

Newspaper Headlines as Tool for Political Propaganda in Nigeria: Trend Analysis of Implications on Four Presidential Elections

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Abstract : The role of the media in political discourse cannot be overemphasized as they form an important part of societal development. The media institution is considered the fourth estate of the realm because it serves as a check and balance to the arms of government (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary) especially in a democratic setup, and makes public office holders accountable to the people. They scrutinize the political candidates and conduct a holistic analysis of the achievement of the government in order to make the people's representative accountable to the electorates. The media in Nigeria play a seminal role in shaping how people vote during elections. Newspaper headlines are catchy phrases that easily capture the attention of the audience and call them (audience) to action. Research conducted on newspaper headlines looks at the linguistic aspect and how the tenses used has a resultant effect on peoples' attitude and behaviour. Communication scholars have also conducted studies that interrogate whether newspaper headlines influence peoples' voting patterns and decisions. Propaganda and negative stories about political opponents are stapling features in electioneering campaigns. Nigerian newspaper readers have the characteristic of scanning newspaper headlines. And the question is whether politicians effectively have played into this tendency to brand opponents negatively, based on half-truths and inadequate information. This study illustrates major trends in the Nigerian political landscape looking at the past four presidential elections and frames the progress of the research in the extant body of political propaganda research in Africa. The study will use the quantitative content analysis of newspaper headlines from 2007 to 2019 to be able to ascertain whether newspaper headlines had any effect on the election results of the presidential elections during these years. This will be supplemented by Key Informant Interviews of political scientists or experts to draw further inferences from the quantitative data. Drawing on newspaper headlines of selected newspapers in Nigeria that have a political propaganda angle for the presidential elections, the analysis will correspond to and complements extant descriptions of how the field of political propaganda has been developed in Nigeria, providing evidence of four presidential elections that have shaped Nigerian politics. Understanding the development of the behavioural change of the electorates provide useful context for trend analysis in political propaganda communication. The findings will contribute to how newspaper headlines are used partly or wholly to decide the outcome of presidential elections in Nigeria.

Keywords : newspaper headlines, political propaganda, presidential elections, trend analysis

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