

Portrayal of Electronic Transmission of Election Results in Selected Media Outlets in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the portrayal of electronic transmission of Election results in selected media outlets in Nigeria to determine the extent of attention given to the issue in creating awareness to the public that led to the outcry of Nigerian to subsequent passage of the bill. The selected newspapers were The Punch and The Guardian. The scope covers the reportage from August 2021 to September 2021. It makes use of content analysis research technique. The researcher uses the agenda setting theory as theoretical framework. From the findings, it was discovered that the contribution of the newspapers in terms prominence of electronic transmission of Election Results were not good enough. Even though the media are regarded as agenda setters and platforms for fighting all forms of issues. Based on these, the study recommends that the media should rise up to their responsibilities in ensuring that they play a leading role by setting the agenda for the public and Issues of importance should be more prominence and better informed to the public about the significance of such an issue and the consequences.

Keywords: Media, Election, Electronic Transmission, content analysis, agenda setting theory

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1. Introduction

The debates in Nigeria over the provision of Clause 52 (3) of the Electoral Bill 2021 regarding the electronic transmission of election results appear to be generating a lot of heat but throwing very little light on the cardinal issues. The issue has in the past months continued to increase in Nigeria which subsequently led to the passage of the bill. Since the outrage and outright rejection by the Senate that accompanied the passage of the 2021 Amended Electoral act, most Nigerians have not been blissful with that decision. Consequently, Nigerian Senate had on October 12, 2021 bowed to public stress and adopted the stance of the Independent Electoral Commission INEC to transmit electronically. The Senate which had formerly denied INEC the authority to transmit effects of elections electronically however alternatively empowered the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Assembly to decide the use of digital transmission in an election. The senate, in the course of the consideration of what they referred to as re-committal of amended clauses of a Bill for an act to repeal the electoral consignment 2021, No. 6, 2021, and enact the electoral act 2021, adopted the role of the decrease chamber on the amendments. The controversial clause 52(3) used to be amended to 52(2), which reads: "Subject to part sixty-three of this Bill, vote casting at an election and transmission of consequences below this Bill shall be in accordance with the method decided via the Commission (INEC), which might also consist of digital balloting Akubo, (2021). According to Usman, (2021) electronic transmission of election results referred to a provision in clause 53 of the Electoral amendment act which places on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) the right to transmit results without subjecting their discretion to any other organ as was initially captured that generated controversy. Online voting, however, refers to technologies that contained voting process such as: digital broadcasting, telephony, the internet Magdalena, 2014, as cited in Nnaeto & Anulika, (2018). According to Adekunle, (2021), one of the front-burner issues agitating the polity, apart from insecurity, is that of the electoral act amendment. This in the past months came

to light that a provision for electronic transmission of election results had been expunged from the proposed amendments to the Electoral Act. This as a result, triggered clamor in Nigeria. Astonishingly, the same National Assembly approved the use of other electronic means during elections as INEC deems fit but hinged on electronic transmission of the results based on the express approval by National Assembly and the Nigerian Communications Commission. The role of the media as it concerned electronic transmission of election result has no doubt called for investigation to find out how often the media report this issue because of the power of the media to set agenda for the public. Geyer, 2014 as cited in Lacas & Laguma, (2020), found that the media have the ability to set agenda for the public. This therefore means that, the media can achieve this through prominence and the frequency accorded to stories on electronic transmission of election results in Nigeria.

According to INEC position paper (2021), the attraction of electronic transmission of election results in Nigeria today could be summed up in three words trust, efficiency and safety. The media are fundamental to democracy, and a vote based political race is unimaginable without media. A free and reasonable political decision isn't just with regards to the opportunity to cast a ballot and the information on the best way to make a choice, yet additionally about a participatory interaction where citizens take part openly discuss and host satisfactory information about parties, policies, applicants and the political race process itself to settle on informed decisions. <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me/onePage>. In the existing political affairs and society at large, media is indispensable for the protective straightforwardness of democratic processes. This is often known as its 'watchdog' job. Straightforwardness is wanted on many stages such as admittance to information; accountability and authenticity of people, business enterprise and cycles themselves; and for official cooperation and public discussion. <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me/onePage>. The theoretical framework for this study was based on the agenda-setting theory propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972). The main thrust of the Agenda Setting Theory is that the Mass media may not be powerful enough to determine for us what and how we actually think, they are obviously influential in determining what we as a nation, society or group think about at a particular time. Media resides in more than the amount of space or time devoted to a story and its position in the stream or on the page. Invariably, this theory is relevant to this study because it is the portrayal of the Electronic transmission of Election results in the media that will make the people to see the initiative as important in their informal discussion setting as well as the period given to the issue and its position in the newspaper

To this end, the study, therefore, examined the portrayal of electronic transmission of Election results in selected media outlets in Nigeria to determine the extent of attention given to the issue in creating awareness to the public that led to the outcry of Nigerian to subsequent passage of the bill. To achieve this aim, this study looked at how to ascertain the volume of stories on electronic transmission of election results reported by the newspaper, it determines the prominence of selected newspapers reportage of electronic transmission of election results in Nigeria and finally ascertained the direction of coverage given to electronic transmission of election results reported by the newspaper.

2. Materials and Methods

The research designed used for this study was content analysis. This was used based on the fact that the study seeks to establish the extent of attention given by the newspaper to electronic transmission of Election results in Nigeria from August 2021 to September 2021. The data gathered from the selected newspapers were subjected to quantitative analysis. The study population includes all the selected newspaper editions produced and circulated in Nigeria within the period of study. The newspapers used were The Punch and The Guardian. The total population of the edition was 122. The study purposively selected from the population two national newspapers published and circulated each day as the sample size. The choice was based on the circulation, availability, and national coverage for this study. Meanwhile, out of the total population of 122 editions published only 46 editions reported stories on electronic transmission of election results which was used as sample size for this study. The data analysis was presented using simple percentage methods.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of the contents analysis of the selected newspapers for this study are presented below:

Table 1: Distribution of selected Newspaper coverage on Electronic Transmission of Election Results.

| Media outfit | Month | Year | Number of stories on Electronic Transmission of Election Results | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------|--|------------|
| The Punch | August | 2021 | 14 | 31% |
| The Guardian | August | 2021 | 11 | 24% |
| The Punch | September | 2021 | 9 | 19% |
| The Guardian | September | 2021 | 12 | 26% |
| Total | | | 46 | 100% |

Table 2: Prominence given to Electronic Transmission of Election Results.

| Media Outfit | Month | Year | Placement | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|---------------|------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| The Punch | August & Sept | 2021 | Front page | 10 | 28% |
| The Guardian | August & Sept | 2021 | Front page | 8 | 18% |
| The Punch | August & Sept | 2021 | Inside page | 16 | 28% |
| The Guardian | August & Sept | 2021 | Inside page | 12 | 26% |
| Total | | | | 46 | 100% |

Table 3: Direction of coverage given to Electronic Transmission of Election Results.

| Media Outfit | Month | Year | Placement | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|---------------|------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| The Punch | August & Sept | 2021 | Positive | 16 | 35% |
| The Guardian | August & Sept | 2021 | Positive | 12 | 26% |
| The Punch | August & Sept | 2021 | Negative | 7 | 15% |
| The Guardian | August & Sept | 2021 | Negative | 6 | 14% |
| The Punch | August & Sept | 2021 | Neutral | - | 0% |
| The Guardian | August & Sept | 2021 | Neutral | 5 | 10% |
| Total | | | | 46 | 100% |

Based on table 1 above, the result shows that the sample edition of the newspaper studied reported 46 stories on Electronic Transmission of Election Results. The Punch in August and September reported 25 stories representing 54% of the total number of stories for the two months. While The Guardian in August and

September reported 21 stories representing 46% of the total number of stories also reflecting for the two months. From the analysis above, it is evident that the Punch Newspaper reported more on Electronic Transmission of Election Results than the Guardian. This implies that there was poor coverage on the side of Guardian because the volume of coverage was not significant enough. The media are regarded as agenda setters and platforms for fighting all forms of issues including public policies, the media in this instance were expected to give full coverage of electronic transmission of election results but going by the results the coverage was seen as not adequate.

Based on the results, the study shows that the prominence that was given to the coverage of Electronic Transmission of Election Results was a little above average. It indicates that 54% of the stories were reported in the inside pages while 46% stories were reported in the front page. This implies that Electronic Transmission of Election Results stories were not given enough prominence. Newspapers accord prominence to a story by placing it on the front page among other things. Front page placement of a story is not only an indication of adjudged importance of the story by the newspaper, which invariably influences people's perception of such issue as being important, but also makes the story strategic for audience attention. The implication of this study is that the selected newspapers studied did not properly set agenda on the issue of Electronic Transmission of Election Results because from the findings, most of the stories on Electronic Transmission of Election Results were on the inside pages.

The result on table 3 above shows the direction of coverage given to Electronic Transmission of Election Results. Out of the 46 stories reported in the selected newspapers for the month of August and September 61% of the stories reported were in favour of Electronic Transmission of Election Results. While 28% were against and 1% were neutral. The implication of this study is that most of the reported stories were in support of electronic transmission of election results in Nigeria. The findings, therefore, revealed the direction of coverage given to Electronic Transmission of Election Results which subsequently led to the passage of the bill.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the analysis and interpretation of data collected in the selected newspapers, the following conclusion and recommendations were drawn that the media have essential roles to play in reaction to challenges of nation building. The media can do this by improving the awareness of these developmental concerns in society at large. The print media has no doubt helped in educating, informing, mobilizing and enlightening Nigerians on the issue of Electronic Transmission of Election Results but more still need to be done in terms of coverage on issues of importance. The prominence given to the reportage of Electronic Transmission of Election Results by the selected newspaper were not enough, therefore, the print media need to dedicate enough space for the coverage of Electronic Transmission of Election Results in Nigeria. Also based on the researcher findings the following recommendations were drawn: The media should always ensure that adequate information is made available to the public in time of critical issue like Electronic Transmission of Election Results. The media should rise up to their responsibilities in ensuring that they play a leading role by setting the agenda for the public. In the same vein, issues of importance should be more prominence and better informed to the public about the significance of such an issue and the consequences.

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