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Newspaper Framing of the Rise and Fall of the RUGA Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria

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Abstract

This research examined newspaper framing of the rise and fall of the RUGA Programme, a rural settlement initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria where farmers and cattle herders will be accommodated in an organized place with basic amenities such as schools, hospitals, road networks, veterinary clinics, markets and manufacturing entities that will process and add value to meats and animal products and solve the long standing problem of farmer/herder crises. The work was informed by the controversies surrounding the launching and suspension of the programme where contents of four national newspapers along regional divide: Daily Trust and Leadership (North); and The Guardian and Punch newspapers (South) were analysed to reveal the framing of the RUGA programme. The study was anchored on the Framing theory and used content analysis to carry out a census of the four selected newspapers within the period of the introduction and suspension of the programme. The findings of this work revealed a very low but positive framing of the RUGA programme by the northern newspapers but a predominantly higher and negative framing of the RUGA programme by the southern newspapers. The research also revealed that the selected newspapers emphasized the political angle of the RUGA programme under episodic frames which did not provide the necessary background information and context. This study recommends that newspapers should step up their coverage of important national development programmes such as the RUGA issue, use more thematic frames in order to give their audience the much needed background and context, eschew regional sentiments and emphasize the benefits of government programmes and policies to encourage public acceptance.

Keywords: Framing, RUGA, Media, Programme, Newspapers

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1. Introduction

The roles of the media in the development of any country cannot be over-emphasized. Hence, the traditional roles of the mass media include but not restricted to information, education, entertainment, motivation, public enlightenment, surveillance and promotion or preservation of culture from one generation to another among others. These duties seldom vary from the submission of one scholar to another. Adeyanju (2017) asserts that, the media serve as veritable channels by which citizens receive and process messages or information to guide them in deciding their position on political and policy issues. The media provide guidance for citizens and set agenda for the society. These roles among others become indispensable in the mobilization of individuals for the growth and development of societies such as a developing Nigeria.

Adeyanju (2017) further submits that, the Nigerian media have carved a niche for themselves over the years. From pre-independence, to independence; and all through to post independence Nigeria, the media remain the link between the government and the citizens not just in reporting government activities to the people but also in helping to monitor government in trust for the people. Moreover, the media, according to Isola (2008), also promote and nourish the ideals of democratic ethos and constantly assure and guarantee the protection of freedom of individuals and that of the media, which is the heart of popular participation in liberal democracies.

Furthermore, Adeyanju (2017) observes that the achievement of any government relies mostly on its ability to get the right information on its activities (proposed, implemented and completed) to the people at the right time and in the right way. Failure to do this can cause the government problems especially, on issues of credibility, acceptance and authority. Since the government derives its legitimacy from the people, it behooves on the government to sustain such legitimacy through the provision of adequate information and mobilization of the people towards achieving societal goals. The media, thus remain a viable vehicle for achieving such. One example where the media played roles in echoing divergent views from both the government and the citizenry is the issue of the introduction and the suspension of the RUGA programme in 2019.

The RUGA programme, an initiative and a policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria was launched on the 10th of May, 2019. RUGA, meaning the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA), a Hausa term for cattle settlement to replace open grazing is a proposed rural settlement in which animals, farmers and cattle herders, will be accommodated in an organized place with the provision of necessary and adequate basic amenities such as schools, hospitals, road networks, veterinary clinics, markets and manufacturing entities that will process and add value to meats and animal products. The RUGA programme was also projected to benefit the nation in the reduction of crises between herders and farmers, increase in animal protection and production, including a complete value chain that will improve the quality and hygiene of livestock in terms of beef and milk production; improve the quality of feeding and access to animal care; and encourage private sector participation in commercial pasture production by way of investments. In addition, the programme was projected to be capable of giving rise to job creation, access to credit facilities, security for pastoral families and curtailment of cattle rustling among others (Ekpo and Tobi, 2019; Mudashir *et al.*, 2019).

However, Nigeria being a complex entity where ethnic, regional and religion tensions intersect with politics and governance, the RUGA programme was perceived and received with mixed reactions by different individuals and interest groups. While some states and regions, notably the Northern states supported and welcomed the programme, others are against the government submissions, hence resisted the programme especially in western and eastern regions. For instance, the then chairman of the South East Governors forum and Governor of Ebonyi State, David Umahi, in a statement by his spokesman, Emmanuel Uzor, said there was no plan for a RUGA settlement in any part of the Southeast and South-south regions. According to him, the Southeast is purely agrarian with limited landmass for farming and therefore cannot accommodate the RUGA programme (Mudashir *et al.*, 2019).

Similarly, the Southern and Middle Belt Leaders association described the RUGA initiative as “repugnant, repulsive and provocative”. They alleged that the RUGA settlement initiative was a subtle attempt by the Fulani to colonize the rest of Nigeria under the guise of promoting cattle rearing. They emphasized that cattle-rearing is a private business that should not have the involvement of government, arguing that a government interested in the unity of the country should not dabble into such business which tends to promote one ethnic

group over another. The group also alleged that in the last four years, herdsmen had turned non-Fulani communities into killing fields with the government turning a blind eye to all their crimes (Mudashir *et al.*, 2019).

Additionally, the group observed that a policy of national importance such as the RUGA programme is expected to have been initiated and presented for discussion at National Executive Council meetings which has both Ministers and the Governors of the 36 States of Nigeria in attendance. The RUGA policy, by all indications, did not follow this tradition as the then office of the Vice President had denied having knowledge of such a programme which demonstrates the skirmishes that surrounded its formulation and subsequent presidential approval. Moreover, section 153 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes the Vice President as the Chairman of the National Economic Council (NEC) with the responsibility to advise the President concerning the economic affairs of the Federation. It is, therefore, an aberration that a policy of this magnitude circumvented the vice president's office and still manages to secure presidential approval. As such, the RUGA programme was seen as a product of "federal might" (Ekpo and Tobi, 2019; Mudashir *et al.*, 2019).

On the other hand, the Nigerian government had assured citizens that the programme had no intention of snatching any state's land, colonizing regions or forcing RUGA on any part of the country against their wishes as implementation was voluntary. At the point of launching, twelve states applied to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, making lands available for the take-off of the scheme in their states. These states with interest was seen by government to be sufficient for the pilot scheme. However, despite these assurances but consequent upon the strong oppositions from several people, the then government of President Muhammadu Buhari suspended the implementation of the controversial RUGA settlement programme across the country. The presidency announced the suspension on the 4th of July 2019, due to its perceived inconsistency with the approved National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) (Ekpo and Tobi, 2019).

The media both print and broadcast are at the center of this controversy, providing news and information on the unfolding events using different words, phrases, sentences and tones. Since the media in most societies have always been known for national reflections and report on topical issues in the society, they are seen to serve as a mirror for issues of national concerns. Hence, Pate and Adeyanju (2019) posit that they are seen to perform at least three distinctive roles: serving as the market place of ideas, provision of important public information for individual decision making as well as acting as the "watch dog" that checks the undue behaviors or conducts of the political office holders to guarantee their accountability and transparency.

Similarly, as part of their traditional reportage, the media are generally believed to possess a strong influence in constructing social realities which involve framing images of reality in a predictable and desired manner (Umueri, 2008). This means that the mass media in all societies provide news and information on issues and events happening within and outside their environments and frame them in a particular manner. By deduction, it is safe to assume that Nigerians media also provided news updates and reports on the RUGA programme using different words, phrases and other journalistic frames. And in their reportage, they may have reflected public responses to the RUGA programme such as acceptance, outcry, condemnations and rejection which may have subsequently led the Nigeria government to suspend the programme a few months after its launch.

This is therefore, the thrust of media framing in content: selecting, emphasizing and presenting information to create specific interpretations and narrative, and as such, it is the basic foundation for this research enquiry. Hence, this study examined the role of the Nigerian media, particularly the selected newspapers, in the farming of the rise and fall of the RUGA programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria from April to August 2019.

2. Statement of Problem

The proposed RUGA programme of the Federal Government, which aimed to create designated grazing areas for herdsmen, improve livestock production, reduce clashes and conflicts and promote economic growth met with acceptance from the northern part of the polity, while recording strong rejection from the southern parts of the country who see the initiative as an act of dominance of the Fulani by the Buhari led administration. Despite the publicity accorded to the RUGA initiative prior to the introduction of the programme where the

programme was projected to boost food security, provide employment of youth, combat farmer-herder crisis as well as to promote the administration's economic diversification agenda, the Federal Government was forced to suspend the programme due to controversies surrounding it.

The launching and suspension of the RUGA programme have been reported by the Nigerian media which contributed to the discourses on the RUGA programme using different concepts and frames. The introduction and suspension of RUGA programme have also sparked debates and invited queries from scholars, policy makers and researchers in different areas. In the communication domain, particularly, media reportage of the programme, researches have been conducted (see for example: [Ekpo and Tobi, 2019](#); [Seyedi and Ndagi, 2019](#); [Ogunlade et al., 2020](#)) on the frequency of reports, perception and analysis of the RUGA programme in some communities and newspapers. However, there appears to be limited researches on the framing of the rise and fall of the RUGA programme by the Nigerian newspapers. This research therefore, examined how four selected newspapers across two regional divides of Nigeria (North and South) framed the RUGA programme from April 2019 to August 2019 to find the frequency, direction and types of frames on the RUGA programme.

3. Objectives of the Study

This research examined media framing of the RUGA Programme in 4 selected newspapers. The specific objectives are to:

- 1) Find out the frequency of reports on the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers,
- 2) Identify the direction of framing the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers; and
- 3) Examine the type of frames used in reporting the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers.

3.1. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What is the frequency of reports on the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers?
- 2) What is the direction of framing the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers?
- 3) What types of frames did the selected newspapers use in reporting the RUGA Programme?

4. Literature Review

4.1. The Role of the Media in Reporting Issues

The media are powerful social institutions for generating and transmitting standardized messages to large, widespread and heterogeneous receivers ([Ojete, 2008](#)). The media which include television, radio, newspapers, magazines, films/videos, books, cinema, and internet among others are influential vehicles for information dissemination. They inform the public about new issues and events in the society as well as persuade the target audiences to imbibe new behaviours, accept new policies or to enlighten them about critical pieces of news. The media also keep the public updated about campaigns or share information about new programmes and strive to empower rural dwellers on how to fight major causes of diseases through vaccination and immunization. The media also inform large numbers of people of seasonal or daily variations of activities such as availability of new products or services, where to seek help, teach new skills or organize listening groups, and increase community acceptance of programmes or policies ([Akpor and Clever, 2016](#)).

The media in Nigeria perform these roles and more. They continuously serve as important channels of transmitting messages and information to a large heterogeneous and diversified audience. Hence, the media have over the years saturated people's lives and have become central to people's existence. They remain the veritable tools for mass mobilization through frequent reportage of issues. The media no doubt have a significant impact in the everyday lives of the citizens which overshadows their broader cultural relations and determines their experiences, values and understanding of the world. As a result, the media have been identified as a major source through which people understand public issues such as conflict, famines and policies. Consequently, the media have the capacity to mitigate wars and conflicts and at the same time, can instigate conflicts among parties ([Kamoru and Sirajudeen, 2016](#); [Bello and Oso, 2018](#)).

To this end, Ojete (2008) observed that experts in media studies are unanimous that the effect of media mobilization efforts can be seen from a triple stance. First they have the capability to create attitudes towards certain public or national affairs where none existed. Second, they could cause a shift of public attitudes or opinions that have not been deeply rooted. And third, they can simply reinforce an already existing public or individual opinions on given issues or government activities. This is because they carry out the primary responsibility of gathering and disseminating news and information, as well as educating, entertaining and enlightening the mass audience. The media also play the surveillance function and serve as watchdogs of the Nigerian society's norms and values.

Therefore, in discharging these responsibilities, the media are not only capable of affecting people through the information they disseminate, they sometimes determine people's world view through framing. In other words, the media are central to how citizens comprehend issues and events that happen around them as they are seen to occupy a prime place as the popular convener and conveyor of ideas, messages, information and images that nurture the "picture in our heads" (Bello and Oso, 2018). Hence, the media reports use frames to provide focus and influence on how issues and events are understood and evaluated by the audience thereby giving them a particular point of view, perception or frame of interpretation. Thus, the media play essential roles in our contemporary society, serving as the "conduit" through which societal members learn of issues away from the horizon of their personal lives (Mohammed *et al.*, 2018).

Similarly, Kariuki (2013) reiterates that framing seeks to understand the media content included in the media texts and what interpretation the media content is trying to promote through the coverage, or lack of coverage, of events. The frame of an issue has wider implications regarding the viewpoint adopted by those exposed to it. Thus, the media frame can be described as an organizing process for media content. And as such, it provides immediate context to the recipient of the frame, through the selection, emphasis or exclusion of specific facts or ideas. Additionally, in the view of Rogala (2011), frames provide an easy understanding of complex issues by tilting towards more important or weighing certain considerations and arguments over others. They assist to communicate why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible, and what can be done about them. In the process of analyzing a news report, and looking closely at what is emphasized in the story, what is deliberately excluded and what is elaborated on, it becomes very clear that the way the story is presented has a big impact on the effect of the article as against the story itself.

This means that there are many dimensions to assessing or evaluating frames in a study, both media frames and audience frame; quantitatively and qualitatively. Therefore, the goal of framing is to understand the nature of media representations and how these representations affect audiences. However, this research focused on framing in content; that is media frames and examined the reportage and framing of the RUGA programme in 4 selected newspapers.

4.2. The RUGA Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria

The RUGA programme came into being as a result of The World Bank Report (2017) which indicated that, with the low pricing of the global oil, Nigeria needed a fresh growth strategy aimed at economic diversification. Consequently, the then Buhari led administration made efforts towards implementing economic stabilization and revival measures to solve medium and long-term development agenda. These measures are aimed at resolving macro-economic buoyancy, development and restoring normalcy in security compromised regions of the North East and Niger Delta. These short, medium and long-term growth initiatives depended heavily on addressing sector-specific problems, particularly in agriculture to enhance competitiveness and improve inclusive growth, accelerate job creation and economic revival. Agriculture, mining and infrastructure are officially designated as the main propellers for improving non-oil revenues, diversifying the economy, achieving food and nutrition security; and generating jobs for the citizenry.

The report further observed that due to higher consumer demand, the livestock sub-sector has been growing at a rate of 12.7%, higher than agricultural growth rate of 6.8%. The subsector is therefore vital to the socio-economic development and key for nutritional security, providing 36.5% of the total protein in-take of Nigerians. However, despite the large herd size, livestock sub-sector's production fails to match the current needs, and the gap between domestic demand and supply is expected to widen in the future. And in order to match the growing demand, the production of the animal protein products requires a rapid growth as this low productivity,

has major negative consequences for the economy. Therefore, transforming the sub-sector and developing the productivity of livestock by resolving necessary supply and demand side constraints and risks is an area of interest to the Government of Nigeria ([The World Bank, 2017](#)). Consequently, the Nigerian government embarked on various economic diversifications with agriculture as the leading sector in the campaign. This provided the basis for the introduction of many initiatives including Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) programme, on the 10th of May 2019.

The RUGA programme, as one of the Federal government's agricultural initiatives is aimed at boosting agricultural transformation and remedy to the lingering farmers-herders' clashes that have resulted in colossal loss of lives and properties across the country. It was projected to benefit the nation in the areas of reduction of crises between herders and farmers, increase in animal protection, including a complete value chain that will improve the quality and hygiene of livestock in terms of beef and milk production; improve quality of feeding and access to animal care and private sector participation in commercial pasture production by way of investments ([Ekpo and Tobi, 2019](#)). In addition, the programme was projected to be capable of giving rise to job creation, access to credit facilities, security for pastoral families and curtailment of cattle rustling ([Mudashir et al., 2019](#)). However, the RUGA initiative became death on arrival due to agitations from several quarters of Nigeria on conspiracies of "Islamisation", "Fulanisation" and federal-backed land-grabbing agenda" ([Ekpo and Tobi, 2019](#)).

Researches have been conducted on the farmer-herder conflicts and the RUGA programme in Nigeria. For instance, Mohammed and Dalib ([2017](#)) examined how Nigerian newspapers framed the issues of Farmers - herders' clashes by looking at the patterns of news framing using quantitative content analysis to reveal three major patterns of stereotypes, favoritism, and ethnic apathy. Similarly, Gever and Essien ([2019](#)) investigated newspaper reports of the conflict between farmers and herdsman in Benue State, Nigeria by examining, text format, frequency, prominence, depth of coverage, language of reports and audience assessment of *Daily Sun* and *Daily Trust* coverage for 12 months. Findings of this research revealed, that the text format for both newspapers was mostly straight news with focus on conflict as against the victims of the conflict and stories reported were not given prominence.

Ogunlade *et al.* ([2020](#)) assessed how the RUGA initiative was reported in selected Nigerian newspapers by examining the frequency, report format and prominence accorded the RUGA news with reference to other subject matters in the news reports through a systematic quantitative content analysis of the *Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. The findings revealed, among others, that RUGA issues were not given adequate prominence in the selected newspapers, even though the newspapers played more of informative role in the reportage other than analysis of the programme. In a similar research, Seyed and Ndagi ([2019](#)) also examined the perception of 100 respondents from 5 selected areas of Niger state over the planned RUGA settlement in Bobi grazing reserve. Findings revealed that majority of the respondents are aware of the RUGA settlement issue and are positively disposed to the arrangement. The work concluded that RUGA settlement in Niger state will aid in the reduction of conflicts among farmers and herders in the state. Gever ([2019](#)) also investigated the frames and tones of media reports on the anti-open grazing law of Benue State, by *Punch* and *Leadership* newspapers; *Channels TV* and *Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)* from June 2016 to November 2017. The work interviewed 10 journalists who reported stories on the anti-open grazing law. The results revealed that most of the stories cited Benue indigenes as sources with horror and hope as dominant frames while the tone of framing was largely positive in support of the law.

Ekpo and Tobi ([2019](#)) did a situational analysis of the RUGA programme to identify the various factors that culminated in its rejection by stakeholders from central and southern Nigeria. Secondary evidences in the form of media reports and primary data such as press releases by stakeholders suggested that the rejection was, instigated by the hysteria of a calculated stratagem of the federal government, through federal-might, to reallocate ancestral lands of central/southern Nigeria to the demographically pastoralized herding groups from the north through the RUGA settlement. In a similar bid, Saka *et al.* ([2019](#)) examined the various discourses on the trajectory of the suspended RUGA programme. Their analysis showed various attacks through criticism regarding the implementation of the RUGA programme with the public reactions identified to be driven by ethnic and religious sentiments as well as lack of proper consultations prior to the implementation of the programme. The insensitivity of the government to the potentials of the programme to generate ethnic and

tribal issues and lack of clarifications regarding the role of the state governments in its implementation were also identified as challenges of the programme.

Apikins (2020) also examined the 'Federal Government of Nigeria's Rural Grazing Area policy: demystification of the elite's theory'. The work reviews how some African countries such as Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria herders (mostly Fulbe extraction) are embroiled in a murderous conflict with African pastoral farmers that often results into an apocalyptic power struggle by their more politically sophisticated and de-normalized kinsmen. It highlights how the solution of the RUGA programme to the conflict has further incited outrage, as majority of Nigerians view it as an assault on inclusivity in a multi ethnic Nigeria, thus rejecting it. And due to widespread condemnation, threat to crop farmers, secularism and national security, the government suspended its implementation. The work asserts that the paradigm shift negates the fundamental thrust of the elite's theory, which presupposes that the elites determine "who does or gets what, when, where and how", hence the problem antique. The paper revealed that the RUGA programme saga among others shows how a nation can compromise her future through sheer accumulation of ethnic grievances through elite manipulations and deceits; and how the citizens can mobilize to demystify unpopular and anti-people policies of government.

Ele (2020) in his research examined the clashes between the herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria as a result of the effects of climate change in northern Nigeria and exacerbated by other factors such as ethno-religious sentiments. The work posits that herdsmen are forced to migrate southwards to face competition for arable and grazing land with the farmers in the middle belt. This, invariably leads to conflicts, often resulting in gruesome murder and carnage with scores of people maimed or killed. To resolve this, the Nigerian government proposed and set up grazing reserves and rural grazing area settlements in all states of the federation. However, the major problem is how and where to obtain the land. The research reflects on the legal implication of a private freehold or leasehold tenure arrangement as against the compulsory acquisition of land as proposed by the government.

These and many other researches were conducted on the RUGA programme. Though, short-lived as it was launched on the 10th of May 2019 but was suspended on the 4th of July, 2019 as a result of condemnation and rejection from different parts of the Nigerian polity, this research examined the framing of the rise and fall of the RUGA programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria in four selected Nigerian newspapers from April to August, 2019, to represent the period before, during and after the introduction of the programme.

4.3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Framing theory to explain this work.

Framing theory is a theory which has its root in both psychology and sociology and is seen as an expansion and extension of the Agenda Setting theory. The theory was popularised by Erving Goffman in his 1974 publication titled "Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience". However, significant contributions to the development of the theory in the field of communication and media studies was made notably by Robert Entman and others (for example, Gamson, 1992; Weaver, 2007; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2011). Framing according to Goffman (1974) simply means "schemata of interpretations". Entman (1993) elaborates and views framing as "making some aspects of perceived reality more salient in a communication text in order to promote problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation" of an issue or event described by the media.

The main assumption of the theory is that, the media concentrate on certain issues in the society and draw the attention of the audience to these issues through the use of certain words, concepts and language which influence reception, perception and interpretation of news and information by the audience. Scheufele (1999) echoes that, journalists select the topics they will present and still bear the professional responsibility of deciding how the selected topics will be presented to the audience. This explains how the content of news are framed, and the influences they may have on what audience think about them. This results in selective influence over how issues are presented and how they may be viewed by the audience.

Entman (1993) further explains that media frames function to define an issue, discuss its causes or factors responsible, evaluate its implications; and make prescriptions on how best to handle the issue. Through these,

media frames provide focus and influence on how issues and events are understood and evaluated by the audience thereby giving them a particular point of view, perception or frame of interpretation. In this respect, Umueri (2008) adds that framing is the way the media paint and colour news items to an acceptable level of constructing social reality; thus affecting the audience, with a view to adding values to information processing and use by the recipients.

News frames therefore thrives on existing technology, professional competence of journalists and the pre-existing information or knowledge of the recipients in the target society. The analysis of text in framing theory usually leads to comprehensible and fascinating results, in a transparent and communicative way. Even if we are left at the end without a clear measure of strength and extent of the 'frames' revealed, there are many cues to depict, like the same ones available to the audience that give rise to supposed effects. These involve visuals, language usage, labels, similes and metaphors, familiar narrative structures, etc. (McQuail, 2010).

Framing recognizes that media can impart a certain perspective or 'spin' to the events they cover and that this in turn might influence public attitudes of the issues. Hence, framing describes the process of organizing, defining and structuring a story. According to Kariuki (2013) framing theorists argue that even when journalists intend to be objective or balanced in their coverage, they necessarily report on issues in ways that give audiences cues as to how to understand the issues, including which aspects of the issues to focus on and which to ignore. As the core task of all media gate keepers is to determine which stories to include or exclude from a given day's newspaper or broadcast and what to emphasize within those stories that are included. This in itself frames the issues covered in their publications and programmes. Beyond inclusion and exclusion decisions, news producers also present or represent issues and political actors in specific ways. So, how a story is told contributes to its framing and therefore to the communication of how the issues and actors in the stories should be evaluated by the audience. Hence, relationship exist between media frames and audience interpretation.

Based on this theory, the media draw public's attention to certain topics or issues in the society. They decide what people think about. When news items occur, they are always more than only bringing up certain topics. The way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is also a choice made by the journalists. To this end, it is note-worthy that in the framing theory, a single sentence in a news report may perform one or more of the framing functions of problem definition, causes diagnosis, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation while many sentences may perform none of them at all (Entman, 1993). Thus, a frame refers to the way media and media gate keepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret news presentations. Frames are therefore, abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news on the audiences. This means frames not only tells us what to think about but also how to think about it (Kariuki, 2013).

There are two essential types of framing. One refers to the way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists within some familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning. The second type is related to the effect of framing on the audience. Here, the audience is thought to adopt the frame of reference offered by journalists and to see the world in a similar way (McQuail, 2010). The frame of an issue by the media which is the focus of this research has wider implications regarding the view point adopted by those exposed to it. Kariuki (2013) asserted that media frame are the major organizing instruments for media content. In this regard, it provides immediate context as the receiver of the frame, through the selection, emphasis or exclusion of the main issues, facts or ideas. Buttressing this, McComb and Ghanem (2003) opined that the media frames are important as research has shown that differences in how media represent, or frame events have consequences on the reasoning and beliefs of media consumers regarding the events.

The idea of a 'frame' in relation to news has been widely and loosely used in place of terms such as 'frame of reference', 'context', 'theme', or even 'news angle'. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selection and salience. He outlined the main aspects of framing to include defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments and suggesting remedies. It is obvious that a very large number of textual devices can be used to perform these activities. They include using certain words or phrases, making certain contextual reference, choosing certain pictures or films, giving examples as typical, referring to certain sources. Hence, framing theory therefore provides an effective means for examining the media roles in developing the publics' disposition towards issues as the concept of framing is central to the understanding of the media's role in

shaping issues/debates. With these contentions in mind, it is evident that framing theory, despite its somewhat scattered conceptualization, has the potential to increase our nascent understanding of how the selected newspapers covered the RUGA programme and the manner of representation given to it (Entman, 1993). This theoretical analysis therefore justifies why this research adopted this theory to situate the study of the RUGA programme.

5. Methodology

This research used quantitative content analysis to assess the contents of the four selected newspapers on the RUGA programme. This is relevant in addressing the objectives of this research. The quantitative content analysis enabled the researcher to assign numbers to the coded data on the frequency, the direction and the types of framing of the RUGA programme in the 4 selected newspapers.

The universe of the study constituted all newspapers published in Nigeria and the study population is 612 editions of 4 selected newspapers published during the study period across 2 regional divides: The Guardian and Punch (South); and Daily Trust and Leadership (North). All newspapers selected are privately owned with context dependent editorial stance and no overt political affiliation. This study used purposive sampling technique to select newspapers based on geographical divide, popularity, readership, independent editorial contents and circulation figures. A census sampling technique was used to select the editions of the newspapers published from the 1st of April, 2019 to 31st August 2019 to enable the researcher examine reports before the launching of RUGA policy, during and after the launching of the programme. Hence a total of 612 newspapers (including weekend editions) constituted the sample size for this research.

The units of analyses for this study are news reports, editorials, features, photos, columns, letters to editor, advertisements and cartoons on the RUGA programme reported by the selected newspapers while the framing categories for this study include the following based on the yardsticks of Thematic frames (stories that provided background and context to stories on RUGA programme) and Episodic Frames (stories that do not provide background and context to RUGA programme).

1. **Ethnicity:** Any reference made in the news reports by the selected newspapers that concerns the tribe or ethnic background of actors in RUGA programme.
2. **Culture:** Reports in the selected newspapers that emphasize the culture or way of life of the actors in the RUGA programme.
3. **Politics:** News reports in the selected newspapers that relate or refer to the political or administration of governance in the country.
4. **Economy:** News report in the selected newspapers that highlights economic implications of the RUGA programme in Nigeria.
5. **Environment:** News report in the selected newspapers that refers to effect or implication of the RUGA programme on the environment in Nigeria.
6. **Conflict:** News report in the selected newspapers that paints the RUGA programme in the form of crisis or conflict in Nigeria.
7. **Religion:** News report in the selected newspapers that has religious under tone in presenting the RUGA programme in Nigeria.
8. **Entertainment:** News report in the selected newspapers that highlights the RUGA programme in Nigeria in form of entertainment, amusement or satire or caricature. Solution: news report in the selected newspapers that focuses on providing solution to the RUGA programme.
9. **Others:** Report that do not fall under any of the above framing categories or cut across more than one category.

The coding sheet served as the instrument for data collection which was developed based on the objectives of this study. The coding sheet has a section containing instructions to coders and sections containing the actual coding information with appropriate columns for units of analyses and framing categories. Inter-coder

reliability was determined by two coders who were randomly selected to do the coding with 10% of the sample using Holsti's formula (cited in [Wimmer and Dominick, 2006](#)). Results indicated 80% inter-coder agreement while validity of the instrument was ascertained by colleagues after series of observations and reviews. Data was presented on tables using simple descriptive statistics of numbers and percentages.

6. Results

A total of 612 editions of the *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *Punch* and *Guardian* newspapers were examined for this research. The sum total of 113 reports were recorded on the RUGA programme. However, two of the reports were discovered to be invalid and therefore discarded. Hence, a total of 111 reports were being analyzed to reveal the frequency of framing the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers:

This Table 1 revealed the frequency of reports on the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers. Data shows a total of 111 reports are recorded for the period under study. Daily Trust newspaper has a total of 19 reports equivalent to 17.12%, Leadership newspaper has a total 22 reports, equivalent to 19.82% on the RUGA programme, the Punch newspaper has a total of 24 reports equivalent to 21.62% while the Guardian newspaper has a total of 46 reports equivalent to 41.44% of the reports. Comparatively, two Newspapers from the North (Daily Trust and Leadership) have 41 (36.94%) reports while the southern newspapers (Punch and the Guardian newspapers) have 70 (66.06%) reports. This means that Northern newspapers even though, they are owned and located in Northern Nigeria where the contentious RUGA programme is said to benefit have less reports on the RUGA programme as compared to the Southern newspapers. This therefore implies that the southern newspapers may have been better motivated to cover the RUGA programme than the northern newspapers as they have the highest frequency of coverage given to the RUGA programme in this research.

On the frequency of coverage, it is perceived as grossly inadequate, especially on an important national issue of general concern and tremendous controversy such as RUGA programme. The introduction of the RUGA programme was greeted with open rejection, outright condemnation and protests by many Nigerians especially in the southern and middle belt regions of the country. This finding therefore falls short of the expectation of the basic media roles in providing adequate coverage of important national issues. This finding is similar to the work of Gever and Essien (2019) who investigated newspaper reports of the conflict between farmers and herders and reported that newspapers in Nigeria gave low frequency to the conflict. The researchers also submitted that reports on the conflict disappeared in the media as soon as the conflict subsided but suddenly re-appeared when the conflict resumed. It is therefore safe to add that, low frequency of coverage has the proclivity to undermine the gravity of an issue, especially one that is of important national interest like RUGA programme.

Frequency	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	The Guardian	Total
News	13 (17.81%)	18 (24.66%)	17 (23.29%)	25 (34.25%)	73(65.77%)
Editorial	0	0	1 (33.33%)	2 (66.67%)	3(2.70%)
Features	1 (6.25%)	3 (18.75%)	1 (6.25%)	11 (68.75%)	16(14.41%)
Photos	0	0	0	0	0
Interviews	0	0	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	6 (5.41%)
Columns	5 (50%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	3 (30%)	10 (9%)
Cartoon	0	0	0	0	0
Letters	0	0	1 (33.33)	2 (66.67%)	3 (2.70%)
Total	19 (17.12%)	22(19.82%)	24 (21.62%)	46 (41.44%)	111 (100%)

Source: Field Research (2021)

As Ojete (2008) puts it, the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at any given time in a given society. The mass media institutions are considered to be responsible for projecting salient issues to the platform of public discourse and continuously draw public attention to them. The media successfully do this via the quantity and frequency of reporting. As such the mass media tend to define the relationship between the coverage and public thinking and therefore influence what the people learn about the society.

Table 2 above shows the direction of the reports on RUGA programme. Direction in this research means tones used in framing the RUGA programme. It reveals a total of 30 (27.03%) positive reports, 54 (48.65%) negative reports and 27 (24.32%) neutral reports. This means the newspapers framed the RUGA programme in more negative tones than positive tones. From the table above, the distribution also shows that the two Northern newspapers (Daily Trust and Leadership) cumulatively gave a more positive framing as compared to the two Southern newspapers (Punch and Guardian) which gave a more negative framing. This therefore can be interpreted that the two northern newspapers Daily Trust and Leadership, though with cumulatively lower coverage have somewhat higher positive reports on the RUGA programme than their southern counterparts (Punch and Guardian) who with high frequency of reports also have higher negative reports. However, it is also clear that negative tone has the highest frequency among the distribution. Therefore, negative tone is the most dominant tone of framing the RUGA Programme by the selected newspapers.

Tone	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Guardian	Total
Positive	8 (26.67%)	8 (26.67%)	7 (23.33%)	7 (23.33%)	30 (27.03%)
Negative	7 (12.96%)	7 (12.96%)	14 (25.93%)	26 (48.15%)	54 (48.65%)
Neutral	4 (29.63%)	7 (25.93%)	3 (11.11%)	13 (48.15%)	27 (24.32%)
Total	19 (17.12%)	22 (19.82%)	24 (21.62%)	46 (41.44%)	111 (100%)

Source: Field Research (2021)

These findings show that newspapers reportage are a reflection of societal concerns. By negative framing, it means that the RUGA programme recorded rejection by majority of Nigerians, hence the subsequent suspension of the programme by the federal government. This submission agrees with position of Adeyanju (2017), that the mass media serve as the veritable channels by which citizens receive and process messages or information to guide them in deciding their position on political and policy issues. And when placed within the framing literature which emphasised selection and salience (Entman, 1993) as factors that impact on perception, organisation, interpretation and consequence, then audience may draw inferences from these frames in evaluating the RUGA programme as frames affects learning, interpretation and evaluation of issues and events which consequently affects individual attitudes, societal decision making and collective action (De Vreese, 2005). Judging from the resultant reactions, actions and counter actions taken by the citizens and government, leading to the suspension of the programme, one can say that the resultant consequences of negative framing of the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers may have been the reason.

This Table 3 reveals the categories of framing the RUGA programme in the four selected newspapers. The data from the findings showed that the selected newspapers framed politics as the category with the highest frequency with a total of 53 appearance equivalent to 47.75% of the reports. This is followed by Ethnicity and Solution with each having 20 (18.02%) counts respectively. The data on the table also indicates that a northern newspaper, Leadership focused more on political frame much the same way as The Punch and The Guardian newspapers which are also tilted more on the political frame in their reports. However, Daily Trust newspapers has "solution" as its highest framing category.

This signifies that majority of the newspapers reports lay more emphasis on the political frames of the RUGA programme. This may account for the reason why the programme was accepted in some states and also rejected by others along regional and ethnic divides in Nigeria. It is in this line that Kamoru and Sirajudeen

Framing Category	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Guardian	Total
Ethnicity	0	0	3 (15%)	17 (85%)	20 (18.02%)
Culture	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1 (0.90%)
Politics	5 (9.43%)	19 (35.85%)	11 (20.75%)	18 (33.96%)	53 (47.75%)
Economy	2 (22.22%)	0	1 (11.11)	6 (66.66%)	9 (8.11%)
Environment	0	0	1 (100%)	0	1 (0.90%)
Conflict	2 (66.66%)	0	1 (33.33)	0	3 (2.70%)
Religion	0	0	0	0	0
Entertainment	2 (66.66%)	0	0	1 (33.33%)	3 (2.70%)
Solution	7 (35%)	3(15%)	7 (35%)	3 (15%)	20 (18.02%)
Security	0	0	0	1 (100%)	1 (0.90%)
Total	19 (17.12%)	22 (19.82%)	24 (21.62%)	46 (41.44%)	111 (100%)

Source: Field Research (2021)

(2016) opined that the newspapers are not necessarily interested in reporting the truth as it is, the events as they occurred, but to reconstruct and reaffirm their ethnic and cultural positions and identities.

Table 4 above shows the types of frames used in reporting the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers within the period under study. From a total of 111 reports by the selected newspapers, there are 22 thematic frames while 89 are Episodic frames. This means that the episodic frames have higher frequency in the reports by the newspapers on the RUGA programme than thematic frames. It also means that episodic frames are the dominant frames used by the newspapers on RUGA programme which goes to show that majority of the reports did not provide background or context to the issues being framed on RUGA programme by the selected newspapers.

This trend in framing may have led the audience towards rejecting the RUGA programme as frames didn't provide the necessary background and context to issues. This agrees with the argument of McComb and Ghanem (2003) that media frames are important, as research has shown that differences in how media represent or frame events have consequences on the reasoning and beliefs of media consumers regarding events.

Frame	Daily Trust	Leadership	Punch	Guardian	Total
Thematic	5 (22.73%)	4 (18.18%)	4 (18.18%)	9 (40.91%)	22 (19.82%)
Episodic	14 (15.73%)	18 (20.22%)	20 (22.47%)	37 (41.57%)	89 (80.18%)
Total	19 (17.12%)	22 (19.82%)	24 (21.62%)	46 (41.44%)	111 (100%)

Source: Field Research (2021)

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research highlights the antecedences that propelled government on the need for economic diversification and by extension, a need for modern agricultural innovation to boost productivity and address farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. This provided the basis for introducing the RUGA programme which the government launched on the 10th of May 2019 but suspended on the 4th of July 2019 amidst public outcry, protests and rejection of the programme. The research projected the responsibilities of the media in promoting development and public mobilization for achieving national goals and examined how four selected newspapers (Daily Trust, Leadership, The Guardian and Punch) framed the RUGA programme in their various reports.

From the findings of this research, this study concludes that despite the hurricane of controversies surrounding the announcement and suspension of the RUGA programme, the selected newspapers, especially the ones located in the North, gave a very low coverage of the RUGA programme compared to their southern newspapers especially in the news and editorial contents. However, the selected northern newspapers gave more positive framing of the RUGA programme than southern newspapers whose tone are mostly negative. But overall, it is also the conclusion of this research that framing of the RUGA programme by the four selected newspapers' reflected negative disposition towards the RUGA programme through framing. In addition, this research also concludes that majority of the newspapers reports emphasized the political angle of the RUGA programme under episodic frames more than other framing categories; which did not provide the necessary background information or context in the reportage and framing of the RUGA programme.

Based on the above conclusions, this research recommends that the selected newspapers should step up their coverage by increasing their attention on issues of national importance and eschew regional sentiments in presenting government developmental programmes. It is also the recommendation of this research that newspapers should endeavor to emphasize the benefits of government programmes and policies to encourage mass mobilization towards acceptance as against fanning the embers of national discord and unnecessary suspicion. There is also the need for government to constantly evaluate its programmes and policies and learn a very important lesson from the negative framing of the RUGA programme by the selected newspapers to fashion out better ways to introduce future programmes and policies for national development. The findings of this research revealed high usage of episodic frames, this study therefore recommends that there is the need for newspapers to use more thematic frames especially in news and editorial contents to give the audience the much needed background and context to important national issues of public interest like RUGA programme. This will go a long way to de-emphasize the ethno-religious sentiments attached to important national discourses.

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