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# CONTENTS

## PAGE

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Newspaper Framing of Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives<br>–Patrick Udende, Ibrahim Yusuf Abubakar, Ph.D. and Tanjudeen<br>Olanrewaju Yusuf.                                                                         | 1   |
| 2. Representation of Female Journalists in Public Broadcast Media in Sokoto<br>State – Maryam Ibrahim, Ph.D.                                                                                                                    | 16  |
| 3. Assessment of the Influence of “MTV Base” Programmes on the Dressing<br>Patterns of Delta State University Students – Seigha Jammy Guanah,<br>Kingsley Osazuwa Agbongiator, and Ijeoma Obi.                                  | 26  |
| 4. Analysis of the Use of Social Media for News by Students of Tertiary<br>Institutions in Lagos State – Soji Alabi, Ph.D.                                                                                                      | 45  |
| 5. North and South Dichotomy: An Analysis of some Selected Nigerian<br>Newspaper Coverage of 2016 U.S Presidential Election Campaigns – Daniel<br>Too hukwu Ezegwu, Uchechukwu Mercy Enem, and Chioma Juliet Ndife.             | 51  |
| 6. Public Relations and Working Relationships in Schools – Gbemisola<br>Omorinola Ojo.                                                                                                                                          | 62  |
| 7. Newspapers Coverage of Child Domestic Labour in Nigeria – Oguchi O.<br>Ajaegbu, Ph.D, Oluwaseyi Sodeinde, and Wasiu Olatunbosun, Ph.D.                                                                                       | 75  |
| 8. Influence of the Perceived Portrayal of Female Artistes in Nigerian Hip Hop<br>Music Videos on the Cultural Values of Nigerian Youths – Aminat Sheriff<br>Owolabi, Bashir Amoda Ajijola, Ph.D and Monsurat Modasola Wonuola. | 89  |
| 9. Motives for the Use of Social Media for Consumption of Mainstream Media<br>Contents among Students of the University of Ilorin – Maryam Lasisi<br>Mustapha, Oyindamola Zainab. Usman, and Rukayat Ololade Adegoke.           | 102 |
| 10. Readership of Online and Offline Newspapers in Makurdi, Benue State<br>–Vaungwa Apaa Nyihar Tine, Ph.D., Caleb Terngu Chile, Ph.D. and Gabriel<br>Aer.                                                                      | 116 |
| 11. Symbolism and Intercultural Expressionism in Nigerian Political Cartoons:<br>The Whatsapp and Facebook Experience - Ndoma Brown, Ph.D, Irene I.<br>Bassey and Juliet Deborah Etteh.                                         | 127 |
| 12. A Comparative Analysis of Effective Communication in Classroom<br>Education, Educational Broadcasting and Online Education: The Nigerian<br>Experience – Jacob Udayi Agba, Ph.D.                                            | 137 |
| 13. Sermonizing as Propaganda: Analysis and Application of A. J. Machenzie's<br>Seven Secrets of Propaganda-Patrick U. Ineji, and Bibiana U. Ineji.                                                                             | 144 |
| 14. Television Cartoons and their Influence on Children-Ibituru Iwowari Pepple,<br>Ph.D., Emmanuel Nyong Inyang*and Jaquelyn Ijeoma Acholonu.                                                                                   | 152 |
| 15. Campaign against Self-medication Practices in Rural Nigeria: A Social and<br>Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) Approach – Ukam Ivi Ngwu.                                                                                | 163 |
| 16. International Organisations and National Development in Nigeria<br>–David N. Etika.                                                                                                                                         | 174 |

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# NEWSPAPER FRAMING OF NIGERIA'S SEVENTH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## Abstract

*The importance of the Nigerian House of Representatives is noticeable in its legislation, representation and surveillance among others. On its part, newspapers are always alive with reports on activities of the House of Representatives. However, the aspects of undertaking qualitative research to complement existing studies that adopt other methods have been elusive. Consequently, this study seeks to analyse the pattern of frames newspapers use to construct stories on the House of Representatives. Method of the study is qualitative content analysis while population is four Nigerian dailies namely This Day, The Nation, Daily Trust, and Nigerian Tribune purposively selected. Unit of analysis is headlines systematically selected between January 2013 and December, 2014. Findings reveal conflict/human interest as the dominant frame newspapers use to construct their stories. Findings also show that several reports do not favour the House of Representatives. The study recommends, among other things, that newspapers should restrain from conflict-ridden frames that are dramatic but employ frames with educational undertone. On its part, the Green chamber should eschew legislative misdemeanours which prompt newspapers to depict it in a negative light.*

**Key words:** Newspaper framing, House of Representatives, budget, legislation and oversight

## Introduction

There exists a high possibility that the Nigerian Seventh House of Representatives, regarded as the lower chamber of the National Assembly, has carved a niche in Nigerian politics. This is evidenced in its vibrant and pragmatic disposition to issues that affect citizens particularly when compared with its Senate counterpart as reported in the Nigerian newspapers. *The Nation* (January 10, 2012) alluded to the House's pragmatism when it simply put as a kicker that "House of Reps' resolution commendable; but Upper Chamber's silence troubling" (p.19). This assertion came on the heels of what was considered the insensitive removal of fuel subsidy by the Goodluck Jonathan-led government in 2012, when the House was forced to cut short its recess to decide on the backlash. This is not to say that the Lower Chamber does not compromise nor is never accused of self-centeredness and insensitivity to public plight. The *Nigerian Tribune* (January 3, 2011) was elaborate on one of the fundamental misgivings of the legislature thus:

Since Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi brought back the profligacy and self-centredness of the National Assembly on the front burner of public discourse, so much has been said and written to explain away the disservice of the legislative chambers to the country. Senate President David Mark and Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole have been advancing arguments that are not only feeble but also diversionary.

They have not been able to prove the legislators' innocence (p.17).

Oni (2013), who also took a holistic view of the National Assembly, posited that the House of Representatives in conjunction with the Senate, both of which constitute Nigeria's National Assembly, provide a platform for a wider representation of various interests groups in the country. This probably led Tom and Attai (2014) to opine that, their activities should be directed towards reversing the declining economy, stabilizing the polity and integrating society with the overall aim of enhancing national development.

As the legislative arm of government, it oversees, represents and legislates for good governance, its activities never go unnoticed by the mass media. What the legislature does is regularly brought to public domain through newspaper framing. By so doing, newspaper framing of the Green chamber tends to educate, inform and interpret the House of Representatives' activities thereby enabling citizens to become more informed and to consequently, take reasoned political decisions.

Abundant literature in political communication show that, some scholars look at the legislature in terms of its functions (Edet & Amadi, 2014; Hazel, 2001; Ken, Peter, Abel & Katrin, 2012; Oni, 2013; Sodaro, 2007); nature of parliamentary coverage (Negrine, 1999; Regis & Michel, 2007), effect of newspaper coverage of the legislature (Aalberg, Stromback & De Vreese, 2012; Odoemelan, Okebonor & Adibe, 2012); and public trust and confidence (Blind, 2006; Moy, Pfau & Kahlor, 2009). A detailed assessment of Nigeria's Federal House of Representatives by Joshua and Oni (2014) centered on its susceptibility to corruption between 1999 and 2011. Other researchers have examined the relationship between legislature and the press (Adedeji, 2011; Aruguete, 2011; Brown, 2013; Ileri, 2012; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). However, even studies that dwell on newspapers' coverage of the legislature restrictively centre on depth, prominence and frequency of reportage.

In spite of variations in their approaches and methods, political communication scholars (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012; Entman, Matthes & Pelicano, 2009) seem to have come to a consensus that one possible way newspapers interpret issues is through framing. Framing attracts varying definitions. In this context, framing refers to patterns of interpretations in which information is classified for an efficient handling (Roessler, 2008). This simply implies newspapers' selection of some aspects of an issue and how they construct stories about an issue with a view to promoting a particular interpretation. That is transiting from media salience which places high premium on prominence, depth and frequency to valence or media effect commonly referred to as second level media agenda (Hawkins, 2011).

Eminent framing scholars and researchers (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Iyengar, 1991; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) have at different instances identified different types of frames news writers employ in their reports. For example, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) postulated five frames that are cardinal for news construction. These include attribution of responsibility frame, economic consequence frame, conflict frame, human interest frame and morality frame. Stretching the categories of frames, Gamson and Lasch (1983) offered signature matrix of eight frames categories – metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual image, roots, consequences, and appeal to principle. These frames have become an enabling template which scholars and researchers rely on to determine certain frames in given circumstances and contexts. In the light of this, this study is guided by Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) categorisation to identify and analyse the pattern of frames newspapers used to frame stories about Nigeria's seventh House of Representatives.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Issues about individuals, organisations and institutions come up daily and it is the direct responsibility of newspapers in particular and the mass media in general to bring

such issues to public domain. Due to limited space and time as the case may be, news writers select and decide on what to write and how to write a story. It is the way newspapers construct stories that we refer to as framing. However, a scan on literature reveals a lack of studies on newspaper framing of Nigeria's House of Representatives which would enable members of the public to better appreciate its role. This apparent lack of studies entails an existing void in political communication research that needs to be filled. On account of this, the study was undertaken to analyse the pattern of frames that characterised newspaper reports on Nigeria's House of Representatives, as well as, analyse the direction of newspapers reports.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to analyse the pattern of frames selected Nigerian newspapers construct stories about the Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- i. Analyse the pattern of frames newspapers constructed stories about Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives.
- ii. Analyse the direction of newspapers reports about Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives.

### **Research Questions**

Arising from the objectives of the study are the following research questions:

- i. In what pattern of frames did newspapers construct stories about Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives?
- ii. What is the direction of newspapers stories about Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Against the backdrop that the primary focus of this study is on how newspaper portrayed the Nigeria's House of Representatives, media framing presents the most appropriate theoretical framework. Central to the theory is the power of communication to direct individual cognitions toward a prescribed interpretation of a situation or object (Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber & Fan, 1998). This implies that a newspaper's attention to discrete features of an issue will alter the public's understanding of the issue and the importance they assign to it.

Contributing to framing theory, Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) posited that journalists in particular have to tell a story within certain time and space constraints, and make it accessible to a broad and often heterogeneous public. And they go beyond by making the story available to the public but how they present the story is important. The only way to do this is by structuring the information, creating an interpretive framework that allows the comprehension of the message.

When an issue is framed in terms of meaning, cause, solution, and responsibility, the primary effect of that frame is to render specific information, images, or ideas applicable to that issue (Tewksbury & Scheufele 2009).

By framing the House of Representatives issues or activities in certain ways, to newspaper influences the way people perceive such issues or activities and their consequences, possibly altering their final evaluation of the issues or activities.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Newspaper framing means the way journalists present information to audience members. In her attempt to conceptualise framing, Cissel (2012) aptly stated that newspaper framing is the way in which information is presented to its audiences. Entman (1993) elaborated 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. Journalists therefore, place figurative picture frames around the ever-moving target of events and actions, thereby focusing our attention on particular issues, ideas, and individuals while obscuring what lies outside the frame (Boykoff & Laschever, 2011). Framing, then, provides a means of describing the power of communication to direct individual cognitions toward a prescribed interpretation of a situation or object.

Ofori-Birikorang (2010) has also contended that, through news production, the media provide knowledge to their audiences, and such knowledge, in turn, exerts crucial influence in deciding the direction of citizens' understanding about what is reported. Without the newspaper platform, citizens cannot hope to influence legislatures. Citizens can only influence legislations if they are first fully informed about what they are doing. Similarly, it would be difficult for citizens to be able to hold their representatives accountable unless they are informed about activities of the legislature.

The need to provide perspectives on the way newspapers cover the Nigeria's National Assembly has in recent times prompted researchers to direct their studies at that arm of government. Joshua and Oni (2014) have undertaken a detailed assessment of Nigeria's Federal House of Representatives. However, their focus was on the House's susceptibility to corruption between 1999 and 2011. At the end of the study, they concluded that, not only was the House weak in making laws to check the menace of corruption in the period covered by their study, but that the legislative body itself was in the particular period truly neck-deep in corruption.

Framing has different typologies including strong and weak, episodic or generic frames. Frame Works Institute (2002) pointed out that the episodic frame presents a portrait, while the thematic frame pulls the camera back to present a landscape. The importance of this distinction is that the two types of frames have different effects on how people view a given problem - and whether people will see the need for individual-level and/or broader environmental or institutional solutions to that problem (Frame Works Institute, 2002).

Irrespective of the frame typology, newspapers create content as it reports. One way newspapers create content is by valence framing wherein a frame casts the same story in either a positive or negative light. Valence is easily noticeable when the writer identifies people or institutions with labels. Examples of the labels include but are not limited to "fundamentalist sect" and "terrorist activities". Halloran et al. (1970) cited in Van Dijk (1983, p.31) demonstrated that the press used labels like "hooligans," "thugs," "mobs," "horde," etc., to characterise participants in a demonstration against intervention in Vietnam. These labels activate audiences understanding and construct their opinion about what is reported. This probably inclined Adeniran, Suleiman, Ajaga and Jimi (2015), who aptly concluded that, the way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is the prerogative of journalists.

## Methodology

The study made use of the constructive variant of knowledge approach to content analyse the chosen headlines. It analysed selected frames to infer the tone and direction of newspapers reports. Unit of analysis was the headline of each selected story. Population of the study was made up of four Nigerian dailies purposively selected. The sampling was done by using the cyclical approach to select a small but relevant and consistent House of Representatives stories across the newspapers for analysis. According to Mautner (2008) cited in Adisa, Udende, Abubakar and La'aro (2017), in cyclical sampling process more material is added up to the point when, following the law of diminishing returns, new data no longer yield up new representations.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

The data analysis took recourse to certain frames in consonance with some of Gamson and Lasch's (1983) "signature matrix" aimed at sorting out the specific elements of framing in a text which they attribute into eight categories including metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual image, roots, consequences, and appeals to principle. Some frames, however, reflected morality, response, powerlessness, attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, labeling, and conspiracy frames postulated by Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000), Iyengar (1991) and de Vreese (2005) cited in Okoro and Odoemelum (2013).

Specifically, the study used conflict/human interest, attribution of responsibility, consequence, morality, and response frames. The data was further analysed using thematic approach. Dominant themes under consideration included legislation, oversight, and mediation. The rest were considered under 'others'.

**Research Question One:** In what pattern of frames did newspapers construct stories about Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives?

### 1. Legislation

- a. "Constitution Review: Reps likely to propose autonomy for local governments – To vote on Tuesday" (*The Nation*, July 19, 2013, p.5).

**The analysis:** This report is on a critical issue of the need to review the 1999 Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria which some sections are considered deficient and ineffective. From the tone of the story constructed with response frame, there is high probability that members of the House will favour the call for local government autonomy. In view of the perceived belief that the autonomy would bring development to the grassroots, the report gave insight into the urgency with which the House of Representatives was prepared to vote in this regard without delay.

- b. "Law makers not opposed to passage of PIB – Committee Chairman" (*Nigerian Tribune*, February 7, 2014, p.43).

**The analysis:** The report which used response frame appears to clear reservations from certain quarters that House of Representatives was indisposed to the passage of Petroleum Industry Bill meant to liberalise the oil sector thereby eradicating the encumbrances that deny Nigerians from optimizing the benefits of the sector.

- c. "Reps mull compulsory public education for civil servants, politicians' wards" (*The Nation*, August 22, 2013, p.37).

**The analysis:** Inferentially, the decay in Nigerian public schools, which consequence are for children and wards of well-to-do civil servants and politicians school in private schools or even abroad, seemed to have finally attracted the attention of the House of Representatives. Using response frame, the report, at least drops a hint about the House of Representatives which contemplated a bill to reverse the status quo. The likely implication was that, Nigerian public schools were to be given a face lift and children of vulnerable families that hitherto suffered the misfortune of attending the dilapidated schools were going to be emancipated.

- d. "House Shelves Debate on 2013 Budget Amendment Bill" (*This Day*, April 26, 2013, p.9).

**The analysis:** One of the characteristics of the House of Representatives is the

demonstrable laxity as regards the conduct of their legislative activities. This report is a testimony of the inglorious conduct. Budget is an imperative in driving the economy. This is only possible when a proposed appropriation budget is deliberated on and passed as at when due. Instead of expediting actions on the budget, the House of Representative has reportedly stayed action on it.

- e. "Budget 2013: House Makes U-Turn, Reconsiders Amendment Bill" (*Daily Trust*, July 19, 2013, p.8).

**The analysis:** Perhaps, due to reasons only known to the House of Representatives, the Green Chamber has reversed its earlier stance of shelving the 2013 Appropriation Bill, as the newspaper used catchphrase "House Makes U-Turn" and reconsiders the Bill. Even if the House did not rescind its earlier decision, it would only delay consideration of the budget since it has no option in the final analysis.

- f. "Oil price benchmark row threatens budget" (*The Nation*, November 15, 2014, p.4).

**The analysis:** The Nigerian National budgets are based strictly on oil benchmark in the international market. The rationale is that the country operates a mono economy. By virtue of the report which used conflict frame, there is a decision impasse on what should be the oil bench mark for the 2014 budget. While a Conference Committee adopted \$76.5 per barrel, the House of Representatives suggested \$79 per barrel. The stalemate naturally stultified an early passage of the 2014 budgets which should drive the economy.

- g. "House Not Under Pressure to Scuttle PIB" (*This Day*, April 10, 2013, p.12).

**The analysis:** The newspaper used response frame to allay fears of Nigerians considering the importance of the Petroleum Industry Bill which cannot be overstressed. But the apparent delay in consideration and passage of the bill by the House of Representatives, probably led to insinuations that forces benefitting from non-passage of the bill do not want it passed. However, the assurance coming from the Speaker of House of the Representatives (as reported in the content of the story) served as an anti-dote for possible discomfort of Nigerians in dire need of the bill.

- h. "NASS not competent to make constitution for Nigeria" (*Nigerian Tribune*, April 15, 2014, p.35).

**The analysis:** The story depicted a perceived character of the House of Representatives in particular, and the National Assembly in general. Inferentially, it involved more stakeholders and processes when the need arose for inventing a new Constitution. A cursory look at the story which made use of response frame indicated that the NASS simply lacks the capacity and it would be demeaning if it insisted on making a Constitution for Nigeria unilaterally.

- i. "Postponement of House sitting not because of Tambuwal - Ogor" (*Nigerian Tribune*, December 4, 2014, p.8).

**The analysis:** This was another story the newspaper uses response frame to construct. The story also depicted an unsavory conduct of the House of Representatives. Based on the report linked to Ogor, the Minority Leader of the House, it creates the impression that the postponement of sitting was uncalled for. But in politics, being proactive is the ability to anticipate the future and accompanying consequence with a view to strategizing how to deflect what will affect one adversely. Therefore, it would not be too surprising if the postponement came at the instance when the Speaker's seat was threatened shortly after his defection from PDP to APC.

## 2. Oversight

- a. "Reps Lament Poor Funding of Consumer Control" (*This Day*, October 14, 2013, p.30).

**The Analysis:** This report makes use of attribution of responsibilities framed by holding government responsible for the paucity of funds faced by the Consumer Protection Council (CPC). Taking into cognizance that it is incumbent on government to protect lives and property in all ways, one would expect government to ensure this through its agencies. For government agencies and other established bodies to function effectively, there is need to empower them financially. This is not so with the Consumer Protection Council (CPC), as reported. The centrality of CPC is evidenced in protecting citizens from consumption of fake and substandard products. But one wonders why the legislature should be lamenting in the face of appropriation made to it since such are expectedly based on their budget.

- b. "Service Wide Vote: Another N24bn Missing from Police Pension Fund – House, again summons Okonjo-Iweala, others" (*This Day*, March 12, 2014, p.10).

**The Analysis:** This report made use of attribution of responsibility frame. It inferentially held Okonjo-Iweala, then Minister of Finance, and others responsible for the missing fund. If the fund is tagged as another missing fund, the impression is that there have been several similar cases of missing funds despite offices and personnel that should keep tract of government transactions and be held accountable. Striking from the story also is the huge amount involved which explains the monumental financial hemorrhage through covert means like the Service-wide vote. Curiously too, one wonders if the fund should be linked to Service-wide vote or domiciled in its legally designated account, which is the Police Pension Board's.

- c. "Alison-Madueke's N10b jet probe not selective, say Reps" (*The Nation*, March 28, 2014, p.53).

**The Analysis:** This report, which used response frame and human interest frame, was attributed to the House of Representatives. It was suggestive of the report that there was an overture of lack of fair play; an allegation the legislature debunked that the probe was not selective by all standards. Even if it was selective, those who viewed it that way raised the issue of morality as a justification for reasoning that way.

- d. "House to Probe Okonjo-Iweala over N29bn Police Pension Fund" (*This Day*, January 16, 2014, p.11).

**The Analysis:** A similar case was considered. Here too, the newspaper used attribution of responsibility for the misappropriation of the Police fund by holding Okonjo-Iweala responsible for the disappearance of the fund. The report also reinstated difficult-to-trace huge monies that disappear from government treasury with impunity by those who should account for them.

- e. "House Probes Budget Office over N8 tn Service-wide Votes" (*This Day*, October 14, 2013, p.12).

**The Analysis:** In living up to its statutory responsibility of over sighting other arms of government, the House of Representatives probe a mind-boggling amount to the tune of more than 8 trillion naira appropriated to Budget office. It is common for such probes to be carried out especially when there is grave suspicion for misapplication.

- f. "Reps unhappy with abandonment of Nigerians in CAR" (*Daily Trust*,

December 19, 2013, p.12).

**The Analysis:** Despite the fact that the report does not identify who is responsible for the abandonment, mere mention of Nigerians in the Central African Republic, CAR entailed that the onus was on the Federal Government of Nigeria, which duty was for the safety of Nigerians within the country and in diaspora. Viewed this way, the newspaper used attribution of responsibility frame to construct the story to express the House's displeasure over the executive's presumed insensitivity to the plight of Nigerians living in the war-torn enclave.

- g. "APC Asks N'Assembly to Probe Gombe Airport Blockade" (*This Day*, January 6, 2014, p.8).

**The Analysis:** In this report, the newspaper used attribution of responsibility to construct the story. By inference, the management of the airport, is and should be held responsible for the blockade. Conventional wisdom portends that for one to land at the tarmac, necessary contacts and arrangements are made. The sudden blockade without justifiable reason creates the impression of executive rascality of those sympathetic with the ruling political party (PDP) towards opposition political parties which the APC was the major one.

- h. "Investigate Oritsejafor over cash for arms deal, ACF urges lawmakers" (*Nigerian Tribune*, September 29, 2014, p.4).

**The Analysis:** The story made use of attribution of responsibility frame to construct the story. It linked Oritsejafor to the arms deal saga that raised many questions to be answered. Oritsejafor was the president, Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, a civilian from the southern part of the country, and owned a carrier that was used for the transaction. The call attributed to the Arewa Consultative Forum, an umbrella body that fosters northern aspirations is not strange particularly to those familiar with the religious and ethnic cleavages that offer interpretation given to issues in Nigeria. In any case, one denominator is a wakeup call for lawmakers to do the needful.

- i. "Tambuwal, Ihedioha want justice for victims" (*Nigerian Tribune*, April 15, 2014, p.2).

**The Analysis:** In this report, the newspaper used response frame to construct the story. The story, credited to the then Speaker, and his Deputy in the Green House, could have not come from anyone of less status. The call was on the heels of Boko Haram attacks in Yobe State where several people were adversely affected in different ways. Victims needed reprieve in terms of resettlement, rehabilitation, and above all arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of the heinous act.

### 3. Mediation

- a. "House of Reps wades into ASUP/Fed Govt Crisis" (*The Nation*, May 1, 2014, p.15).

**The Analysis:** The newspaper reported one of the daunting issues in the Nigerian educational sector which is incessant industrial disputes with their attendant consequences. Using morality frame, the newspaper brought to perspective the mediation role of the legislature as a platform for the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics, ASUP and the Federal Government of Nigeria to resolve the standoff. The newspaper's use of the noun "Crisis" showed also the element of conflict/human interest frame in the story.

- b. "Reps see end to ASUU strike – Church urges govt to honour pact" (*The Nation*, August 22, 2013, p.7).

**The Analysis:** This report is about the mediation role by the House of Representatives in

resolving the apparent disagreement between the Academic Staff Universities Union, ASUU and the Federal Government of Nigeria. The story, which uses both conflict and morality frames, is also attributed to the Church for its intervention role rather than playing the neutral role like the legislature. The Church emphatically enjoins government, in particular, to honour the agreement reached.

#### 4. Others

- a. "Reps in row over compilation of minority leader" (*The Nation*, June 4, 2014, p.6).

**The Analysis:** This report is embedded with conflict/human interest frame. The report typified the House of Representatives as a conflict-ridden institution even on matters of composing its minority leader. Easy, simple and seamless the compilation exercise may appear, considering the position as one of the rare plum and influential ones in the House naturally attracted some vested interests nursing ambition to be considered for the position.

- b. "Uproar in House as APC members claim majority – Gbajabiamila calls Leo Ogor Minority Leader" (*The Nation*, January 22, 2014, p.1).

**The Analysis:** This is another report where the newspaper used conflict/human interest frame to construct the story. The nature of the chaotic legislature took a different dimension when some members of the ruling People's Democratic Party, PDP defected to the major opposition party, the All Progressive Congress, APC. The kicker of the report shows how APC dares PDP. This was evidenced in the report as an APC member, Gbajabiamila addresses Leo Ogor as the Minority Leader of the House sequel to the defection. This is indeed an overt affront to the PDP!

- c. "Drama as Ogor Moves to Upstage Gbajabiamila, Osagie, Others" (*This Day*, June 4, 2014, p.10).

**The Analysis:** In this report, the newspaper used conflict/human interest frame to construct the story. Another noticeable frame was the attribution of responsibility frame which identifies Ogor as being responsible for the drama. The crisis is between the Deputy House Leader, Leo Ogor, and Minority Leader, Kemi Gbajabiamila, Minority Whip, Samson Osagie, and other members of the House. Essentially, the report indicated that Ogor attempted to unseat Gbajabiamila. In politics, such intrigues and political deftness manifest at the slightest opportunity. Even when such an opportunity did not present itself, political gladiators fashion one to leverage on so as to achieve their inordinate desires.

- d. "37 PDP House of Reps Members Defect to APC – 22 senators set to follow suit – court restrains Tukur, Mark from declaring seats vacant – Atiku to consult associates before deciding on joining party" (*This Day*, December 19, 2013, p.1).

**The Analysis:** This report, which made use of the conflict/human interest frame, presented a graphic picture of the magnitude of PDP defectors to APC. The first kicker did not lose sight of the possibility of some 22 senators, who would soon defect to APC. The second kicker, which was linked to former Vice-President, Abubakar Atiku, gave the impression that his decision to also defect from PDP to APC depended on the outcome of necessary consultations with his associates. In politics, defection is tolerated. Those aggrieved, particularly when their personal interest is injured or perceived to be injured, do not hesitate to defect. Sadly, some of those defectors often lack cogent reasons, as even their political party leanings, lack distinctive ideologies.

- e. "Reps' defection to APC, a betrayal - PDP" (*Daily Trust*, December 19, 2013, p.5).

**The Analysis:** This report used the conflict/human interest frame and attribution of responsibility frame to construct the story. Evidently, the conflict was between PDP and APC. The report which was credited to PDP held its defecting members responsible for the act rather than the prevailing circumstances responsible for their defection.

- f.. "National Assembly Dragged to Court over N53 bn Increase in 2014 budget" (*Daily Trust*, May 19, 2014, p.12).

**The Analysis:** A dominant feature of our budgets is their arbitrary increase by the National Assembly, sometimes referred to as padding. Using the attribution of responsibility frame, the newspaper report holds the NASS responsible for the increase in the 2014 budget. It was in attempt to determine the legality of NASS' act considered ignoble that it was sued.

- g. "House declares day of mourning for slain Yobe pupils – military captures Boko Haram fighters in forest" (*The Nation*, March 12, 2014, p.4).

**The Analysis:** In this report, the newspaper used morality frame. The report brings to mind the sustained mayhem Boko Haram has been unleashing on Nigerians. By the stance of the report, even if the government was unable to contain the menace, there was need to condole with the bereaved, hence the one-day national mourning declaration.

**Research Question Two:** What is the direction of newspapers stories about Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives?

**Table 1:** Direction or valence of the newspapers reports.

| Story                                                                                                                                        | Direction                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| "Constitution Review: Reps likely to propose autonomy for local governments – To vote on Tuesday" ( <i>The Nation</i> , July 19, 2013, p.5). | Favourable: Patriotic legislature             |
| "Law makers not opposed to passage of PIB – Committee Chairman" ( <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> , February 7, 2014, p.43).                         | Favourable: Patriotic legislature/responsible |
| "Reps mull compulsory public education for civil servants, politicians' wards" ( <i>The Nation</i> , August 22, 2013, p.37).                 | Favourable: Patriotic legislature/responsible |
| "House Shelves Debate on 2013 Budget Amendment Bill" ( <i>This Day</i> , April 26, 2013, p.9).                                               | Unfavourable: Irresponsible                   |
| "Oil price benchmark row threatens budget" ( <i>The Nation</i> , November 15, 2014, p.4).                                                    | Unfavourable: Irresponsible                   |
| "House Not Under Pressure to Scuttle PIB" ( <i>This Day</i> , April 10, 2013, p.12).                                                         | Favourable: Patriotic legislature             |
| "Budget 2013: House Makes U-Turn, Reconsiders Amendment Bill" ( <i>Daily Trust</i> , July 19, 2013, p.8).                                    | Favourable: Patriotic legislature             |
| "House Defers Presentation of Constitution Review Report" ( <i>This Day</i> , February 1, 2013, p.11).                                       | Unfavourable: Insensitive                     |

|                                                                                                                                                             |                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| "Reps pass Pension Reform Bill" ( <i>The Nation</i> , May 1, 2014, p.6).                                                                                    | Favourable:<br>Proactive legislature              |
| "Reps Lament Poor Funding of Consumer Control" ( <i>This Day</i> , October 14, 2013, p.30).                                                                 | Favourable: Patriotic,<br>considerate legislature |
| "Service Wide Vote: Another N24bn Missing from Police Pension Fund – House, again summons Okonjo-Iweala, others" ( <i>This Day</i> , March 12, 2014, p.10). | Favourable:<br>Responsive legislature             |
| "Alison- Madueke's N10b jet probe not selective, say Reps" ( <i>The Nation</i> , March 28, 2014, p.53).                                                     | Favourable: Patriotic<br>legislature              |
| "House to Probe Okonjo-Iweala over N29bn Police Pension Fund" ( <i>This Day</i> , January 16, 2014, p.11).                                                  | Favourable:<br>Responsive legislature             |
| "House Probes Budget Office over N8tn Service-wide Votes" ( <i>This Day</i> , October 14, 2013, p.12).                                                      | Favourable:<br>Responsive legislature             |
| "Reps unhappy with abandonment of Nigerians in CAR" ( <i>Daily Trust</i> , December 19, 2013, p.12).                                                        | Favourable:<br>Concerned legislature              |
| "House Probes "Secret" Amendment to Armed Forces Act" ( <i>This Day</i> , July 3, 2013, p.11).                                                              | Favourable: Sensitive<br>and just legislature     |
| "APC Asks N' Assembly to Probe Gombe Airport Blockade" ( <i>This Day</i> , January 6, 2014, p.8).                                                           | Unfavourable:<br>Insensitive legislature          |
| "Investigate Oritsejafor over cash for arms deal, ACF urges" ( <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> , September 29, 2014, p.4).                                          | Unfavourable:<br>Insensitive legislature          |
| "Tambuwal, Ihedioha want justice for victims" ( <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> , April 15, 2014, p.2).                                                             | Favourable: Sensitive,<br>Compassionate           |
| "House of Reps wades into ASUP/Fed Govt Crisis" ( <i>The Nation</i> , May 1, 2014, p.15).                                                                   | Favourable: Sensitive,<br>Compassionate           |
| "Reps see end to ASUU strike – Church urges govt to honour pact" ( <i>The Nation</i> , August 22, 2013, p.7).                                               | Favourable: Sensitive,<br>Compassionate           |
| "Reps in row over compilation of minority leader" ( <i>The Nation</i> , June 4, 2014, p.6).                                                                 | Unfavourable:<br>Irresponsible                    |
| "Uproar in House as APC members claim majority – Gbajabiala calls Leo Ogor Minority Leader" ( <i>The Nation</i> , January 22, 2014, p.1).                   | Unfavourable:<br>Irresponsible                    |
| "Drama as Ogor Moves to Upstage Gbajabiamila, Osagie, Others" ( <i>This Day</i> , June 4, 2014, p.10).                                                      | Unfavourable:<br>Irresponsible                    |
| "Reps in rowdy session over move to disband minority leader" ( <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> , June 4, 2014, p.2).                                                | Unfavourable:<br>Irresponsible                    |
| "Reps row over leadership change, Tambuwal calls for caution, PDP delaying the inevitable - APC" ( <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> , January 22, 2014, p.2).        | Unfavourable:<br>Irresponsible                    |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| "37 PDP House of Reps Members Defect to APC –22 senators set to follow suit – court restrains Tukur, Mark from declaring seats vacant – Atiku to consult associates before deciding on joining party" ( <i>This Day</i> , December 19, 2013,p.1). | Unfavourable:<br>Irresponsible                 |
| "APC now in majority as 37 Reps defect from PDP -22 Senators, 57 Reps get court order to retain seats" ( <i>The Nation</i> , December 19, 2013, p.4).                                                                                             | Unfavourable:<br>Irresponsible                 |
| "National Assembly Dragged to Court over N53bn Increase in 2014 budget" ( <i>Daily Trust</i> , May 19, 2014, p.12).                                                                                                                               | Unfavourable:<br>Unpatriotic,<br>Irresponsible |
| "House declares day of mourning for slain Yobe pupils – military captures Boko Haram fighters in forest" ( <i>The Nation</i> , March 12, 2014, p.4).                                                                                              | Favourable:<br>Compassionate,<br>Responsible   |

Source: Field Study, 2017.

### Discussion of Findings

The study analysed the pattern of frames newspapers used in constructing stories about Nigeria's Seventh House of Representatives. It also analysed the direction of newspapers' reports about Nigeria's seventh House of Representatives. In the course of the analyses, the researchers logically confronted the problem using thematic approach. Themes that served as barometer for the analyses were legislation, oversight, mediation, and a combination of several other roles the House of Representatives perform. Eminently featured in the stories under consideration in each of the themes were conflict/human interest frame, response frame, and attribution of responsibility frame.

The conflict frame, for example, signified the newspapers' portrayal of the House of Representatives as deteriorating into chaos. Consistent with the centrality of framing theory that the power of communication is to direct individual cognitions toward a prescribed interpretation of a situation or affected object (Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber & Fan, 1998), this conflict/human interest frame goes beyond a simple reporting of discussions on the lower chamber's activities. It constructs the meaning of its activities. Through conflict/human interest frame, the newspaper focused on the inability of House of Representatives, which constitute Nigeria's political leadership, to resolve differences that characterize members' conduct. The newspaper further drew attention to the House's failure or inability to take action to resolve certain issues that affect citizens' welfare contrary to Tom and Attai's (2014) assertion that, their activities should be directed towards reversing declining economy, stabilizing the polity and integrating society with the overall aim of enhancing national development.

However, the use of response frame demonstrates, to a large extent, the commitment of the House of Representatives as being responsive to some daunting issues. The same can be said of attribution of responsibility frame whereby the newspaper clearly brought to public domain who should be held accountable for what.

On valence of the newspaper reports, findings of this study reveal that considering the way in which the House of Representatives was framed brings to clear perspective the ability of the newspaper to present the legislature both favourably or unfavourably in the minds of the public. This, however, depends on the issues at stake. But the fact that most of the reports that negatively portray the House of Representatives appear to favourably compete with few stories that depict the House of Representatives as being patriotic, responsive, sensitive, and responsible becomes worrisome.

## Conclusion

The Newspaper serves as a valuable source of information and a powerful mode of communication. Based on this study, there is little doubt that the newspaper plays a crucial role in framing how Nigeria's House of Representatives could be perceived. A growing body of literature highlights this role. By examining newspaper framing theory and applying this in the analysis of newspapers reports, several frames were identified. These frames analysed under different themes of legislation and oversight just to mention two, highlight how newspapers are able to influence public perception.

## Recommendations

Against the backdrop that most of the reports portray the House of Representatives as a rancorous and irresponsible institution, it is hereby recommended that members of the House should restrain from inglorious acts like undue disagreements, conduct themselves with some decorum and avoid incessant defections on account of petty grievances that threaten the stability of the institution.

The House of Representatives should avoid mere expression of dissatisfaction or disappointment of certain developments at home by comparing them with what obtains abroad, but should rather suggest cogent measures of addressing such concerns. Where the House for example, only mulls over issues, as in the case of ill-fated public schools in Nigeria, is clearly unacceptable. Rather, the legislature should expeditiously exercise its mandate of lawmaking by sponsoring appropriate bills to remedy the situation.

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