

EXPLORING THE NARRATIVES OF NIGERIA'S RESTRUCTURING IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

Recently, there have been agitations for restructuring in the Federal character of Nigeria which is assumed to be heavily skewed towards the Northern Nigeria. The perceived imbalance in resource allocation and control has continued to generate debates that led to hate speeches among various groups in different medium of communication the newspaper being the prominent. The study adopted quantitative content analysis of three randomly selected newspapers (The Punch, The Guardian and Vanguard). A total of 504 editions of from these selected newspapers published over a period of six months were content analysed for placements, frequency, themes and framing. The study concluded that narratives on restructuring were given appropriate prominence as editorial contents covers the issues.

Keywords: Restructuring, Resources, Agitations, Media, Narratives

1. Introduction

The agitation for restructuring in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. History gave credence to the era of colonial rule as providing an archetype for restructuring in Nigeria, through the 1914 amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates which gave birth to Nigeria as a nation. However, since Nigeria broke loose from the colonial and directorate of the British, concerns have been raised consistently about the unevenness of control and privileges in the country, which has birthed hostilities of different nature over the years of the nation's self rule. Nigeria as a nation had tried few political philosophies that ranges from parliamentary, regional, military regimes and democracy (Benjamin, 2000:26; Peter, 2010:65). The issue of restructuring was as a result of hegemonic influences exerted on the minorities, marginalization and perceived unequal distribution of the nation's wealth.

The grievances and aggression expressed by some sectors have not been handled by the Federal Government in a way to quell the animosities but fuel it. Critically examining the concept of 'federalism' in the Nigerian clime, it is an aberration of what true federalism portends. Nigerian adopted federalism structure was not well mapped out philosophically when compared to other countries of the world that practice federalism system. Wheare (1963:10) defined federalism as the method of dividing powers so that general and regional government are each within a sphere, coordinate and independent. Wheare's concept of federalism is an opposite of what obtains in Nigeria; what is in operation in Nigeria could be described as quasi-federalism (strong centre, weak unit) in the words of Peter (2010).

Problem Statement

Several past government systems and regimes including the 6th republic have witnessed the anger, resentment, aggression, frustrations and advocacy that resulted from lopsided federalism as practiced in Nigerian clime. The clamour for restructuring of the federal government is not a new phenomenon in the country, as Nigerians are resenting the constitutional provision of 1966 and 1999 that promote unitary or quasi federalism (Peter, 2010) that is in dissonance to true federalism as practiced in developing nations.

Agitations and advocacy in form of armed insurgencies, kidnappings, killings, sabotage of government and transactional economic activities by restive youths and partisan government functionaries at both state and local levels are examples of the manifest reactions that the quest for restructuring has birthed over the years (Benjamin, 2001:13). Amongst the insurgencies are: Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and notably, Odua People's Congress (OPC) from the south-west which was created to protect the interest of the westerners, just as the Northern Youth Forum (NYF) arose to defend the North and Boko

Haram that abhor all western system of education, politics, economics and so on. Continuous disruptions from the restructuring agitators have socio-economic and political influence on the country as political animosities fueled ethnic feud and tribal cleansing.

The media as the conveyor of government policies and ideologies play a mediating role between the government and the citizen. And a number of discourse on the issue of restructuring of the nation's federal character has not escaped the media's purview over the years. As far as the researches awareness affords, media narratives on the issue of restructuring has been scantily appraised or examined in communication and media scholarship in Nigeria.

This study therefore examined media narratives on the issue of restructuring of the federal character of Nigeria, with a view to understanding the prominence, frequency, themes and framing on the issue.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to understand media reportage and coverage on salient issue of restructuring, how media enhance or trivialized Nigerians' agitations and advocacy for restructuring. The study is essentially informed by agitations from Nigerians followed by legislature demand for re-presentation of 2014 Confab report that followed the registration of anger by several institutions and quarters in Nigeria. The organized agitations, protest and advocacy for fiscal federalism was not a new concept but issues that had been on-going for decades. Thus, the study objectives are as stated below, to:

- i. measure the prominence given to stories on restructuring through the analysis of placements and frequencies.
- ii. appraise the dominant themes on the reports of restructuring.
- iii. assess the frames adopted in the reportage on restructuring in form of the tones.

Research Questions

Thus, the study seeks to answer the following questions to achieve the objectives of the study:

- i. What is the prominence and frequency given to media coverage on restructuring?
- ii. What are the dominant themes of the media content on restructuring?
- iii. What are the tones and frames adopted by the media in presenting news stories on restructuring?

The paper is divided into five sections, Introduction as section 1, Literature Review as section 2, Research methods as section 3, while section 4 and 5 are data presentation, analysis; and conclusion

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Extant literatures abound on the issue of federal system of Nigeria as several scholars had written conceptual, empirical and position papers on the historical and analytical phenomenon on the political system or structure that had generated so much controversy, argument and dissent. The issue of restructuring emerged as a result of agitations that could be traced to inequality in the distribution of the nation's wealth and adoption of quasi federal system (Peter, 2010).

Scholars like Adedeji and Ezeabasili (2018) examined the theoretical paradigm of the concept of federalism by examining the philosophy guarding its practice in two countries using comparative analysis. They adopted library research and findings revealed that as changes occur, the system should make allowance for assimilation of changes, while also concluding that federalism was no more than a constitutional friction that could be given content which seemed appropriate at the moment.

On the other hand, Osegbue, Madubueze and Nwokike (2016) conducted a study that investigated the recent challenges facing federalism in Nigeria and how these challenges affect the unity, integration and cohesion of Nigerian society and equally hamper development. The study traced the origin of federalism to Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 that enacted regional government with powers to generate and utilize funds at their own discretion to the disruption of federal system by military regimes that favoured centralized federalism. The study adopts library research and the data generated through the secondary data was analysed using themes. The findings of the study revealed that federalism in Nigeria exists only in paper and not in reality. The study submits that the antidote against agitations was a total restructure of the entire geographical locations so as to accommodate the dissent tribes clamouring for independence.

Other scholars' expounded on the issue of restructuring. Arowolo (2011:9) enunciated that fiscal federalism or quasi as practiced in Nigeria as against the true federalism handed over by the colonial masters in 1967 was characterized by constant struggle and clamour for a change. The hijack of power by military regimes in Nigeria

with promulgation of 1966 and 1999 Constitutions that arrogated more power to the central had met with dissatisfaction of Nigerians as the state and local government suffer from the centralist federal government.

Ewetan (2012:1084) in his submission, identified centralists system of fiscal relations, critical issues of over dependence on oil revenue, conflict over sharing principle and disharmony of federal/state relations amongst other issues that characterized the quasi federal system established by the military. Political animosities, hegemonic influences, marginalization, oppression are all issues that culminated into the outcry for true federalism by the public. Media has served as the platform for each group to air their grievances.

The mediatisation power of the press cannot be over-emphasised as it relates to the happenings and occurrences in the society where it operates. Media as the fourth estate of the realm exist to foster development of an individual, organization and the larger society (Chiakaan & Ahmed, 2011:15). It is also seen as agent of socialization (Hansen, 2005). Lasswell (1980) opined that the mass media are extension of those functions that the society have always needed. Lasswell (1980) stated the functions of the media as surveillance of the environment, correlation of different elements of society and socialization and transmission of culture. Ajir (2009) affirmed that, the mass media provides values into people. One of the cardinal functions of the media is to inform the masses about current issues and set agenda on issues to be discussed by the masses to form opinion. This feat is accomplished by the media's theoretical apparatus of agenda-setting, framing and priming of issues for public discourse. The media has been bridging the gap between governments and the governed based on its watchdog role in the society and as the conveyor belt that interpret government policies for the public, as well as the voice of the voiceless.

Media narratives is the way the different elements in a news stories are organized to make meaningful story or set schema for public interpretations. Ivare (2009), affirmed that the media mould people's perception, opinion and understanding to desired directions. The media comprises of print, electronic and the new media, each category having a unique slants or varied ways of telling a story.

Fiscal and True Federalism

The nomenclature, 'federalism', had been given myriads of names and its meaning differs from people to people. Some in the political class see it as a panacea for socio-economic and political challenges faced by the nation. (Adedeji and Ezeabasili 2018:160). Different names were employed to describe federalism as practiced in Nigeria: "centralized federalism"; unitary federalism"; "quasi federalism" (Peter, 2010). Nwankwo (2002) posited that federalism "is a type of government system where the authority and powers are shared between two levels of government: namely the central or national government and component of states. Olawari (2003) supported this definition by placing emphasis on two levels of government with shared powers and authorities.

Centralized federalism as x-rayed by Nwankwo (2002) identified nine (9) salient points of dissonance of federalism, being practiced in Nigeria to what it ought to be. Wheare (1946), the founding father of federalism defined it "as a system of government in which there is a division of functions between co-ordinate authorities which are in no way subordinate to one another either in the extent or in the exercise of their allotted function." From his definition, the emphasis is fashioning a method of division of power and authority that empowered the other subordinating units, which could be in the form of state and local government to have autonomy to some extent. He listed the following as essential ingredients of federalism:

- (a) Division of power among other governments;
- (b) A written constitution showing the division of powers;
- (c) Coordinate supremacy of two-order of government with regards to their respective functions.

The three essentials listed by Wheare are the areas of contentions in Nigeria's practiced federalism. The 1966 and 1999 constitution had attributed 80% controlling powers to the central while the remaining twenty percentage was given to the state with none allotted to the Local government Osegbue, et. al. 2016:98. Nigeria as a nation has a legal framework in form of constitution which has been reviewed over the time. The 1999 Constitution earlier mentioned, has emboldened the central government with more powers. The dominance of the central government over the government of the component units, with regards to their functions, was extremely high to the extent that the central controls and allocates resources.

Scholars have traced the origin of federalism to colonial masters which impose their ruling system, culture and hegemony on Nigerians. Adeyeri (2010) and Nwankwo (2002) posited that federalism was ushered into Nigeria through Lyttleton Constitution of 1954, which gave greater autonomy to regions.

Empirical data has established the fact that the regional system handed down to Nigerians by the colonialists was maintained and sustained as true federalism (Ojameruaye, 2011; Nwankwo, 2002). The disruption in the political system as witnessed in the country was traced to military regime that assigned 80% controlling powers to the central

government as provided for in the 1966 and 1999 Constitutions. The distorted federalism as practiced today had a link with the incidence that happened in 1966 when the Military President, General Aguiyi Ironsi attempted to introduce a unitary system that concentrate power at the centre.

Another incidence that instigated agitation for restructuring could be traced to 1951 when Anthony Enahoro demanded of creation for Benin-Delta state and the pressure lasted through 1952, 1953 and 1955 (Jimoh 1993:94). In Nigeria, agitations for restructuring was based on creation of additional regions through which it was hoped to be liberated from the central domination (Dudley, 1982:56). Many concepts had emerged as the solutions to the dissatisfaction that Nigerians have against centralized government.

Fiscal federalism was proposed as an antidote to provide analgesic to the pain and clamour generated by quasi federalism practiced in Nigeria. It emanates from the struggle of ethnic minority states that are naturally endowed and serve as the economic backbone for the nation. Arowolo (2011:19) opined that fiscal federalism in Nigeria is “characterized by constant struggle, clamour for change and very recently, violence in the form of advocacy and agitation for resource control in the Niger-Delta. This part of the country marked with low infrastructural development coupled with environmental degradation as a result of oil drilling, advocated or demand for higher economic empowerment in form of resource allocation from federation account. The gun-powder was the issue of resources control that remain the volatile point of conflicts and agitation. Ewetan, (2012:1084) as cited by Adedeji and Ezeabasili (2018) identified the following problems of fiscal federalism in Nigeria:

- (a) Dominance of the federal government in revenue sharing from the federation account;
- (b) The centralist system of fiscal relations;
- (c) Critical issues of over dependence on oil revenue;
- (d) Conflict over sharing principle and
- (e) Disharmonious federal/state relations.

The issue of fiscal relations among the tiers of government has remained undefined marred with animosities and often form the bases for clamour for a restructuring of Nigeria’s federalism. Tamuno (1998:13) argued that available literature of revenue sharing formula is lopsided in favour of federal government. The on-going political tension resulting from agitation for restructuring had been on without any much effort from the government to nip in the bud except for the 4th republic under President Olusegun Obasanjo who instituted the National Conference to look into issues that caused conflicts and dissatisfaction, and the 5th republic during former President Goodluck Jonathan that did not execute the report of 2012 but instituted another Conference with 2014 Confab report that was neglected by the recent government in power.

The central government had put up measures in order to address the fears, agitations and frustration of Nigerians as expressed by the majority and minorities accusing the government of marginalization and oppression. To safeguard the interests of the minority, the government through constitutional framework had established the federal character principle through the establishment of the Federal Character Commission vide Section 14 (3), Part 1 & Section C of the 1999 Constitution.

Restructuring and National Integration

Challenges confronting the nation had been diagnosed by political scientists, analysts and bigwigs as to the need for emergent and urgent attention to salvage the situation and happenings across the country that reveals fragmentation and internal fractures of the society. Government counter measures have not been able to promote social cohesion and integration of the amalgamation of Nigeria’s 350 ethnic groups which were historically coalesced in 1914 by the colonial Lord.

Agitations from many quarters of the country are indices that the social cohesion and unity of this nation are threatened or under a siege that could be dangerous to the co-existence of the society. The criticisms and complaints of Nigerians against unitary federalism had created internal fractures in both political, social and economic perspective as agitators are seen from different perspectives, and other bodies, agencies and institutions add their voices to advocate for true federalism.

The unitary federalism practiced in Nigeria is an aberration when compared to how federalism is practiced in developed countries. The agitators, knowing the flaws and errors that laced the constitution that empowered unitary federalism and the legal backing for their advocacy as enshrined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) of 10 December, 1948, Article 21 that protects and affirm the right of everyone “to take part in the government of his country” and to “equal access to public service of his country”. The violation of this article are clearly obvious in Nigeria as some regions are more developed structurally than others. The people owns the nation, and the constitution that will facilitate national integration

must be a popular charter freely and voluntarily created and adopted by the people. It must be a reflection of people's consensus and acceptance (Afinotan, 2010).

Another legal platform is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolutions, 2200A (21) of 16 December, 1966 Article 25 that recognized the right of every citizen without distinction of any kind to take part in the conduct of public affairs, to vote, be elected and to have access to public services.

2014 Confab Report

The legislative arms of the 5th Republic have added their voice to the clamouring for the nation's frequent reoccurring issues on restructuring by demanding for the re-presentation of 2014 Confab report submitted to the presidency before the assumption of the current administration. Political gurus, former presidents and other eminent people in the society had joined their voices to demand the implementation of 2014 Confab report as a starting point on the journey to reposition Nigeria to true fiscal federalism. May 25th, 2017, the former president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, canvassed for fiscal federalism and implementation of the Conference report as the only panacea to socio-economic and security challenges plaguing the country (Guardian Newspaper, May, 25 2017: Kevin Ebiri). His assumption was based on the fact that the conference was executed based on the yearning, agitations and desperation of Nigerians. The Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), Afe Babalola advocated return to parliamentary system of government.

The gap discovered was the fact that content analysis has not been adopted to examine the media manifests on the issue of restructuring which was very salient in setting agenda for the public interpretation and perspective. These are research gaps that this study filled. This study therefore contributes to the body of knowledge on the understanding of the framing of restructuring issues. It focuses on media content to identify the salience, objectivity, placement, themes and tones as related to the issue of restructuring.

Theoretical Review

This study was based on the framework of the framing theory. Framing is a research paradigm that has its origin in psychology, but concept has gained recognition and relevance in sociology and anthropology (Iorgoveanu and Corbu, 2013), and has also achieved wide application in media studies was triggered by Entman's (1993) postulations on framing. Framing as a media effect theory form an aspect in agenda setting theory. Framing was described as centrally organized ideas for news that supplies a context and suggest what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; Galadima, 2009). Framing was situated within the context of media decisional power to provide the public with issues for information or discussion to influence opinion. Specifically, media influence in changing people's perspective or behaviour. This implies that news items, prominence, direction of publication among other strategies can influence public opinion on politics, economic and social issues. This implies that newspapers possess the potential to provide schemas for the public to interpret on the issues of restructuring.

3. Research Method

The study adopted quantitative content analysis to collect data for the study as it is the most appropriate method for the study considering the fact that it is a systematic technique to investigate media manifests. Walizer and Wiever (1978) defined content analysis as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information. Berelson (1958) defined the concept as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Content analysis as a concept originated from communication scholars. It was first used or its application was traced to 1600s when the church conducted observations of communication content to avoid dissemination of non-religious materials through the newspapers, (Krippendorff, 1980).

Population

The study population consist of three (3) Nigerian newspapers namely: *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard*.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of three newspapers was purposively selected for the study. Editions of six months were selected for the study, covering January 2017 to June 2017. The total editions for the period under study were 504 which constituted the population for the study. Thus, 140 editions representing 27% were selected at an interval of one edition per five issue dates, weekend editions inclusive. The sampling interval was determined by preparation of a sampling frame

on issue dates, selecting the ‘th’, the interval was 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th and 30th. Systematic sampling technique was adopted for creating a random probability sample in which each piece of data is chosen at the fixed interval for inclusion in the sample. 27% of the population were sampled for the study based on Wimmer and Dominick (2006) and Kerlinger (1979) that enunciated that a sample size between 10 and 20% of the population is appropriate.

Instrumentation

Coding sheet was designed to capture the different parameters measured in the study, including the prominence, types, placement and tone of each news stories on restructuring.

4. Analysis and Discussion

RQ 1: What is the prominence and frequency given to media coverage on restructuring?

Table 1: Prominence and frequency count for position of issues on restructuring.

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cum. %
Front Page	3	6	6	6
Editorial	3	6	6	6
Inside Page	38	76	76	76
Central Spread	1	2	2	2
Full page	5	10	10	10
Total	50	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Results from Table I above showed 3 (6%) of the stories published with restructuring on front page placement while 3 (6%) of the news stories enjoyed editorial rhetorical analysis and exposition on the same issue; 38 (76%) enjoyed inside page coverage. However, the importance of the issue was recorded to enjoy 1(2%) central-spread prominence and 5 (10%) full page reportage. Analysis of the placement and frequency of the stories, revealed that the larger percentage of 38 (76%) news stories were shrouded inside the pages of newspapers. The reason for this could be the sensitivity of the issue and the media might not want to be seen as instigating the emotion of the public.

Table 2: Position of story cross-tabulation.

Newspapers	Editorial	Central Sp.	Front Page	Full page	Inside page
Punch	1	0	2	1	12
Guardian	2	1	2	2	13
Vanguard	0	0	2	2	13
Total	3	1	6	5	38

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Table 2 result revealed that the frequency count on issues of restructuring as reported by *The Guardian* newspapers enjoyed front page twice, (“We must restructure this country and go back to parliamentary system of government”. March 21, 2017; “Jonathan canvasses fiscal federalism, implementation of 2014 Confab Report”. May 25, 2017), while *Punch* (Senate’s hypocrisy on 2014 conference report. June 26, 2017) was once and *vanguard* has none. Examining the editorial content on the issue, *The Guardian* newspaper published historical, analytical and interpretative articles on the issue and equally gave it prominence with placement on central spread. Also *Punch* Newspaper has 1(one) editorial titled “Senate’s hypocrisy on 2014 conference report.” on the issue of restructuring, while *Vanguard newspaper* did not have editorial on the issue of restructuring.

RQ 2: What are the dominant themes of the media content?

Table 3: Dominant themes on restructuring Issue

Dominant Themes	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cum. %
Agitations	6	12	12	12
Violence	7	14	14	14
Protest	7	14	14	14
Marginalization	10	20	20	20
Advocacy	20	40	40	40
Total	50	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Result from Table 3 showed 6 (12%) of the reportage reflect agitations from some quarters of the country, while 7 (14%) news stories covered violence by some groups. 7(14%) was on protest, just as 10 (20%) was on marginalization and 20 (40%) was on advocacy.

RQ 3: What are the tones adopted by the media in presenting news stories on restructuring?

Table 4: Dominant tones in the media manifests on restructuring.

Dominant Tone	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cum. %
Objective	36	72	72	72
Fear Appeal	2	4	4	4
Neutral	12	24	24	24
Total	50	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Findings revealed that 36 (72) news stories were objectively presented while 2 (4%) portrayed fear appeal and 12 (24%) enjoyed neutrality reportage on restructuring issues.

Discussion

The results obtained from the study were used in answering the research questions. From the total news stories counted from the sampled newspapers with the six months period under consideration, *The Guardian* newspapers gave greater prominence to the issue of restructuring by placing it on editorial and central spread for emphasis as it presented historical, analytical and interpretative rhetoric on the issue of restructuring. *The Punch* and *Vanguard* on the other hand have considerable coverage of news stories on restructuring as full page in the inside pages and editorial. This is evident in the frequency of their coverage as assessed from the newspapers. Generally, it could be said that the issue of restructuring received salient coverage during the period under study. Fifty stories related to the campaigns were counted throughout the period of the study.

Entman (1993) enunciated that framing centered on how media select on which aspect of issues to accord prominence by size, placements, tone and slanting in a way that particular interpretations and perspective are promoted and prioritized above others. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) posit that media transfer the salience of specific attributes to issues or events (Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams and Trammel, 2005). Framing was examined in this study using themes and tones as conveyed on the news items on restructuring. The most pronounced theme was advocacy with 20 (40%) news reportage followed by 10 (20%) outburst of marginalization from some quarters of the country that accused the central government of being oppressive and bias. It was revealed from the results that by advocacy the public is in support of restructuring of the current quasi federal system to true federalism.

In addition, examining the tone, it was revealed that reportage on issue of restructuring were treated with objectivity with 36 (72%) while 2 (4%) showed fear appeal and 12 (24%) news items portrayed neutrality on the issue of restructuring.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that the three selected newspapers accord considerable and significant attention to the reportage on the issue of restructuring and considered it salient. It equally revealed that the frames of the marginalization and advocacy were prominent on the counted issues. The study concludes that the public is in

support of restructuring of the current quasi federal system (Peter, 2010) to true federalism that allows equal distribution of wealth and that empowers the people at the grassroots.

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