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Coverage of the 2016-2017 Economic Recession in Selected Newspapers in Nigeria

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Abstract- The mass media play a critical role in raising and creating awareness on issues that affect society. One such subject that the media must bring to the attention of all-government and individuals in the community is an economic recession. The continuous instability of the Naira against the dollar, geometrical increase in unemployment, the rising cost of living, non-payment of salaries to the employed, the unpredictable prices of crude oil among other things were issues the common man in Nigeria faced as a result of economic recession. How such stories was reported in the media is a critical subject for empirical inquiry, hence the need for this study. The paramount objective of this study was to analyze the newspaper coverage of the 2016-2017 economic recession in Nigeria. The newspapers selected for the study include Daily Sun, The Guardian, and Vanguard. The coverage examined frequency, story genre, story prominence, story direction, story depth. Agenda setting and priming theory served as the theoretical foundation of the study. The study employed content analysis as research design. The Code sheet was the instrument used to gather data. Results of the study showed that the frequency of coverage on economic recession stories is 243 in the print media; prominence attached to economic recession stories is low, and the dominant story genre is news.

Keywords: *economic recession, newspapers, coverage, nigeria.*

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Coverage of the 2016-2017 Economic Recession in Selected Newspapers in Nigeria

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Abstract- The mass media play a critical role in raising and creating awareness on issues that affect society. One such subject that the media must bring to the attention of all-government and individuals in the community is an economic recession. The continuous instability of the Naira against the dollar, geometrical increase in unemployment, the rising cost of living, non-payment of salaries to the employed, the unpredictable prices of crude oil among other things were issues the common man in Nigeria faced as a result of economic recession. How such stories was reported in the media is a critical subject for empirical inquiry, hence the need for this study. The paramount objective of this study was to analyze the newspaper coverage of the 2016-2017 economic recession in Nigeria. The newspapers selected for the study include *Daily Sun, The Guardian, and Vanguard.* The coverage examined frequency, story genre, story prominence, story direction, story depth. Agenda setting and priming theory served as the theoretical foundation of the study. The study employed content analysis as research design. The Code sheet was the instrument used to gather data. Results of the study showed that the frequency of coverage on economic recession stories is 243 in the print media; prominence attached to economic recession stories is low, and the dominant story genre is news. Further findings revealed that the direction of the reportage on the economic recession by the selected newspapers was negative. The study also revealed that the chosen print media did not give depth to stories on economic downturn. It was recommended in this study, among other things, that Newspapers should sustain their reportage of economic recession stories since they have the power to shape opinions through their agenda-setting role.

Keywords: economic recession, newspapers, coverage, nigeria.

I. Introduction

The mass media, as an important informers of society, play a critical role in covering and commenting on social and political crises, natural disasters, and economic recession (Cottle, 2009). Boykoff and Ravi (2007) note that the-integral role played by the media is not surprising as they are still the main source of information and opinion for millions of readers and viewers through newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the internet.

> Television news and newspapers are principal sources of information about economic developments, in particular the state of the national macro-economy (Mutz, 1992).

Economic coverage can affect individual citizens' economic perceptions (Hetsroni, Amir and Mosi Rosenboim, 2014) as well as consumer confidence in the economy (Hollanders and Vliegenthart, 2011). Mass media serves the role of being a source of information as well as an advocate for important economic facts.

Analysis of news coverage (television and newspapers) routinely reveal that the economy receives a substantial amount of coverage, both in absolute terms and relative to other issues (Boydstun, 2013). News coverage of the economy provides citizens with context for understanding their own economic experiences and thus judging economic performance (Boydstun, 2013). Citizens expose themselves to at least some of the news coverage of the economy. The exposure might be direct or indirect, and it might be intentional or unintentional. In any case, the sizable amount of news coverage of the economy in combination with many citizens' regular exposure to it suggests the plausibility of the proposition that mass economic attitudes are shaped by news coverage of the economy (Boydstun, 2013).

Subsequently, citizens rely on cues in economic news coverage to gauge changing economic conditions (De Boef and Kellstedt, 2004), place personal finances in a broader economic context (Mutz, 1992), and attribute responsibility for economic outcomes (Rudolph, 2006). Particularly essential is news coverage during an economic recession, as coverage increases in volume, is more negative in tone, and citizens pay increased attention to economic news (Fogarty, 2005). In this respect, economic news coverage serves as a burglar alarm alerting citizens to both real and perceived economic problems (Zaller, 2003).

Economic news reacts asymmetrically to economic developments. News becomes more negative when the economy declines, but not more positive when the economy improves (Soroka, 2006). Harrington (2009) showed that American networks give more attention to negative news than positive news. Soroka (2006) showed that newspaper coverage of the economy in the United Kingdom reacted to negative, but not to positive developments.

After more than a decade of economic growth in Nigeria, the sharp and continuous decline in crude oil prices from mid-2014, along with a failure to diversify the sources of revenue and foreign exchange in the economy, led to a recession in the second quarter of 2016 (Okeke, 2017). Economic downturn, as a phase of economic cycle, occurs after two consecutive quarters

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of negative growth featuring low output and investment, abnormal increases in unemployment due to massive retrenchment, falls in the availability of credit facilities, fluctuation in forex market, illiquidity, as well as reduced amount of trade and commerce (Okeke, 2017). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Nigerian economy slid into an economic recession path in the second quarter (Q2) of 2016 with a real GDP deficit of-0.36 percent (Shido-Ikwu, 2017).

Agri, Maliafia, and Umejiaku (2017), stated that economic recession in Nigeria affected socio-political structures, Nigeria's credit condition, general living standards, imports, production, and employment as well as consumption demand in Nigeria. The continuous instability of the Naira against the dollar, geometrical increase in unemployment, non-payment of salaries to the employed, and the unreliability of world crude oil prices are issues the common man in Nigeria faced as a result of the downward economic growth (Okeke, 2017).

The economic downturn continued in the third quarter of 2016 as the economy recorded negative growth to solidify the fact that Nigeria is deep in economic crisis (Okeke, 2017). During a recession, there is usually a decline in certain macroeconomic indicators such as GDP, employment, investment spending, capacity utilization, household income, business income, and inflation, with the attendant increase in the rate of unemployment (CBN, 2012).

With rising cases of unemployment and job loss, high prices of goods, lack of access to credits, low product quality, manufacturers' inability to employ new staff, every individual in the country felt the bleak effects of the recession (Okeke, 2017). The economic recession created a harsh economic climate in Nigeria, which is evidenced by high energy cost, high bank interest rate (22%) and a soaring naira exchange to a dollar (N360 to $1US). Some multinational companies like Etisalat mobile, Dunlop, etc. have relocated to neighboring countries because of the harsh economic climate.

Since the economic crises do not just affect one aspect of societal living but encompasses all economic activities of every citizen in a country, it, therefore, becomes a pertinent issue for press coverage (Soroka, 2006).Given this dominant concern, economic news has been receiving extensive media coverage for years. Wu and Day (2005) posit that news coverage of the economy and economic reality are generally consistent; but during bad economic times, people are more attentive to negative coverage, and their perceptions of the economy are more likely to be influenced by negative coverage. Since economic crisis coverage can affect individual citizens' economic perceptions, examining the kind of information citizens are exposed to in the newspaper becomes pertinent (Vandalen, DeVreese and,Albaek, 2015; Fogatry, 2005).

Such times demand the public be aware of the situation, and one key way to be privy to this issue is by the level of importance media houses attach to the matter. Due to the economic crises of Nigeria in the last two years, one of the essential things that should be considered worthy of coverage by the Nigerian media ought to be the issue of the economic recession. Since the media is known for setting public-agenda, it becomes pertinent to examine the level of attention given to themes that relate to the economic crises in Nigeria. Given the relevant consequences of media coverage of economic events, this study seeks to analyze the manifest content of newspaper reportage of the economic downturn in Nigeria.

II. Statement of the Problem

Mass media reportage of issues of public concern has always been a critical issue for intellectual discourse amongst communication experts and scholars alike (Fogatry, 2005; Cottle, 2009). It is argued that the media have aided in setting agenda for public discourse on issues by giving them prominence and vast coverage (Vandalen, DeVreese and,Albaek, 2015). One of the normative functions of economic news is surveillance, making citizens aware of significant economic developments.

Empirical studies that analyzed media content during the 2008 global economic crisis have shown that the media were paying attention only to some sectors of the economy and that their evaluation was not very critical (Starkman, 2009; Tett, 2009). Other scholars have criticized financial journalists for being unaware of the institutional framework in which they (journalists) operate (Tambini, 2010), for not being trained and knowledgeable enough (Doyle, 2006) or paying too little attention to economic details (Schiffrin and Fagan, 2013).

Adebumiti (2016) noted that the mass media (newspapers) have not been timely in their reportage of economic crisis. Other scholars also show that Nigerian newspapers have not effectively played a surveillance function in the reportage of economic recession, neither have they displayed a high level of interpretation in their reports (Afolabi, 2011; Agu, 2017). Others accuse the mass media of being more negative during economic recession and misrepresentation of economic reality (Fogarty, 2005; Soroka, 2006)

Also, it is suggested that the Nigerian mass media do not give significant coverage and provide effectual awareness on economic issues even as they fail to offer adequate explanations to economic issues in general (Ajulo, 2015). This raises a lot of arguments about the volume of coverage, the subject matter used to report economic nosedive, and the direction of the coverage of the 2016-2017 economic recession in Nigeria. It is based on the above that this study seeks to elicit data by making an empirical inquiry into the

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newspaper reportage of the 2016-2017 economic recession in Nigeria.

a) Objectives of the Study

The general issue of this study is to analyze the newspaper coverage of the 2016-2017 economic recession in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks:

1. Examine the frequency of coverage on economic recession stories in the selected newspapers;
2. Determine the level of prominence given to economic recession stories in the elected newspapers;
3. Examine the direction of stories on economic recession in the selected newspapers;
4. Examine the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of economic recession in the selected newspapers; and
5. Assess the treatment of stories on economic recession in terms of depth in the selected newspapers.

b) Research Questions

The following questions have were generated to guide this study:

1. What is the frequency of coverage on economic recession stories in the selected newspapers?
2. What is the level of prominence given to economic recession stories in the selected newspapers?
3. What is the direction of stories on the economic recession in the selected newspapers?
4. What is the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of economic recession in the selected newspapers?
5. What is the treatment of stories on economic recession in terms of depth in the selected newspapers?

III. Literature Review

a) Economic Recession: An Overview

Economic recession has been conceptualized by many scholars and experts. CBN (2012) sees the economic recession as a business cycle contraction, which every economy will have to experience from time to time.

In practical terms, a recession is a period when a nation's gross domestic product (GDP) declines for at least two consecutive quarters in a quarter-to-quarter comparison (Mazurek and Mielcova, 2013). This shows that if an economy grows by 2% in one quarter and then contracts by 0.5% in each of the next two quarters, it is judge to be in recession. Although this definition, which was first suggested by Shisken (1974) in Rewane (2016), is instructive, it has two weaknesses. First, the "two-quarter" rule is flawed. Judgment should be made based on monthly data of economic activity such as industrial production, employment, real income, and wholesale and retail trade. Second, the focus on GDP alone is narrow. GDP figures themselves can be misleading because that they are subject to big revisions (The Economist, 2008). Therefore, according to Claessens and Kose (2012), it is often better to consider a bigger set of measures of economic activity to determine whether a country is indeed suffering a recession.

Awujola and Ejezie (2015) note that the roots of recession rest in several quartets of positive but slowing growth. They further aver that a recession generally lasts from 6 to 18 months as efforts made to stimulate the economy during this period. These efforts include offering cheap rates to borrow money. Rewane (2016) also posits that a recession occurs after two consecutive quarters of negative growth. Fapohunda (2012) posits that an economic recession is a period of economic slowdown featuring low output, illiquidity, and unemployment. She further adds that it is always characterized by its length, abnormal increases in unemployment, falls in the availability of credit, shrinking output and investment, numerous bankruptcies, reduced amounts of trade and commerce, as well as highly volatile relative currency value fluctuations, mostly devaluations, financial crises, and bank failure.

b) Causes of the 2016 Economic Recession in Nigeria

The following was alleged to be the causes of the 2016 economic recession in Nigeria. The suggestions here was gathered from the views of different experts.

a. *Delay in forming the cabinet:* Government vacuum for over seven months in 2015 is a critical factor that led to the recession (RTC advisory services, 2016). Oladapo (2016) explains that the present administration ran like a sole administrator in its first eleven months. He further states that this led to a policy vacuum as there were no managers of the economy on the ground to make sound economic decisions.
b. *The fall in the global crude oil prices:* Nigeria, a mono-product dependent economy, is easily affected by a slight fluctuation in crude oil prices. Theoil price decline of 56.39% from 2014's peak became a challenge (Rewane, 2016).
c. *Sabotage by the Niger-Delta Avengers:* Renewed violence and attacks of oil and gas installations in the Niger-delta form part of the causes of the economic crisis faced in 2016 in Nigeria. Their actions accounted for income loss on approximately 800, 000 barrels of crude daily for about five (5) months (RTC advisory services, 2017). This loss led to a sharp decline of 26.3% in oil production (Rewane, 2016).
d. *Removal of fuel subsidy by the Federal Government:* The subsidy removal, though intended to remove the cabals and liberalize the petroleum sector, its

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ripple effects on the economy were very severe. Since everything in Nigeria revolves around oil, when the pump price increased, it caused inflationary pressure (Oladapo, 2016).

e. *Implementation of the TSA:* In a bid to bring sanity, stop corruption and to consolidate all FG funds, the Government introduced, and implemented the Treasury single account (Orode, 2016). The impact of this, as he further notes, is that the withdrawal of enormous deposits from banks reduced the ability of banks to grant loans to their customers. Oladapo (2016) avers that the TSA mopped up liquidity in circulation and stifled credit creation and economic activities in the country.

c) Patterns of Economic Coverage by the Mass Media during Economic Recession and Economic Boom

Journalism research in areas other than the economy has given insight into why media coverage intensifies in some periods. Studies of the coverage of, for example, the threat of street violence have shown that journalists at times open the gates and focus on specific societal problems. Similar mechanisms may increase attention to the economy and lead to an overly negative or positive tone of economic news, depending on the economic cycle (Dalen, Vreese, and Albæk, 2015).

One of the mechanisms driving these periods of intensive coverage is the emergence of a dominant news theme, which provides a popular interpretation or labeling under which diverse events can be summarized (Dalen, Vreese, and Albæk, 2015). When journalists cover a complicated topic, they orient themselves towards their "competitor-colleagues" to reduce ambiguity. This orientation can lead to the development of one dominant journalistic interpretation, which is shared across different outlets (Dalen, Vreese, and Albæk, 2015).Pack journalism is strengthened by increasing competition among media outlets and journalists' fear of missing the important stories of the day (Frank, 2003). Once such a dominant news theme emerges, it "leads to a high degree of uniformity in the news selection and pressure on every news desk to join the pack" (Vasterman, 2005, p. 514 in Dalen, Vreese, and Albæk, 2015).

As a consequence, the threshold to report about events that fit the dominant news theme is low, and the media gates are open to report similar issues. When the media gates at the same time shut out stories that do not fit the dominant perspective, the result is continuous reinforcement of the dominant theme (Dalen, Vreese, and Albæk, 2015).Journalism studies have shown that such dominant news themes or organizing devices used to construct news stories are hard to change once they become mainstream among journalists and societal actors (Huxford, 2012cited in Dalen, Vreese, and Albæk, 2015).

"Recession" or "economic crisis" are examples of such common news themes that can trigger self-reinforcing spirals of coverage about the economy. Due to the complexity of the economic system as well as the availability of a wide variety of sometimes contradictory economic indicators, the state of the economy news is often ambiguous (Huxford, 2012). The theme of economic recession gives both journalists and their audience a similar interpretation, which helps to simplify economic reality. Huxford (2012) in Dalen, Vreese, and Albæk(2015)argues that during the economic downturn in America in 2000, journalists diminished the economic complexity by "corralling the multitude of economic states and indicators within the label recession; and then treating that as a single entity" p.350.

Later, McCarthy, and Dolfsma (2009) showed that crisis-related terms in The Economist increased sharply in 2007 and 2008. Kleinnijenhuis, Schultz, and Oegema (2015) showed that the complexity decreased during the start of the crisis in 2007 and 2008, which could indicate that a dominant angle emerged. Once such a dominant angle is established, it can lead to more stories about the negative state of the economy, which spread from the financial section of the newspaper to other parts. The crisis frame lowers the threshold for negative stories but raises it for stories with a more optimistic outlook. The crises frames may result in more economical coverage with an overly negative tone.

IV. Empirical Review

a) Frequency of Economic News during Economic Recession

A study entitled "Reflecting on the Nigerian Media Coverage of the Dwindling Economy in Q1, 2016" was carried out in 2016 by Adebumiti. The study sought to ascertain, among others, if the mass media gave attention to the dwindling fortunes of the Nigerian economy. The functionalist and social responsibility theories is the theories used to explain the study. Content analysis was employed as a research design while the code sheet served as the instrument of data collection. Finding from the study revealed that the newspapers reviewed (i.e. *The Nation and The Punch* newspapers) gave adequate attention to issues of the economy for the period under review.

Damstra and Vliegenthart (2016) carried out a study entitled "(Un) covering the Economic Crisis?" The aim of the paper was to analyze ways in which Dutch newspapers have reported the economic crisis in the Netherlands. Another objective was to discover the factors that accounted for variation in coverage by different outlets. Content analysis was the research design. Findings from the study revealed that Dutch newspapers cover the crisis extensively but with marked inter-outlet differences.

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b) Prominence of Stories

A study was also carried out in 2014 by Fadairo, Fadairo, and Aminu, entitled coverage of corruption by major newspapers in Nigeria. The researchers sought to ascertain the coverage of corruption issues and their effects on the economy of the country. Using the content analytical method, the researchers analyzed stories from *The Nation, Tribune,* and *The Guardian* newspapers. Findings revealed that most (87.4%) of the stories analysed on the issue were on the inside pages, which point to the fact that low prominence was attached to the subject. Further findings revealed that news stories accounted for the majority of the stories analyzed as it had an overall percentage of 76.7%. Recommendations were made from the results that prominence is attached to corruption issues by journalists by writing more editorials and putting such matter on the cover pages to be more visible.

c) The direction of Economic News during the Recession

Another research effort was carried out by Forgatry (2005) entitled "Determining economic news coverage." Using the content analytical design and using Poisson auto-regression analysis (an economic analytical tool), the researcher discovered that more news about the economy is tilt towards the negative direction than the right direction. He puts it; thus, "news media are inclined to emphasize the negative when the economy is doing poorly."

A study has also been conducted by VanDalen, DeVreese, and Albaek (2015) on the media as the magnifying glass for business news coverage. Using the content analytical method, the researchers found out that economic news became more negative in times of recession.

Damstra and Vliegenthart (2016) carried out a study entitled "(Un) covering the Economic Crisis?" The study aims to explain ways in which Dutch newspapers have reported the economic crisis in the Netherlands. Another objective was to discover the factors that accounted for variation in coverage by different outlets. Content analysis served as the research design. The finding showed that newsworthiness is driven more extensively by the unexpectedness of events than the negativities of consequences. Thus Novelty rather than severity steered attention for the crisis coverage.

V. Theoretical Framework

Two theories of mass communication will explain this study. They are the Agenda setting and priming theories.

a) Agenda Setting Theory

According to Baran & Davis (2006), "Agenda setting implies that the media do not tell people what to think but what to think about, the media sets the agenda of what their publics are supposed to think about" p.319. Folarin (2002) further states that "Agenda setting means that the mass media predetermine what issues are important at a given time in a given society. Agenda setting theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we think, but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about" P. 68.

Lipman (1922) in Okunna (2002) added that the media help to "put pictures in our heads" (p. 21). This explains the power of the mass media to set the agenda and raise the issue of public importance. This function is closely related to public opinion generation since it is often the mass media that raise subjects upon which public opinion is aired.

Wimmer and Dommick (2000) opined that the theory on agenda-setting by the media proposes that what kinds of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped, and directed by what the media choose to publicize. Cohen (1963) in Wogu (2008), corroborated this stance when he stated that "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 140). In this light, if news media chooses to give most time and space to reporting Fulani herdsmen attacks in various communities in Nigeria, it will become the most important thing on the audiences' minds.

The theory is relevant in this research because it helps to explain the function of the media in attaching importance to the economic downturn issue in the country. The newspapers can do this by giving prominence to the matter, giving the issue a sustained coverage which will help set the agenda for public discourse and aid policy-makers in making working policies that will help stem reduce the effects on the masses. This means the more the media project the issue of economic crisis, the more important the public will attach to it, and probably the faster policy-makers will attend to the problem.

b) Priming Theory

The main media-priming process consists of two steps. In the first step, information received through a media channel (i.e., the media prime) activates pre-existing associated knowledge in the mind of the receiver (i.e., available cognitive units or concepts). This activation makes the cognitive units more accessible, which means that the receiver is more likely to use them in interpreting and evaluating a subsequently encountered target stimulus (i.e., the attitude object). A media priming effect occurs if, in the second step, the receiver applies the primed, now accessible concept to a target stimulus when he/she would not otherwise have done this. The first step thus consists of the priming process, and the second speaks to its consequences.

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Furthermore, it refers to the ability of the media to control the interpretation of new information by feeding the public prior ideas. This existing context set frames of reference within the audience members, which ultimately affects their judgments (www.communication studies.com). Mass communication media, therefore, can influence people to think based on the media concepts that is to them.

For example, if the press continuously reports an issue that might ordinarily seem irrelevant, once the event becomes news, it tends to become relevant. Thus, the more coverage an issue receives, the more of an impact it has on the opinions the public forms about the issue and those involved. Iyengar and Kinder (1987), quoted in Chong and Druckman (2007), describe priming as follows: By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are assessed.

Mass communication media, therefore, play anindispensable role in society. The public does not always notice the effects of persuasive advertisements or well-narrated news stories presented by media. However, the increasing demands determine the impacts of these media concepts to the people in all aspects. People buy a certain product because of the appealing commercial on television. People conform to the latest fashion trends because of the models and endorsers on the magazines. People vote for a particular politician because of the constant release of propaganda through the news. These are just a few of the many examples showing the extreme effects of mass media on the public. Even though the people are often unaware of these influential demands and clear consumerism, the society still relies on the ability and credibility of mass media for providing information that would help each cluster function well in a country.

The theory is relevant to the present study in the sense that by making economic issues more salient in people's minds, the mass media can shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about economic issues.

VI. Methodology

a) Research Design

To ensure quality study, the researcher used content analysis. Content analysis as a research design studies already documented materials systematically.

b) The population of the Study

The population of the study include all issues published by the three selected national dailies: *Daily Sun, The Guardian, and The Vanguard* newspapers from July 1st, 2016 to March 31st, 2017, which amounted to 822.

c) Sample Size

A total of 231 editions of the three selected newspapers formed the sample size of this study. The procedure for arriving at this sample size is shown in the sampling technique below.

d) Sampling Technique

In defining the sample size, this research made use of the multi-stage sampling technique whereby varying techniques were involve at different stages in the selection process. *Vanguard, Daily Sun,* and *The Nation* newspapers were selected using the purposive sampling technique. These papers were chosen based on of their national reach and on the assumption that national papers have a higher readership.

These selected newspapers were studied for nine months. That is from July 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017. The period was selected because it was the period that Nigeria experienced an economic recession.

In determining an appropriate sample size for the study, in each of the weeks of the months studied, two issues were chosen for the three newspapers. The days of Monday and Wednesday were chosen for *Daily Sun,* Thursday and Saturday were chosen for *Vanguard* while the days Tuesdays and Fridays were chosen for *The Guardian*. The choice to study two issues for each newspaper was based on a stratified sampling technique where the days were picked to stand in for the rest of the days that could not be studied since it would have been unwieldy to study all the editions of the three newspapers within the period. The newspapers amounted to 231 issues from the newspapers chosen for the nine months. The selected newspaper is presented in the table below:

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Table 1: Details of the editions selected from the sampled newspapers

Months	Daily Sun	The Guardian	Vanguard
July	4, 11, 18, 25, 6, 13, 20, 27.	5,12,19,26,8,15,22,29.	7,14,21,28,2,9,16,23,30
August	8,15,22,29,3,10,17,24,31	2,9,16,23,30,5,12,19,26	4,11,18,25,6,13,20,27
September	5,12,19,26,7,14,21,28	6,13,20,27,2,9,16,23,30.	1,8,15,22,29,3,10,17,24
October	3,10,17,24,31,5,12,19,26	4,11,18,25,7,14,21,28	6,13,20,27,1,8,15,22,29
November	7,14,21,28,2,9,16,23,30	8,15,22,29,4,10,18,25	3,10,17,24,5,12,19,26
December	5,12,19,26,7,14,21,28	6,13,20,27,2,9,16,23,30.	1,8,15,22,29,3,10,17,24
January	2,9,16,23,30,4,11,18,26	3,10,17,24,31,6,13,20,27	5,12,19,26,7,14,21,28
February	6,13,20,27,1,8,15,22	7,14,21,28,3,10,17,24	2,9,16,23, 4,11,18,25
March	6,13,20,27,1,8,15,22,29	7,14,21,28,3,10,17,24,31	2,9,16,23,30,4,11,18,25
Total	77	77	77

e) The instrument of Data Collection

The code sheet will is the instrument of data collection. It is the most appropriate tool for analyzing recorded messages and information. The code sheet cover all the variables necessary for arriving at reliable answers to the research questions.

i. *Content Categories*

The content categories used for this study include

a. Gas/Oil
b. Banking/Financial
c. Housing
d. Agriculture
e. Labour

ii. *Units of Measurement*

The units of analysis for this study include: news stories, editorials, letters-to-the-editor, features stories, pictures: photographs, cartoons, charts and graphs, and opinion articles. The units of measurement is divided into categories that will serve as a guide for the study. Thus:

1. Frequency
   A (1) Gas/Oil
   A (2) Banking/Financial
   A (3) Housing
   A (4) Agriculture
   A (5) Labour
2. Prominence
   Placement
   B (1) Front Page
   B (2) Back Page
   B (3) Centre Spread
   B (4) Inside Page

Illustration

   C (1) Photographs
   C (2) Cartoons
   C (3) Charts
   C (4) Graphs
   C (5) Not Illustrated

3. Direction of Coverage
   D (1) Positive
   D (2) Negative
   D (3) Neutral
4. Story Genre
   E (1)News
   E (2)Features
   E (3)Editorials
   E (4)Letters to the Editor
   E (05)Opinion Articles
5. Depth (Length of Coverage)
   F (1) 1 – 5 Inches
   F (2) 6 – 10 Inches
   F (3) 11 – 5 Inches
   F (4) 16 Inches and above

f) Description of Sample

This study examined coverage of the 2016-2017 economic recession in selected newspapers in Nigeria. The period studied was from 1st July 2016 to 31st March 2017. The study conducted within a time frame of nine months. All data analyzed were collated from the three national newspapers studied–*Daily Sun, The Guardian,* and *Vanguard.*

VII. Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question One: What is the frequency of coverage on economic recession stories in the selected newspapers?

Table 1: The Frequency of Coverage

Content Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gas/oil	125	51%
Banking	42	17%
Housing	33	14%
Agriculture	18	7%
Labour	25	10%
Total	243	100%

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Research Question two: What is the level of prominence given to economic recession stories in the selected newspapers?

Table 2: Placement of Stories

	Content categories						
	Gas/oil	Banking	Housing	Agriculture	Labour	Total	Percentage
Front Page	2	-	-	-	3	5	2%
Back Page	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Centre Spread	3	-	-	-	-	3	1%
Inside Page	120	42	33	18	22	235	97%
Total	125	42	33	18	25	243	100%

Table 3: Illustration of Stories

	Content Categories						
	Gas/oil	Banking	Housing	Agriculture	Labour	Total	Percentage
Photographs	19	13	8	3	5	48	20%
Cartoons	3	-	-	-	-	3	1%
Charts	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Graphs	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Not illustrated	103	29	25	15	20	192	79%
Total	125	42	33	18	25	243	100%

Research Question three: What is the direction of stories on economic recession in the selected newspapers?

Table 4: Direction of Reportage

	Content Categories						
	Gas/oil	Banking	Housing	Agriculture	Labour	Total	Percentage
Positive	42	13	11	5	7	78	32%
Negative	71	21	17	11	14	134	55%
Neutral	12	8	5	2	4	31	13%
Total	125	42	33	18	25	243	100%

Research Question four: What is the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of economic recession in the selected newspapers?

Table 5: Story Genre

	Content Categories						
	Gas/oil	Banking	Housing	Agriculture	Labour	Total	Percentage
News	99	22	18	11	15	165	68%
Features	12	4	5	7	8	36	15%
Editorials	5	7	3	-	2	17	7%
Letters to the Editor	5	4	2	-	-	11	4%
Opinion Articles	4	5	5	-	-	14	6%
Total	125	42	33	18	25	243	100%

Research Question five: What is the treatment of stories on economic recession in terms of depth in the selected newspapers?

Table 6: Depth of Coverage

	Content Categories						
	Gas/oil	Banking	Housing	Agriculture	Labour	Total	Percentage
Inches 1-5	103	24	23	14	17	181	74%
Inches 6-10	12	13	10	4	5	44	18%
Inches 11-15	6	5	-	-	3	14	6%
Inches 16 and above	4	-	-	-	-	4	2%
Total	125	42	33	18	25	243	100%

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VIII. Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: What is the frequency of coverage on economic recession stories in the selected newspapers?

The frequency of coverage seeks to ascertain the volume of coverage given to economic recession by the newspapers within the period under the study. The answer to the question is the content analysis provided in table one. The manifest data from the data presentation revealed that there were a total of 243 stories on economic recession within the period of the study. The content category they use to report economic downturn includes gas/oil, banking, housing, agriculture, and lastly labor. Out of the 243 stories on economic crises, the newspapers carried 125 stories (51%) regarding gas/oil industry, 42 stories (17%) on the banking and the Nigerian naira, and another 33 stories (14%) on the housing industry, 18 stories (7%) on the agriculture category and 25 stories (10%) on the labor category. This data shows that the frequency of coverage is sufficient.

The above findings revealed that the media reported more on the oil and gas sector. The oil and gas sector as regards economic recession came under a lot of media report due to the lingering fuel scarcity and the activities of vandals that have affected the free flow of premium motor spirit also known as petrol in the country. The result of this study is consistent with that of Adebumiti (2016), who reported that newspapers gave adequate attention to issues of the economy. This finding is also in line with Shah et al. (2002). They find that when the economy is negative, the media give the economy a great deal of attention.

Since there is a positive correlation between media agenda and public agenda, it means that the members of the public probably spent more time talking about gas/oil in the country than the time they spent in discussing other issues regarding the economic recession.

Research Question two: What is the level of prominence given to economic recession stories in the selected newspapers?

Research question two sought to ascertain the level of prominence given to economic recession stories in the selected newspapers. To answer this research question, the placement of stories, and the illustration attached to them by the print media used.

In the placement of stories, the result is that almost all the stories is on the inside pages, 235 (97%), 5(2%) on the front page, and 3(1%) on the center spread. There were no stories on the back pages of the newspapers. The result shows that the prominence attached to the placement of the issues on the economic recession is low. Front pages are very strategic in attracting the attention of readers.

This finding corroborates the findings of Owolabi (2014), who discovered that stories about SMEs for economic development were found more on the inside pages of the newspapers. The implication of this is that most of the stories, no matter how good and educating they might have been, may not have been read or seen by the readers as they were 'hidden' on the inside pages of the newspapers. Most readers do not get past stories on the front page since there are so many things begging for their attention, and there may not be time to peruse through the whole broadsheet. Thus, the selected newspapers for the study period did poorly in giving prominence to recession stories as others like political issues since a good number of the stories were inside the pages of the newspapers.

On the illustration of stories, a majority of 192 (79%) stories is not illustrated while only 48 (20%) stories is illustrated with photographs, and 3(1) is illustrated with cartoons. None of the stories were illustrated with charts and graphs. This finding is in line with that of placement of stories as it gives credence to the fact that the level of prominence attached to the coverage of economic recession by the newspapers is low. Pictorial illustrations serve as attention-grabbing devices to newspaper stories. They attract people's attention to read. Stories without images hardly elicit the attention of newspaper readers.

The implication of the above is that low prominence was given to reports on the economic recession by newspapers. The majority of the issues about economic downturn are pushed to the inside pages of the print media and were not illustrated, where readers might not see nor get attracted to it and therefore carries little or no effect on the general public. The media has the responsibility of featuring business bankruptcy and oil prices as relates to the economic recession, for instance, on the front and back pages of newspapers with suitable illustrations regularly. This illustration could engender the government to embark on quality economic policies. The agenda-setting function of the media suggests that the selection and prominent display of stories on economic recession will provoke public discussion of the same (i.e., Economic crises), which may invariably influence the government to align its financial policies as appropriate.

Research Question three: What is the direction of stories on economic recession in the selected newspapers?

This question aimed at identifying the direction the newspapers take in reporting economic recession. From table four, the result show that out of the 243 stories analyzed, a majority of 134 (55%) were negative. The result means that the direction of the reportage on the economic recession by the selected newspapers was negative. This is followed by 78(32%) stories, which were positive and 31(13%), which were neutral.

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Examples of pessimistic reports include, among others: 2nd January 2017 edition of *Daily Sun*, page 9, which reads- *Recession biting hard on Nigerians, says Saraki.* November 26th, 2016 issue of *Vanguard*, page 27, which reads- *Nigeria's economic situation worse than stagflation-NESG.*

Some of the positive reports in the newspapers include September 23rd, 2016 edition of *The Guardian*, page 3, which reads- *Reps discuss the strategy to end economic downturn*. 12th January 2017 edition of *The Guardian*, page 40, which reads- *Economists proffers solution to the recession.* The neutral reports include 22nd October 2016 edition of *The Guardian*, page 19, which reads- recession confirmed. Now what? 29thMarch, 2017 *Daily Sun*, page 12, which reads, *Recession: Falana urges FG to de-emphasize oil*.

This finding follows the assertion of Fogarty (2005, p.153), who said that "The news media have a penchant for emphasizing the negative when the economy is performing poorly." Further, in his findings, Fogarty (2005) discovered the prevalence of negative stories over positive ones when the economy was doing poorly. This finding corroborates the results of the present research. One reason for this negativity is the fact that newspaper organizations are business outfits, and to sell their papers, stories that capture the interest of the public. Fogarty (2005, p.165) puts it clear that "one possible reason is that reporters and editors may emphasize the negative to pique the public's interest, thus attempting to maximize revenues from readership and viewership."

The consequence of this is that citizens were exposed more to the side effects of the menace and this made them to believe that the government was doing little or nothing to contain the situation as it ought to.

Research Question four: What is the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of economic recession in the selected newspapers?

On the issue of story genre, this study limited them to five important category- news, features, editorials, letters to the editor, and opinion articles. In the presentation of data, as seen in table 5, the story genre that received more attention out of the 243 stories studied is news 165(68%). Also, 36(15%) stories on features, 17(7%) stories on editorials, 11(4) stories on letters to the editor, and 14(6%) stories on opinion Articles. The news was the dominant genre used in reporting economic recession. Using current events, journalists mainly report the views of others, thereby missing important angles in an economic crises. It is not that the opinions of experts will not covered. But more analyses are needed to streamline these views to guide the public and government in their actions.

Ochonogor and Hyacinth (2011, p.363) aver that "serious and current events are given straight news treatment." The implication of this is that the agenda-setting function of the press is done through straight news treatment, which would aid set agenda for public discourse on the issue of economic recession in Nigeria. Thus, it is said that the press, as it relates to recession, gave the audience news stories mostly based on the occurrence of events around the issue. It is worthy of mentioning that straight news stories, unlike opinion articles, and news analysis is brief and not in-depth. Thus, it could be said that audience members were exposed to just peripherals and fundamentals without giving them a full story of the happenings.

Even though there were a couple of features, editorials, letters to the editor and opinion articles, the ratio of straight news stories were much, and since straight news is just a scratch on the surface, more in-depth news or feature articles would have been better to give the audience an in-depth knowledge of the economic challenge facing the country. Another implication of this finding is that the press didn't take the initiatives to make analyses or give their say on the issue as features had just 15% and editorial had 7% of the total stories analyzed. This implies that more need to be done by the press in terms of reportage because more initiatives need to be taken by the print media to report not to wait for events or occurrences to prompt them to make reports as it is in news stories.

Research Question five: What is the treatment of stories on economic recession in terms of depth in the selected newspapers?

In terms of story depth, out of 243 stories examined, 181(78%) was within the range of 1-5 inches, followed by 44 (18%) stories within 6-10 inches, and 14 (6%) stories within 11-15 inches, while 4 (2%) stories were within 16 inches and above.

This above result show that most stories did not have depth, as most of the stories are as a news story. News reports are always straight to the point without opinions, interpretations, analyses, or explanations. It is clear, therefore, that story types such as features, editorials, news analysis, columns, among others, which are platforms through which newspapers can do in-depth coverage, recorded low figures.

Thus, it could mean that the press, as it relates to recession, gave the audience news stories mostly based on the occurrence of events around the issue, as can be seen in the result of research question four. It is worthy of mentioning that straight news stories, unlike opinion articles and editorial, is brief and not in-depth.

Since the amount of space or column inches given to a story shows how essential such a story or issue is to either the press or government, it then follows that the newspapers does not accord enough depth to stories or matters emanating from the economic recession. As a result of the above, the government of the day is in the dark as to where and how to intervene for her people, and the people suffer in the long run. The

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press should, therefore, live up to their responsibility as the watch-dog of the society by reporting and covering the economic recession very well and equally call for the actions of the government to the issues so covered.

IX. Conclusion

Across the world, the media are acknowledged for their time-tested abilities to set agenda, initiating social discourse, spearheading issues of national interest, and generally advancing the well-being of society. The media as the fourth estate of the realm are part of the foremost informers, attitude builders, and influencers of the community. In times of economic recession, what goes out to the public becomes important topic as citizens are willing to update their monetary expectations more often than they do in quiet times. It is expected of the media to be at the front burner of the campaign by giving in-depth analysis, interpretations, and navigating possible solutions to address the issue.

However, this is not the case in Nigeria, as results from this paper showed. Aside from sufficient coverage of the issue, other findings from the study revealed that the media failed to attach prominence and in-depth coverage of the matter.

Therefore, this study concludes by calling on the media to match sufficient coverage with enough interpretations and depth to issues of societal importance like the economic recession.

X. Recommendations

Given the findings of this research, the following suggestions are proffered.

1. Newspapers should sustain its reportage of economic recession stories since they have the power to shape opinions through their agenda-setting role.
2. Newspapers should also ensure a paradigm shift in their coverage of important issues like the economic recession. As the study revealed, most of the story types on economic downturn were predominantly news stories. Others, such are editorials, columns, features, analysis through which the media can perform its agenda role, received less attention than they deserved. To this end, newspapers should embark on investigative and interpretative reporting of Nigeria's economy.
3. Business reporters should liaise with economic experts to understand some of the reports they get and be able to internalize it and simplify it for public consumption. By assimilating the information they receive, they can package it in simple language by breaking down the economic jargon without distorting the actual data.
4. Another study should be done to examine the opinions of economic experts and government officials in Nigeria specifically about their perceptions of the quality of economic recession stories published in Nigerian newspapers. Such study will reveal and confirm the conflicts (as reported by business reporters interviewed in this study) that government officials often have with business reporters.

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