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Press Coverage Of #Endsars Protest In Nigeria: A Study Of *VANGUARD, THIS DAY* and *THE NATION* Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This research titled ‘‘*Press Coverage of #Endsars Protest in Nigeria: A Study of Vanguard, This Day and The Nation Newspapers*” examined how the Nigerian media covered the 2020 EndSars protest which generated different headlines in the country and its security architecture. The objectives of the study wereto ascertain whether *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation* newspapersprominently covered the 2020 EndSars protests in Nigeria, to identify the dominant sources of stories used in the coverage of the EndSars protest in the selectnewspapers, to understand the dominant news genres or types used in the coverage of the EndSars protest in the selectnewspapers and to find out the direction or slant of the stories on the EndSars protest in *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation* newspapers.The study was anchored on the Social Responsibility and Agenda-Setting Theories of Mass Communication. The content analysis research design was adopted in the study. The sample period spanned 8 months - September, October,November, and December2020 to January, February, March and April 2021. The population for this study was 726 editions of the three national dailies; *Vanguard, This Day and The Nation* newspaperspurposively selected based on their national outlook, wide readership, geographical distribution and prestige. The study adopted the census approach to study 726 editions of the select national newspapers.Findings from the study show that the newspapers under investigation prominently covered the protests with greater percent of the observed news items placed in the focal points of the newspaper with reasonable attention, that the dominant source of information on the coverage of EndSars protest is from the ethno-religious source closely followed by political and government source, that the straight news reports dominated news genre used by the three newspapers and that, in regards to the direction of media reports on EndSars, the newspapers gave an unfavourable media reports to the protest with majority of the publications (46.2%) being on the fence and 32.1% being unfavourable against the protesters.It was concluded that dominant media source and the slant of the stories fall short of the expectation of the media in relations to its agenda setting and social responsibility roles in the society. The researcher therefore recommended, among others, that that the media should live up to her responsibilities as the watchdog of the Nigerian society by probing the actions of the government and its agencies against the masses, that singing praises of the government and its agencies should not be the bases for media reporting especially on issues of gross injustice against the people and that the media should strive to stay away from ethno-religious sentiments while reporting issues of national concern as that influences their slant of coverage of issues of public concern like the 2020 EndSars protest.

Keywords: Press Coverage, #EndSARS protest, Police brutality, Nigeria Newspapers

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria as in most of other developing countries of the world, the citizens are often confronted with myriad of challenges facing their wellbeing and survival. These include poverty, high rates of unemployment, violence, deprivation of resources, lack of opportunity, marginalization and the denial and most painfully suppression of basic rights and freedom by the very set of security apparatus that are designed to protect them. The basic thing that triggers unrest among the citizens of any society is trampling on their rights by those in uniforms. Unfortunately, any man in uniform in Nigeria is a demi-god. They act the way they like and abuse their uniforms without any due recourse to ethical conducts and the constitution establishing their unit. This is the case with Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).

According to Hari (2014), the military dictatorships of the past was alleged to have been replaced by democratic institutions but there are still suppressed and marginalized voices without a viable system for these voices to express their grievances. In the total absence of the so-called dividends of democracy, social protest has become an indispensable alternative for people to voice out their opinions, visions of society, grievances and demand in strong terms, for change in their destiny (Erin, 2012).

The youths of Nigeria trouped out in their numbers for demonstrations after the emergence of a viral video that circulated on social media on the 3rd October, 2020. The viral video showed an extrajudicial killing of a Nigerian youth shot dead by members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) who zoomed off with a Lexus jeep belonging to the victim of their extrajudicial killing. SARS is a unit of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) responsible for investigating violent offenses and robbery in the country (Ogbu, 2020). According to Midenda, (2017), the unit was created in Lagos in 1992 following the status of Lagos State as a commercial city bustling with all sorts of people and city challenges. SARS is spread across the sates of the federation 20 years after its establishment in 1992. The sudden spread of the unit into all other states of the federation without any designate structure marked the resumption of their unlawful operations against the citizens (Ogbu, 2020). In no time, the squad resumed unhealthy security practices that runs highly contrary to the constitutional duty assigned to them by the establishing act. This ability to maneuver as they wish was encouraged by their faceless nature. Originally, SARS were faceless because they were designed to perform undercover investigations in order to fight crime in Lagos and recover the state from Shina Rambo and his men who had taken the entire state hostage then. These unconstitutional operations include violation of human rights, illegal arrest and detention of citizens, partnering with politicians and other big brothers in eliminating opponents, unlawful dispossession of property and other valuables from the citizens and most painfully, extra-judicial killings of the citizens of the country among other forms of human right abuses by the squad.

The 2020 End-Sars protest was not the first of its kind in Nigeria. Following the height of brutality of the unit, the Nigerian human rights defenders and activists launched a massive campaign tagged EndSARS in late 2017 (Amnesty International, 2020). The target of the campaign was to call the attention of the government of the federation to the height of human rights violations and abuses meted on the citizens by the faceless police unit established to fight kidnapping, robber and all other violent crimes in Nigeria (Midenda, 2017). Amidst threat to live and economy of the leaders of the Nigerian human rights defenders and activists, the government later admitted that the squad were involved in power abuse and human right violations. In respect to the call by the Nigerian human rights defenders and activists, the government promised to reform the unit but that never came to a reality as the unit continued to abuse the people that they were meant to protect (Oloyede&Elega, 2019; Amnesty International, 2020). The history of brutality and human right abuse by the police and all other security agencies in Nigeria is an age long challenge that seems to have eluded all forms of control by the government. It has gone rampant to the extent that their brutality in Nigeria has even attracted the attention of the Nollywood industry which had in their numerous movies portrayed the height of human right violation and inhumanity from the police (Ogbu, 2020).

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed series of social and political unrest of different magnitude over different issues ranging from nation-wide strikes, boycotts and mass demonstrations that are mostly organized and led by labour unions, youth movements and social activists. This became indispensable because the masses have seen such acts and behaviours of taking to the street as the only

means to press home a variety of demands and a means of expression of their grievances to the government. The major issues that usually culminate into these crises according to Hari (2014) include demands for better wages, better living conditions, formation of obnoxious public policies, high rate of unemployment, continued chronic poverty in the land, corruption and freedom from repressive military dictatorship, unjustified rise in the price of essential commodities in the country etc. These factors force the citizens to take to the street even amidst threats to their lives.

This EndSars protest broke out in Nigeria on the 3rd day of October, 2020 after the video of extrajudicial killing of a young boy by SARS in Delta state went viral on air. When the protest broke out on air through all the social media platforms, the press was the major news sources that updates the publics on the latest development on the happening around the states of the federation. This according to Hamid and Baba (2014) is because the people depend on the media more in times of conflict waiting to get the cause of the conflict and the response of the government and all other agencies to the conflict. The protest which erupted as a result of police brutality against the masses was more like the people against the government in power which they voted for during the 2019 general election. While the protest lasted, the press kept on publishing different stories on the happenings around Nigeria with high level of self-imposed censorship as a result of the fear of government persecution of journalists after their stories. This was because of the guidelines of news coverage placed by National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) which came up immediately after the 20th October Lekki massacre. The restrictions or guideline according to Ani (2020) providedthat *"outlets which "have a duty to promote the corporate existence of Nigeria" should not "embarrass individuals, organizations, government, or cause disaffection, incite to panic or rift in the society at large*."

This guideline might have led the mainstream media to shy away from reporting the incidence that took place on the 20th day of October which claimed the lives of over 56 youths in a rather lukewarm manner (Amnesty International, 2020). The regulation was actually made by the NBC, the Nigeria's media regulator to suppress the press. Subsequently, they penalized three television stations namely the Africa Independent Television (AIT), Arise, and Channels TV for what the NBC tagged "unethical infractions" in their EndSars coverage. The three stations were given a fine of 3million naira each at a press conference in Abuja, by Armstrong Idachaba, the acting director-general of the NBC.

As the source of information on the happenings around the country, the press in Nigeria is under obligation as an intermediary between the people and the government to issue reports on the state of the protest and developments from time to time. They are expected by the public to be the watchdogs of the society, to inform and educate the citizens on the causes of the protest, the state of the protest and the reactions from the government on the state of things in the country within the period of the crisis. This study therefore, examined press reportage of the activities of the protesters and the government which are at war with each other during the period of the protest. In view of the new and sudden release of event coverage guideline by the NBC, an investigation of this nature would ascertain whether the press weremuzzled by fear of subtle government suppression strategy.Against this background, this study examined contents of *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation* newspapers on their coverage of the 2020 #EndSars protest in Nigeria while paying particular attention to the social responsibility and ethical obligations related to such press reportage.

Objectives of the Study

In a bid to understand how the press in Nigeria covered the 2020 EndSars protests this study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To ascertain whether *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation* newspapersprominently covered the 2020 EndSarsprotests in Nigeria.
2. To identify the dominant sources of stories used in the coverage of the EndSarsprotest in *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation*newspapers.
3. To understand the dominant news genres or types used in the coverage of the EndSarsprotest in *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation*newspapers.
4. To find out the direction or slant of the stories on the EndSars protest in *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation* newspapers.

Theoretical framework

Social Responsibility Theory of Mass Communication

This research is premised on social responsibility theory of the press which places press on the duty to ensure that the people are well informed (Nwabueze, 2012). The origin of social responsibility could be traced to the inventive thinking and ideas of Political free thinkers, the proponents of libertarian ideas and those introduced as have nurtured a democratic leadership spirit like John Milton. Drawing from the above premise, it is imperative to state that the social responsibility is an evolution from the libertarian ideology (Nwabueze, 2014; Agbanu, 2013). This theory was formally developed and brought into the academic setting by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956. This happened seven years after the US commission on freedom of press has expressed dissatisfaction on the libertarian theory of the media (David, 2015; Kobiruzaman, 2021). The theory was propounded to encourage total press freedom and with little or no censorship (Kobiruzaman, 2021). Its main base is to improve on *objectivity* in reporting to achieve responsibility in *interpretation* of events and issues around the people in the society. It places the press on the side of humanitarianism while requesting public accountability from the government without acting in a way that incites the public against the government or a society against another. Social responsibility according Ekeli (2008, p. 338) cited in Agudosy, Ikegbunam and Obiakor (2018) originated from the moral philosophy that is directed at protecting the small, poor, the helpless and the underprivileged against any form of unknown and impending danger. The case of police brutality in Nigeria had presented a clear picture of human rights abuse, economic exploitation and threats to peoples' life in the country. This places the media at the forefront of providing information and education about the 2020 EndSars protest in Nigeria with special attention to what the government is doing in order to safeguard the lives of the citizens from the hands of these faceless unit of the Nigerian security outfit. This is the responsibility of the press and doing so without generating reports that can cause uproars in the society is a matter of interpretation. Imperatively, none of this responsibility should be compromised in the interest of humanitarianism and national peace. From the look of things SARS activities in Nigeria has been viewed as a public threat to lives, economic growth and development Nigerian youths.

In this respect, the media are expected to inform the people on the cause of the protest and the response from the government. This may provide the public with the informed decision to take on the crisis that rocked the country in October 2020. Reporting the 2020 EndSars protest in Nigeria for the people to learn from will help the people and the government to know their limits and rights; safeguard the society against future occurrence and equip the policy makers on best alternative measures to settle the imbroglio once and for all. In doing this, the economy and security of the lives of the citizens may be saved from avoidable unhealthy situations. The media, therefore, should not shy away from this role because it is humanitarian in nature and concerns the people's economy and the country's existence.

The Agenda Setting Theory

This theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombsand Donald Shaw in the year 1972. The proponent of the theory posits that the media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues (Miller, 2002). In assisting the people to gain knowledge of issues in the society, the media through their agenda, influence the public agenda by giving more space and time through prominence coverage to some issues where others are left unreported (University of Twente, 2017). According to Miller (2002) cited in Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020) once the media highlighted an issue, the issue is most likely to be seen as an important one in the public agenda discourse. On the other hand, it is the views of the proponent of this theory as captured in McCombs (2003) cited in Agudosy, *et al*(2018), that when the media decide to ignore an event, no matter how crucial it is to the development of the society, the event is most likely to fall short of public debate and review. In this same manner, if the media kept silent on the 2020 #EndSars protest in Nigeria, the matter wouldn't attract public attention and debate.

The agenda-setting theory is one of the media effects theories in the field of mass communication. The major premise of the agenda-setting theory is that the media set the agenda for what the public would deem important. According to the theory, there is a correlation between the media's presentation of news and information and the level of significance the public accord to events and issues in the society. Public

discourse, often than not, revolve around issues that are frequently and consistently focused on by the media. How the media selectively highlight issues also influences the formation of opinion on such issues among members of the public.

The agenda-setting theory is basically about the causal relationship between media agenda and public agenda. Rather than directly tell the public to consider one issue as more important than another, the media set agenda by giving preferential treatment to issues in their coverage (Zhu & Blood, 1997). In similar vein, Grossberg, Wantella, Whitney and Wise (2006) affirm that the media cue the public to see certain issues as important by the prominence such issues are given and "by both the extensiveness of stories in a given day and duration of coverage over time". The process by which media agenda starts and leads to public agenda is captured by Defleur (2010) in the following propositions:

- The press (news media, in general) *selects* a number of issues, topics, and events from its continuous surveillance of the environment to process and report daily as "the news".
- Because of limited space and time, and because of journalists' convictions as to what is "newsworthy", many issues and topics are *ignored* and do not become part of the news.
- The press gives each of the news stories selected greater or lesser *prominence* in its reports by assigning it a particular position, or giving it more or less space or time, in its print or broadcast news presentations.

The selection of stories presented, with their different levels of prominence, space and time, forms the *news agenda* of the press.Therefore, when the public attends to these news reports, they will perceive the order of prominence assigned by the press in its agenda of stories and will use it to decide on a parallel *personal ranking of importance* of the issues and topics that make up the news.

The choice of this theory for this study was informed by the basic elements of agenda setting theory as provided by Folarin (2005) cited in Agudosy*et al*, (2018) where the author stated that the agenda setting involves quality of frequency of reporting of the event understudy, the prominence given to the reports through headlines, pictures, display etc. The degree of conflict generated in the reports and the cumulative media-specific effects of such reports on the 2020 Endsars protests.

Social Unrests in Nigeria: Causes and Means of Mobilization of the Participants

The use of online hashtag activism can be dated back to the 90s when it was first used for internet relay chats (IRC) for the classification of group of items (Shea, 2014). From this very moment the use of the sign gradually started in the social media. Later in 2007, Chris Messina, a San Francisco technologist came up with the sign on twitter and through that encounter, made the sign popular among his followers on twitter (Messina, 2007). Officially, '#' sign was accepted on twitter in 2009 two years after Messina used it in the platform (Gregorio, 2014). The sign entered into all other social networking cites a year after it was adopted in twitter. According to Gregorio (2014, p.1) this sign grow more popular into the social media networking cites when it became the means of identifying trending issues in the social media space. In 2009, the first use of hashtag sign for mobilization of mass demonstration took place in Moldova and few weeks later started in Iran (see Gonzalez-Bailon, Borge-Holthoefer, Rivero, & Moreno, 2011).

Back to Nigeria, EndSars protest is not the first of its kind in Nigeria. Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed series of social unrests at different times on different issues of national concerns under different leaderships. Unfortunately, all the social unrests are caused by the negligence of the poor peoples' rights. Either their economic right, political rights, civil rights or their right to life as is the case in the current crisis that hit the country.

The first social unrest that started like this EndSars protest was the 2009 online activism which was initiated by a Nigerian rappereLDee who took to Twitter to express his discomfort on the epileptic power supply in Nigeria when one of his friends could not have a surgery as a result of power outage. The artiste mobilized four other young Nigerians, SheileOjei, Amara Nwakpa, SeyiKuyinu and Nigerian singer Banky W who joined his discussion on the situation power supply in Nigeria (Odewale, 2014). This led to the birth of the #LightUpNigeria protest in the country. The success of the discussion on #LightUpNigeria led to the birth of #EnoughIsEnough which was another online campaign that was staged ahead of the 2011 general election through which the Nigeria youths demanded for a free, fair and credible election in

Nigeria. Significantly, these two social unrests started and ended in the social media without any physical actions by the masses to buttress the demand by the youths.

Later Nigeria witnessed another social unrest which grossly targeted the political economy of the nation in 2012 following the increase of fuel pump price from 65 to 140 naira per litter. This is a policy change that was made by the government without any due regard for the poor masses in the country. The increase was due to fuel subsidy removal which do not augur well with the labour union who quickly took to the streets of Abuja and Lagos soon after social media discussion. This unrest which came up soon after the Popular Arab spring was tagged #OccupyNigeria protest. It is the first physical unrest that started from online through '#' trending signs in the media and ended up in a physical demonstration where Nigerian at and diaspora occupied the entire streets of the countries and their embassies around the world (Egbunike, 2015). The protest which was characterized by mass demonstration, civil disobedience, strike actions and social media activism using Twitter and Facebook just like the current 2020 #EndSars protest which was sustained by the use of the social media. The movement was a success despite being abandoned by the mainstream media which took side with the government of the federation. Finally, the government responded positively by reducing the price from 140 to 97 naira per liter as a result of the pressure from the social media intensified.

Another hashtag protest was the #BringBackOurGirls which came into existence as a result of the August 2014 abduction of the Chibok School Girls in Borno state. The leader of this protest DrNgoziOkonjiIweala was threatened out of the physical protest but the hashtag gained international attention and scholarly researches on how the how the Nigerian media, British and American media framed the campaign (Berents, 2016; Maxfield, 2016; Ofori-Parku&Moscato 2018; Olson, 2016; Olutokunbo, Suandi, Cephas& Abu-Samah, 2015).

There are several other hashtags that were used in social media to draw attention to the peoples' need in the country. Among these hashtag social media awareness campaigns though not as very popular like the current one include #IStandWithNigeria, #BeingFemalInNgeria, #ABSURape, #OpenNASS, #StopBokoHaram all have been in existence before this mother protest popularly called #PoliceReform and #Endsars campaign (Oloyede&Elega, 2019). In all these hashtags, three things are unique. The whole issues addressed in different hashtag share three unique but interrelated views which include exposing the world to nagging problems facing the people in the country through creation of awareness and asking for solution to the problems from the government and finally set agenda for both the mainstream media and the public discourse. In this respect, all successful hashtag campaigns had in one way or the other impacted on the lives and socio-political cum economic development of Nigeria at one time or the other. Drawing from the views expressed in Oloyede&Elega, 2019) Nigeria had had a total of 15 hashtag campaigns since 2009 till 2020. This means that there is an average of at least a hashtag campaigns or protest per year. This is a sign of failure in leadership.

#EndSars Protest in Nigeria: A Brief Overview

The history of police brutality in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial era when the police was created to promote the economic and political agenda of the colonizers (Human right watch, 2005). Modern policing started in 1861 during the annexation of Lagos when the British colonial masters established police to protect the European-occupied parts of the city from recalcitrant local rulers (Abosade, 2020). Later in 1891, the British acting consul general George Annesley assembled and armed a small group of men to subdue chiefs in the upper Cross River region. The reason for this action was that those traditional chiefs were seen as obstacles to the expansion of British economic power. Annesley reportedly planned to pay his agents from fines extracted from the conquered native chiefs. Within a year, a revelation that the force is used for perpetrating all sorts of atrocities against the native people surfaced and the force known among British Officials as "Annesley Baba and his 40 thieves" was disbanded (Abosade, 2020). With this act, the native people of Nigeria had an initial negative views and perception of the police and their activities from the time immemorial. Unfortunately, no police reform initiative has achieved a reshape of the original view and perception of the police by the people even after the colonial masters in Nigeria. This has been the origin of police brutality against the mases in Nigeria.

The current social unrest that hits Nigeria in October was as a result of heartless and inhuman treatment of people in Nigeria which had led to death of hundreds of people who were murdered by the SARS in clandestine forms across different states of the federation. Sometimes in 2013, the Ezu River in Anambra state was full of human bodies dumped into it by unknown persons (Nwabueze and Ikegbunam, 2016). These human bodies were alleged to have been dumped into the river by officers and men of SARS in Anambra state. This is not the first of its kind neither was that the last. They kept on killing people without trial in any court of law and evidences of such killings were everywhere. Complaints were made by different persons including victims of their abuse and relatives of missing human beings who are aware that their wards are under SARS custody but could not have access them.

Unfortunately, the superior officers of the police command that are supposed to discipline the unprofessional men of SARS never took the expected actions of disciplining them leaving the people at the mercy of their oppressors. This very negligence of their duties gave the officers and men of SARS more space and go ahead order to add more strategies of torturing and exploiting the masses to the extent of stopping Nigerians, searching their phones and laptops along the road and withdrawing funds from unsuspecting victims through online transfer, ATM and POS machines. This was far from the original duty of fighting armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry and all other violence crimes in the country which formed the bases of their existence. This year's protests can best be understood from the deception by the government originating from their series of failed promises on previous activism that SARS would be demobilized in 2014, 2015, 2017 and the latest promise of reform of the unit by the Vice President, Prof YemiOsinbajo in 2018 (Amnesty International 2020).

Despite all these promises and pure confirmation that the unit of the police is perpetrating unlawful security practices against the masses, SARS officers continued to act with impunity, committing armed robberies, rapes, other acts of torture and extrajudicial killings as is the case with this 3rd October Delta State victim which sprang up the latest 2020 mother protest in Nigeria that claimed the lives of over 100 Nigerians including police officers. 48 of whom were killed by men and officers of the Nigeria military on 20th October 2020 popularly tagged the Black Tuesday. In their usual deceptive manner, the government of Nigeria announced On Oct. 11 that SARS would be disbanded. Before this time, crowds of protesters had grown bigger even in the face of violence and intimidation from all security apparatus in the country.

Significantly, Nigeria is well known for the use of force in controlling unrests. This application of the military shooting against peaceful protesters in Lagos is not the first of its kind. In 1929 The Aba Women's riot, the General Strike of 1945 and the Enugu Colliery Strike of 1949 were instances where anti-colonial resistance was met with a quasi-military policing force deployed to subjugate citizens (Abosade, 2020). Surprisingly, the youths of the country have made a mark in the #EndSars protest even in the face of a repressive government that is highly unresponsive to their needs. Significantly, this protest may be regarded as the mother protest of all times because of its timing just three days after the country's sixtieth independent anniversary. The implication is very significant to the socio-political history of Nigeria that sixty years later, young Nigerians are still demanding for freedom from repression in the hands of those meant to protect them.

Most significantly, the 2020 #EndSARS protests began with a focus on police brutality, but snowballed to other dimensions of corruption, human rights violations and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Which the youths spotted as the major factors that made the police vulnerable to adoption of different means of extortion of the people to the extent of serving as assassins to those who can pay them handsomely. Far from toppling the Buhari administration as alleged by his kinsmen, the #EndSARS protests sought to make Nigerian citizenship mean something tangible and worthwhile for younger generations rather than trash as it is in recent time when people have less regards for being a Nigerian citizen.

The Media and Conflict Reporting: A Conceptual Review

The role of the press in reporting issues of national importance was classified by the first executive president of Nigeria AlhajiShehuShagari as sacred responsibilities. According to Iruonagbe, Imhonopi, and Ahmadu (2013), the president remarked that the duty of fostering national unity and engendering a

sense of belonging in the minds of the people lay upon the shoulders of the press. In this regard, the media holds a very unique position in that it possesses an enormous power that could either destroy or build the nation (Nigeria, 1980)**.** Although the press was intended to be a watchdog for the country, similar to its role in developed countries like United States and United Kingdom, it has had difficulty fulfilling that role due to the demands of the various competing special interest groups here in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country with diversity. These diversities and the heterogeneous nature of the country account for the media swing in their coverage. Sometimes, the ethnic base of the media and the religion of the individual reporters sometimes control their contents on national issues which in turn influence the peoples' perception of true realities. The mass media are expected to be free to educate and enlighten the people in the state but the diverging interest eat up the freedom this was captured more clearly in Ekeanyanwu (2007), who argued that the media exists as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, educational promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilization. These functions set the media apart as an important link/factor in the relationship between the government and the governed and make them a sine qua non to societal growth and development.

Generally, earlier media studies on newspaper coverage issues have shown that the newspapers ownership and geographical location influence the slant, tone, and the generality of the content of news on issues of national importance. This was captured in Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor (1985) where it was reported that diversity of group interests, newspaper type, and newspaper ownership were the critical factors which influenced the coverage of the conflicts they identified in the newspapers studied. As a heterogeneous society, there are varying interests that exert influence on newspaper coverage of the 2020 #EndSars protest in Nigeria. Among some of the factors that has the capacity to influence publications in newspapers include their ownership and political affiliation of the individual reporters and their pay masters. According to Ering and Olofu-Adeoye(2013) the pay masters of media workers always want their workers report what they wanted the people to see about a given event thereby to forcing the reporters to instigate and escalate conflicts as empirical evidence has demonstrated in the Middle East, Sudan, Nigeria and other flash-points across the globe.

Significantly, the media is more ready and busy reporting conflict issues than other things in the country (Edeani, 1994). This was confirmed in Bola (2010, p. 83) where it was revealed that conflicts in Nigeria have consistently received maximum media coverage; Timiebi (2010) where it was found that the Niger-Delta crisis was adequately covered by the Nigerian mass media with higher coverage from the broadcast media. Remi (2010) also found that the media gave adequate coverage to Jos crises. From these literatures, it can be seen that the media celebrate crisis and in the same way incite it the more or reduce it through framing and all other media techniques depending on their choice of words. Several media studies Ademola and Okeke (2011); Oputa (2011); Lawrence (2011) have blamed the media for being bias in coverage of different conflicts in Nigeria. Their biasness in discharge of their duties according to Udoudo&Bassy, (2001, p. 43) sways public confidence away from the media.

Critical Explorative Examination of Police Brutality in Nigeria

Before the ENDSARS protest against police, no attempt to protest police brutality in Nigeria have been made by the people. In this regard, Amnesty International and other civil societies became the only voices and most CSOs protested isolated cases (Dambo, Ersoy, Auwal, Olorunsola, Olonode, Arikewuyo, and Joseph, 2020). Severally, Amnesty International has reported against police brutality and campaigned against the use of torture by law enforcement agencies for years in Nigeria as a means of getting the people to confess to crimes most time against the truth.

Amnesty international released its report dubbed "*Welcome to hellfire*" Torture and other ill-treatment in Nigeria in November 2014. This report shows that the use of torture and other forms of ill-treatment formed the means of military and police investigation of crimes in the country. Its use was widespread and routine in military and police custody across the country. Before this report, torture was rampant across police units, especially in among SARS officers. Two Nigerian human rights organizations, the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN) and the Human Rights Social Development and Environmental Foundation (HURSDEF), have also accused the Nigerian police of using torture to force

confessions out of suspects and using these confessions in courts as basis for conviction (Amnesty International, 2016).

Beyond being responsible for enforcing the law, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is rife with corruption, brutality, poor relationships with communities which sometimes leads to more abuse, poor recruitment practices, poor working conditions for the NPF, inadequate welfare package etc. (Ayoyo, 2018; Chinwokwu, 2016; Ojo, 2014). These problems open gates for all kinds of ill-practices to erupt among the officers of the Nigerian police force. Significantly, these problems have hindered the effective performance of the NPF over the years to the extent that the people have lost confidence in the police as law enforcement agent. It therefore comes as no surprise that the execution of responsibilities by some over-zealous officers have done more harm than good in society.

However, it is imperative to recall that the abuse of power by members of the NPF can be traced back to the colonial era (Akinlabi, 2017; Edet, 2017; Ikuteyijo&Rotimi, 2014; Ojo, 2014).

Although the abuse of power can be found in almost all police formations in the world, the nature and extent of this abuse varies from country to country and from one clime to another each depending on the level of economic meltdown and moral decadence. This makes police abuse of power appears higher in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes as well as in military dictatorships than in democratic societies and governments (Igbo, 2017). Unfortunately, the views held by Igbo, (2017) is not true about Nigerian democracy if the rate of police brutality is placed side by side with that of the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. The one that brought about the popular #EndSars protest in Nigeria was because, in recent times, police abuse has been alleged to be targeting Nigerian youths.

Across the world, online campaign has in different times encouraged social actions against the institution of the state. So, online campaign against police brutality is not peculiar to Nigeria. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) which arose in response to the numerous killings of unarmed African Americans by white police officers (Clayton, 2018; Williamson, Trump, & Einstein, 2018), existed long before the ENDSARS movement in Nigeria. Both movements however, have similar ideals. We confidently argue that in a way, #EndSARS movement is also a BLM movement as the movement itself became global in 2016 (Armitage, 2016). Unlike the BLM however, ENDSARS protests the killing of unarmed Nigerians, extortion, harassment etc. by some members of SARS in Nigeria's police force. As reflected on twitter protests, SARS, whose responsibility is to detect and prevent robbery has found some of its members carrying out extra-judicial killings, unlawful arrests and harassing young Nigerians. In 2019, Nigeria's Inspector-General of police launched a review of the Force order 237, which regulates the rules of engagement when fighting crime. This was not put in practice as the SARS continues to oppress those they are meant to protect.

RESEARCH METHODS

Method of Study

This study adopted content analysis method of study. This method allows the researcher to analyze the manifest content of the selected Nigerian newspapers that constitute the sample of the study. These newspapers' contents concerning the 2020 #EndSars protest in Nigeria were carefully examined, coded and analyzed.

The period covered by this study was 8 months - The study covered 8 months of September, October, November, and December2020 to January, February, March and April 2021. The Endsars protest happened in October 2020. The choice of the period of study was as a result of the desire to get the pre-protest media reports, on-the-protest media reports and post-protest media reports of the Endsars protests.

Table 1: Period of Study

	Months	Number of Days
1	September, 2020	30
2	October, 2020	31
3	November, 2020	30
4	December, 2020	31
5	January, 2021	31
6	February, 2021	28
7	March, 2021	31
8	April, 2021	30
	Total Number of Days	**242**

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The population for this study was 726 editions of the three national dailies; *Vanguard, This Day and The Nation* newspapersselected for this study. The three newspapers were purposively selected based on their national outlook, wide readership, geographical distribution and prestige. The population of study comprised of only editions of the select within the months understudy. The number of days under study, all taken together, gives242 days. The total of 242 days multiplied by the number of newspaper titles under study will give 726editions of the newspapers.

This study adopted the census approach to study 726 editions of the select national newspapers. The whole editions of the newspapers within this period (1st September, 2020 to 30th April, 2021) were studied (census). The motive to study the total editions (census) was based on the view expressed by Prasad (2008) in Kim, Lee, and Kim(2017), who states that, if the period for the study was within a short period of time, the entire content could be studied so as to ensure reliability of data. Similarly, Wimmer and Dominick (2011) note that as a 'general rule, the larger the sample, the better of course, if too few datas are selected for analysis, the possibility of an unrepresentative sample is increased'. In other words, each element in the population was given the opportunity to be observed by the researcher.The units of analysis are largely based on the research questions posed by this study, to wit: prominence or story position, story source, news genres or types and story direction.

FINDINGS

These data were analysed and interpreted in accordance with the set research objectives and questions.

Total Editions of the Three Selected Newspapers by Months of Publication

Months	Newspapers			
	Vanguard	***This Day***	***The Nation***	**Total**
September, 2020	30	30	30	90
October, 2020	31	31	31	93
November, 2020	30	30	30	90
December, 2020	31	31	31	93
January, 2021	31	31	31	93
February, 2021	28	28	28	84
March, 2021	31	31	31	93
April, 2021	30	30	30	90
Total	**242**	**242**	**242**	**726**

Source: Content Analysis, 2022

The data in the above table revealed that each of the days in the week and month for the eight months study period was studied and analysed for each of the three selected national newspapers. The data revealed that each of the newspapers had 243 editions, which gave rise to a total of 729 editions for the three newspapers.

Total Available Contents on the EndsarsNews Stories Published in Select Newspapers

Months	**Newspapers**			
	Vanguard	***This Day***	***The Nation***	**Total**
September, 2020	0	0	0	0
October, 2020	25	46	28	99
November, 2020	13	27	26	66
December, 2020	13	11	12	36
January, 2021	5	7	6	18
February, 2021	8	5	9	22
March, 2021	4	0	6	10
April, 2021	9	4	3	16
Total	**77**	**100**	**90**	**267**

Source: Content Analysis, 2022

This table revealed that the Nigerian media did not foresee the EndSars protest before it started in October, 2020. This is evident in the fact that not even of the newspapers understudy published a single article or news story on the police brutality to the citizens in the month of September preceding the month of the protest. In another development, the table also demonstrated the idea of the hot media theory where the media report starts and rise and then begin to fall as the event is brought to halt. The data in the table shows that the media attention to the EndSars was more in the month of October after which it started dwindling in number of publications. Actually, the month of November had high coverage but the coverage suddenly dropped from 100 in November to 65 in December. As of December, the media have less attention to the protest and this continued till April 2021 which has the least publication in the 8 months understudy. The implication of this is that the media rush to cover events as they happen recently and move for another event that is fresh in the society.

Placement of the Story on Endsars

Variable	***Vanguard***	***This Day***	***The Nation***	***Freq.***	**%**
Front page	13	25	20	99	23
Inside page lead stories	20	28	21	110	25
Inside page minor	37	38	42	192	43
Back page	6	9	7	38	9
Total	**76**	**100**	**90**	**439**	**100**

Source: Content Analysis, 2022

Considering the data from the above table, the media could be adjudged to have done well in their coverage of the EndSars. In all, the three newspapers published a total of 439 news items on the EndSars protest in the country with 22.5% placed on the front page of the newspapers and 6.6% on the back page. Of the total of 302 stories reported inside the pages of the newspapers, 110 stories accounting for 25.0% of the total items published were inside page lead stories leaving only 43.7% with less prominence in the stories published. The implication of this is that the Nigerian media paid attention to the EndSars protest that took place in October 2020. Reporting the events and incidences of the protest in the focal points of the newspapers show how important the media attached to the protest. In the same way, with the placement of the news items in the focal parts of the newspapers, more public attention is drawn to the nitty gritty of the protest in the country. The import of this table is that the media accorded significant level of prominence to their coverage of the EndSars protest. It could be a plus in the discharge of their social responsibility and as well the agenda setting function of the mass media that they served the

purpose of educating and informing the people on the protest. Professionally, the surveillance function of the media is being has been performed by this level of attention to the protest.

Source of Stories Used in the Coverage of the Protest among Select Newspapers

Variable	***Vanguard***	***This Day***	***The Nation***	***Freq.***	**%**
Security personnel	16	21	18	96	21.8
Political/Govt.	18	27	26	110	25
International	7	8	9	42	9.5
Ethno/religious	26	36	34	157	35.7
Economic	10	8	3	34	7.7
Total	**77**	**100**	**90**	**439**	**100**

Source: Content Analysis, 2022

The **t**able above shows that out of the 439 items published on EndSars protest, 157 items accounting for 35.7 5 are Ethno-religious source followed by political/government source with a total of 110 items covering 25% of the entire publications. Security personnel source came third with a total of 96 items accounting for 21.8% where international source came a distant fourth with 42 items representing 9.5%. Economic source has 34 items of 7.7 %. The import of the above table is that the Nigerian media pay greater attention to ethno-religious issues. Instead of looking at the security source to the protest with special reference to causes and effect of the protest to both economic and social development of the country, the press was focused on ethno-religious sentiments. of media coverage of EndSars protest in the media is Ethno-religious source. This reveals the danger of multi-ethnic and religious groups being jam-packed in a country.

Dominant News Genres or TypesUsed In the Coverage of the Protest among SelectNewspapers

Variable	***Vanguard***	***This Day***	***The Nation***	***Freq.***	**%**
Straight news	43	61	55	264	60.1
Feature/opinions	16	23	21	101	23
Editorial	2	2	1	8	1.8
Interviews	16	14	13	66	15
Total	**77**	**100**	**90**	**439**	**100**

Source: Content Analysis, 2022

The information in table 4 revealed that of all the 439 items observed as published, 264 items representing 60.1% of the total items published were straight news reports followed by features and opinion articles which came a distant second with a total of 101 items accounting for 23.0% of the items. Interviews on the EndSars protest gained the third position with a total of 66 items accounting for 15.0% of the total items published whereas Editorials on the protest came last in the table with 8 items representing 1.8% of the total items published. Significantly, all the three newspapers under study published at least one editorial news on the EndSars protest. However, although Editorial came last in the table, the fact that all the newspapers had one editorial on the protest shows that they paid attention to the protest. It will be pertinent to recall the fact that of all the five newspapers understudy, This-Day is the leading newspaper in the publications.

Table 4.6: Direction or Slant of the Stories Published in the Select Newspapers

Variable	***Vanguard***	***This Day***	***The Nation***	***Freq.***	**%**
Favourable	23	27	9	95	21.6
Neutral	36	55	34	203	46.2
Unfavorable	18	18	47	141	32.1
Total	**77**	**100**	**90**	**439**	**100**

Source: Content Analysis, 2022

Thetable above demonstrated that of the 439 items observed as published in the selected newspapers, 46.2% were on the fence while 32.1% were against the protesters with only 21.6% supporting the masses who took to the street against inhuman activities usually meted on them by the SARS branch of the

Nigerian security architecture. Among the leading newspapers that published items against masses interests in the study were *The Nation* and the *Daily trust* newspapers. Majority of the items published in these two newspapers portrays the protesters more in negative slants with lots of words condemning the protesters in the country. Devoting the greater percent of their contents to supporting the government of the country and the security architecture allegedly unleashing terror on the citizens is a practical demonstration of the respect for their ownership and regional affiliation. On the other hand, the *Guardian* newspaper was leading publications that support the protesters followed by *This-Day* and *Vanguard* newspapers. Majority of the reports placed in the middle of the whole sage reveals the kind of relationship between the media and the government in the country. the relationship is in such a way that any media that tends to be more critical of the government is made to face some sanctions and oppressions from the government.

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

This study analysed Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the Endsars protests that rocked the country from the beginning of October 2020 and the subsequent outcry. It specifically looked at how three national newspapers - *Vanguard, This Day* and *The Nation* covered the protests with a focus on the prominence given the protests, the dominant sources of stories used in the coverage of the protest, the dominant news genres or types used in the coverage and the direction or slant of the stories on the EndSars protest.

A cursory look at the literature on media and government relationship as found in Gastil (2008) has shown that sometimes the media shy away from responsibilities. This occurs mostly when it concerns the government in power (Agudosy, *et al* (2018). It was as a result of this kind of unhealthy relationship between the mass media which is supposed to serve as the watchdog and the government that this study was designed to examine how the media covered the EndSars protest which was carried out against SARS which is a security arm of the government of Nigeria. This study therefore, probed into the media responsibility of ensuring accountability through effective, objective and responsible reporting aimed at setting public agenda while advancing public interest of the greater number of the citizens. This study has exposed the people to what the government ought to do for the people to encourage fair-play and justice to enhance an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

Furthermore, this following are clear from this study;

1.The Nigerian media dwell on trivialities while the main thing is left uncovered. From the information obtained from the three select national dailies, the newspapers' base and ownership influenced their objective reporting and slant of coverage which was mainly placed on neutral ground with higher stories portraying the protesters in the negative light. Rather than examine the main cause of the protest and its possible implication to the growth and future development of the country, the media reports were tilting towards ethno-religious sentiment.

2. It was observed that the media seem to lose focus on the welfare of the people whom it ought to represent but strive to support the government that has failed the people they are meant to serve. Generally, it was least expected that the media in the country Nigeria, for any reason, will not strive to protect the government and its security arm which has found favour in wasting the lives of the people that they are trained to protect. The media were expected to do better but the findings from the study reveal otherwise.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that although the media prominently covered the protests, they did not live up to their social responsibility and expectations. This is seen in their slant of coverage and dominant sources of their stories. Massive use of straight news reports in the coverage of the EndSars protest distorted the details of the protest which features and opinions pieces could have revealed. With the straight news dominance in the genre used in the coverage, some important facts about the protest that cost the lives and property of Nigerians were silenced.

From the research objectives that guided the study, the researcher concluded that Nigerian newspapers paid more attention to the ethno-religious and political sources of the protest while the security and life of Nigerians were in jeopardy. Also the economic waste accruing from the protest were less covered. It is not out of place to state here that dwelling on ethnic, political and religious sentiments is the main issue

that had caused the country a lot of damage and setbacks including sectarian crises, secession agitations and terrorism that threatens the peaceful co-existence of the country for decades now. Professionally, the mass media shouldn't be agent of ethno-religious and political motivated sentiments. This is because they are instruments of social engineering and national development of every nation.

The researcher also concluded that although the media mostly issued neutral slant reports on the EndSars protest, there are more of negative reports and framing of the protests than positive representations made in the media. It was concluded that the slant of the coverage did not reflect the expected role of the press which is to get the government to be accountable to the people. Protecting the government when an arm of its security architecture becomes brutal to the citizens they are supposed to protect shouldn't be the normal thing for a responsible press. Reporting more of negative views of the protesters did not give the government the needed push to take action against the inhuman treatment by the SARS operativeson the citizens of the country. The media must join hands in calling for immediate policy reformation if not outright change of Nigeria's security architecture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the research, the researcher recommends the following:

1. That the media should wake up and live up to her responsibilities as the watchdog of the Nigerian society. They should their reports to hold government accountable by probing the actions of the government and its agencies against the masses in a reasonable manner that can create an avenue for the accommodation and protection of the public interest.
2. Singing praises of the government and its agencies should not be the bases for media reporting especially on issues of gross injustice against the people. Such occurrences as the violent crises ofEndSarsand the nature of its reportage by the Nigerian newspapers tend to downplay government's irresponsibility and unaccountability to the people who the government is expected to provide for and protect.
3. The media should strive to stay away from ethno-religious sentiments while reporting issues of national concern as that influences their slant of coverage of issues of public concern like the 2020 EndSars protest.
4. The inhuman treatment of the citizens by the security agents who are saddled with the responsibility of protecting them should not be encouraged by the media and her reports. They should help the people to get this protection from the government to save the lives and property.
5. The media, through her reportage and advocacy roles should harp on the need for immediate policy reformation if not outright change of Nigeria's security architecture.

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