Political will | 18                | 12.9         | 4 | 10               | 15.0         | 4    | 4           | 10.5         | 4.6  |
| Vision         | 21                | 15.1         | 3 | 11               | 16.4         | 3    | 15          | 39.5         | 1    |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>139</b>        | <b>100.0</b> |   | <b>67</b>        | <b>100.0</b> |      | <b>38</b>   | <b>100.0</b> |      |

The three attributes defining Jonathan in the online newspapers were patriotism (35.3%), credibility (16.5%) and vision (15.1%). Political will (12.9%) and experience (10.8%) were also primed as important attributes of this candidate. Discipline (9.4%) was, however, not much associated with this candidate in his campaign news coverage. The outstanding attributes of Jonathan may be informed by his gentle disposition, continuous call for unity and the promotion of "Transformation Agenda" throughout the campaign period.

Credibility (23.9%) was the most outstanding attribute associated with Buhari's campaign coverage in the online newspapers. This candidate was also considered outstanding in his experience (20.9%)

and visionary quality (16.4%). Buhari was also rated well on political will (15.0%) and discipline (13.4%). His least emphasised attribute is patriotism (10.4%). These attributes were, perhaps, derived from his much reported integrity, will power and experience as a former military Head of State of Nigeria.

The attributes that mostly characterised Ribadu's campaign coverage were three: being visionary (39.5%), credible (18.4%) and disciplined (13.2%). His experience and political will were also given some degree of attention, each securing 10.5% of his attributes' coverage. These attributes may have been distilled from his past record as a Spartan police officer, head of anti-corruption agency and his call for generational change in leadership throughout the campaign period.

#### **Tone of Candidates' Attributes**

Like issues presentation, candidates' attributes were also subjected to slanting along unfavourable, neutral and favourable tone. Table 6 reveals the slanting of news stories on candidates' attributes.

**Table 6: Tone of Candidates' Attributes in the Online Newspapers**

| Candidates' Attributes   | Tone       |             |             |             | Rank* |
|--------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
|                          | F          | 1<br>%      | 2<br>%      | 3<br>%      |       |
| <b>Goodluck Jonathan</b> |            |             |             |             |       |
| Credibility              | 23         | 10.8        | 0.7         | 5.0         | 4     |
| Discipline               | 13         | 5.0         | 2.2         | 2.2         | 6     |
| Experience               | 15         | 2.9         | 2.2         | 5.8         | 3     |
| Patriotism               | 49         | 2.9         | 12.2        | 20.1        | 1     |
| Political will           | 18         | 4.3         | 4.3         | 4.3         | 5     |
| Vision                   | 21         | 1.4         | 2.9         | 10.8        | 2     |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>139</b> | <b>27.3</b> | <b>24.5</b> |             |       |
| <b>Muhammadu Buhari</b>  |            |             |             |             |       |
| Credibility              | 16         | 4.5         | 3.0         | 16.4        | 2.5   |
| Discipline               | 9          | 3.0         | 1.5         | 9.0         | 5     |
| Experience               | 14         | 0.0         | 1.5         | 19.4        | 1     |
| Patriotism               | 7          | 0.0         | 4.5         | 6.0         | 6     |
| Political will           | 10         | 0.0         | 4.5         | 10.4        | 4     |
| Vision                   | 11         | 0.0         | 0.0         | 16.4        | 2.5   |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>67</b>  | <b>7.5</b>  | <b>15.0</b> | <b>77.6</b> |       |
| <b>Nuhu Ribadu</b>       |            |             |             |             |       |
| Credibility              | 7          | 2.6         | 10.5        | 5.3         | 3     |
| Discipline               | 5          | 2.6         | 7.9         | 2.6         | 5     |
| Experience               | 4          | 0.0         | 2.6         | 7.9         | 2     |
| Patriotism               | 3          | 0.0         | 5.3         | 2.6         | 5     |
| Political will           | 4          | 0.0         | 7.9         | 2.6         | 5     |
| Vision                   | 15         | 0.0         | 2.6         | 36.8        | 1     |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>38</b>  | <b>5.2</b>  | <b>36.8</b> | <b>57.8</b> |       |

1=Unfavourable; 2=Neutral; 3=Favourable

\*Rank applies to favourable tone only

Jonathan's attributes that were favourably portrayed in the online newspapers included patriotism (20.1%) and vision (10.8%). This candidate was, however, less favourably reported on experience (5.8%), credibility (5.0%), discipline (2.2%) and political will (4.3%). On the contrary, the most favourably covered attribute in Buhari was experience (19.4%). This was followed by both credibility and vision, each with 16.4% favourable coverage. Patriotism (6.0%) and discipline (9.0%) were the two least favourably reported attributes of Buhari. The online newspapers portrayed vision (36.8%) as Ribadu's most favourable attributes. Other attributes received low coverage in favourability, with discipline (2.6%), patriotism (2.6%) and political will (2.6%) couched in low favourability.

Generally, the candidates' most outstanding attributes were more favourably portrayed in the online newspapers. While the online newspapers favoured patriotism and vision in their coverage of Jonathan, Buhari was favourably covered on credibility, experience, political will, and vision. However, only Ribadu's attribute of being visionary gained much favourable coverage. The attribute of being disciplined received low favourability for all the candidates. This may be associated with cases of political violence that marked the campaigns of the three candidates. Low favourable coverage on patriotism received by Buhari and Ribadu may have resulted from the mood of the nation on candidates from northern Nigeria. Continuous dominance and insistence by northerners to produce the next president may have been viewed as an act that threatens the corporate existence of Nigeria. Hence, candidacy from such a region may have been deemed as undermining the unity of the country and, therefore, perceived as unpatriotic.

By this consistent pattern of focusing the candidates' issues and attributes, online newspapers set the stage for the audience perceptions of issues and candidates' attributes that were important in the 2011 Nigerian presidential election. In effect, the audiences following the election in the online newspapers were likely to be primed to consider the candidates based on their major issues and attributes coverage in the online newspapers.

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## DISCUSSION

This study presented the possibility of online newspapers to set the stage for political cognitions and attitudes of foreign resident Nigerians during the 2011 presidential election, with specific reference to Nigerian in Malaysia. Based on salience-driven potential of the media and the reliance of migrants on the online newspapers, the study envisaged that the media infrastructure in Malaysia could afford foreign residents, Nigerians in this case, the opportunity to stay in touch with socio-economic and political development of their nations from Malaysia. The study was precipitated by minimal emphasis on the role of online newspapers in the lived experience of migrants and how host nations' media landscape assists these *dislocated* species in keeping in touch with their kith and kin back home.

Based on the questions raised, the dataset showed that the month of March, which was proximal to the election date, accounted for more news coverage than the previous time. This is consistent with previous findings, which claimed that as election approaches, media attention to election issues and candidates increases (Johnson, Davis & Cronin, 2009; Kioussis & McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The data also revealed that the *Daily Trust*, the newspaper located in the administrative capital of Nigeria, offered more news on the election than others. This may be explained by the closeness of the paper to political parties and political candidates' campaign headquarters, which are located in the same city with the newspaper.

Consistent with previous findings, the salient issues and attributes covered in the online newspapers content analysed show that the media could only set agenda for a few number of key issues. Shaw and Martin (1992) averred that the agenda setting potency of the media oscillates between magical five and seven issues at a given time. In the current study, issues and attributes that received much coverage hovered between four and six. This shows that the media could identify key important issues of the community for the public cognizance and bring about public consensus on issues the community should think about, talk about and bother about for the general good of the entire citizenry.

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## **CONCLUSION**

By providing opportunity for Nigerian migrants to advance their lives, Malaysia has built a robust relationship with Nigerian state on the one hand. Malaysia media infrastructure that facilitates appropriation of homeland political discourse via the online newspapers enhances homeland political knowledge of Nigerians on the other. This will not only make them feel at home, but turn them to advocates of Malaysian nation and people in future. Therefore, Malaysia nicety of today would be a source of her soft power in the near future.

The presentation of critical election issues and attributes of the candidates in the online newspapers provides Nigerian foreign residents the state of affairs of Nigerian political transition. Through consumption of the news promoted on the online newspapers, transnational Nigerian audiences could offer comments that would enrich future news production and challenge the nation's political agenda for good. The presentation of candidates' issues position and attributes could also afford Nigerians in diaspora the opportunity to evaluate the candidates and offer suggestions and recommendations on candidates' choice to their kith and kin in Nigeria.

Thus far, little if any study, has given attention to the centrality of online newspapers to lived experiences of the migrants during their homelands' election. Hence, homeland newspapers have not developed any model to tap from their foreign resident audience. This study, therefore, suggests that while migrants can serve as "transnational agents of development", the homeland media system in general and online newspapers in particular could provide vehicles for remittance of migrants' experiences to their homelands. This would not only benefit the country of origin, but could help in building good relations within and among nations in today's globalized world.

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