

**NIGERIAN PRESS UNDER POLITICAL SIEGE:
SOCIAL MEDIA SALVAGE OF PRESS FREEDOM IN FANI-KAYODE VERSUS
CHARLES OF DAILY TRUST**

Lateef A. ADELAKUN,

National Open University of Nigeria,

ladelakun@noun.edu.ng

Simbiat A. ADEMUYIWA,

National Open University of Nigeria,

sademuyiwa@noun.edu.ng

&

Musibau O. OYEBODE,

National Open University of Nigeria,

ooyebode@noun.edu.ng

Abstract

Fani-Kayode versus Eyo Charles of Daily Trust saga compels research attention as it exhumed a new perspective to press struggle under political bondage in Nigeria. Nigerian journalists have been thrown into the towel on several occasions in the struggle to uphold press freedom as some were brutalised, molested, suppressed, bribed, or even intimidated with impunity while carrying out their democratic roles. The agitation not only for press freedom, the degree of independence that put the fourth estate of the realm on uninfluenced reportorial vantage but also a clear separation of media agenda power from politics of bankrolling beeps a light of redemption through social media rendition. Contents of mainstream and social media (Facebook, Twitter & YouTube) in the case of Fani-Kayode versus Charles were subjected to empirical analysis to test media efforts towards self-actualisation from political insubordinations. The data show that social media reign a significant influence on the salvage of press freedom taking “Who bankrolls your tour of states” tussle as a significant variable to compare the agenda and framing patterns the case under study enjoyed on social and mainstream media. The study found out that the media agenda might that recouped the press freedom from political intimidation and disparagement in the case under study was more than 90% social media strength. The mainstream media and their journalists got the inspiration for their belated actions from the battle already won through the social media agenda.

Keywords: Bankrolling, Press Freedom, Mainstream Media, Social Media, Media Agenda.

1. Introduction

The concept of press freedom is a global phenomenon emanating from agitation for the independence of the press from any form of influence, oppression, attack, intimidation, molestation, blackmail, and blockage from accessing or sharing information. It is glaring that the press cannot enjoy absolute autonomy as its democratic roles are part of social system which are naturally regulated by norms, practices, technologies, and institutional structures (Ananny, 2014; Layefa & Johnson, 2016). Media independence, Press autonomy, and Press freedom are related concepts that are used to understand the level or degree of relief that the media enjoy while carrying out its routine roles without any fear of influence from outside-in or inside-out (Apuke, 2016). As media system varies from one society to another, so also the level of freedom that the press enjoys varies. Therefore, since the media is a reflection of the society it serves, press freedom is relative. The uncertainty about the standard measure of the degree of freedom that is considered adequate for the press to operate across different societies leads to different approaches and methods of agitation for the autonomy from one country to the other (Becker, Vlad, & Nusser, 2007). Only on comparative analysis, using some specific parameters that the media of a country can be said to be freer than the other. This could be seen in some empirical submissions that the Nigerian press is comparatively the freest in Africa (Ekanem, 2008(Akinwale, 2010; Sadrettin, Bayram, & Emeagwali, 2016; Sani, 2014)). Yet, a comparative analysis of the press freedom under various administrations within the same country testifies to geographical boundaries as not only the factor that determines the variations in the degree of freedom the press enjoy but also the holistic social system that customises the media roles.

Press freedom has no clear cut-edge structure upon which a general approach could be applicable to ensure a global practice of journalism under similar degree of freedom (Apuke, 2016). The roles of the press may be universally similar but the socio-political environment dictates how such roles are justified and equably carried out. The social structure factor also determines how the media sees itself and how it mirrors the society it serves. Press freedom builds and renews the confidence of the journalists to be accountable to truth and balanced information while surveying the society to ensure an informed and just society. The surveillance role of the press to investigate and uncover all the concealed information and the governments, institutions and individuals' interests in protecting some information for self-preservation are always at loggers-head. As governments hide under the law of Official Secrets

Act and other ‘obnoxious’ enactments to ensure safety from being exposed to the public by the media, institutions and individuals find relief often in law of privacy and sedition (Oduah, 2015). Finding it difficult to convincingly prove the superiority of these laws over the right to information and communication, (for example Freedom of Information Act, 2011 in Nigeria) under democracy forces government officials, institutions and individuals to mount attacks on men of the press and their gadgets. The attacks on the journalists are sometimes out of ‘provocative’ questions that may expose various shortcomings and vices to the public glare and most often it is an escapist’s tactic by the embattled to get off the hook of the journalists.

Studies have documented numerous attacks on the press with impunity especially when such attacks have political, religious or ethnic undertone (Hajara, Sanda, & Msughter, 2018, pp. 9-10; Nwanne, 2014, pp. 15-16). However, the press itself is polarised on these tenets and most often made to perceive some of the attacks as against the individual journalists involved and not a violation of press freedom (Dare, 1996; Kilman, 2017). The fear of not getting support from within the media industry has forced some journalists who are unjustly dealt with by the power-that-be to resign to fate while truth remains the first victim of such unceremonious media fallouts. The argument of Oso (2012, p. 19) that in lieu of market survival strategy as well as business and investment protection being sought from political elites and giant capitalists, press freedom has been unconsciously traded off. This confirms sabotage within the media industry. With all the vocal strength of the press, assuring justice for the oppressed journalists and salvaging the press freedom from political misdemeanour could be a free ride if the press vocal strength speaks in chorus. This study therefore assessed the media reprisal to Fani-Kayode’s oppression on Daily Trust reporter during a ‘staged’ press conference. The objective is to juxtapose the contributions of the conventional media with those of social media counterparts in the struggle that salvage Charles of Daily Trust from losing his right to information and professional dignity. It is also part of the focus to understand the dichotomy between the agitation for press freedom and the press readiness to protect such.

2. Press Freedom in Nigeria and Social Media

2.1. Press Freedom in Nigeria: A Continuous Struggle

Nigerian press has passed through different measures and experiences. Each political administration right from colonial era through military reign to the present democratic system has contributed to what makes Nigeria press today. Political structure of a country has been

identified as the most prevailing factor that determines the level of freedom the media enjoys in a country (Olayiwola, 1991). All other influencing factors are subset of the political institution. The media system that is practiced in a country is what the political system in the country allows. Studies have confirmed the sorry state of the media under different military administrations in many African countries. Obnoxious decrees were enacted by Nigerian Military administrations between 1983 and 1999 to cage the right of the press to information sourcing and communication of ideas, opinions, and issues as enunciated in Apuke (2016, p. 32). The state of the press under military dictators in Africa is similar to those of communist states where media is relegated to a public relation arm of the government. Decree 4 of 1984 under Buhari/Idiagbon regime as an example choked the press. The watch-dog role of the mass media as a check and balance on the excesses of the governments and other institutions remains the first victim in the struggle for the media unhindered right to information and communication.

Nigerian press under military regime has not much difference from the experience under colonial era. All evidences from various records pointed to a caged media system through draconian enactments and decrees. The enactments repressed the press struggle for independence of the country during colonial era (Mordi, 2017). Similarly, the decrees repressed the struggle to uphold fundamental human rights and the movement to restore democracy during military interregnums. These did not create a free atmosphere for the press to act as societal surveillance, government watchdog, and power house for analytical information and interpretation of public opinions for global assessment and attention. The crumps of the draconian enactments as well as decrees during colonial era and military juntas could still be found in the Nigerian constitutions (Okoro, 2004). The transition into democracy could have ensured media independence that catapults the press to a true fourth estate of the realm if politicians had not changed the media to a component of political conglomerate.

The ownership structure of the newspaper media in the democratic dispensation has added to the debacles of the press struggle for autonomy to present the truth without fear of consequences. The ownership nomenclature of the press at the inception was purely private and for religious purposes. As the media started compelling attention, influence and unite public minds towards common aspiration and public good, nationalists saw the opportunity in information power of the press to sensitise Nigerian on self-rule and as a result many became journalists and newspaper publishers and judiciously used the avenue to expose unpopular

colonial policies on newspaper pages (Adelakun, 2018a). Press use for nationalism struggle was later transformed to political interest where newspapers served as the information outlets of the political parties in the regional councils when colonial administrations introduced electoral principles in 1922.

The marriage of the press and politics turn the press to battle grounds for political struggle and supremacy as the political leaders played dual roles as newspaper publishers. Just before independence, the media had been polarised to serve the political interests of the major regional parties that contested political offices at the regional and central levels (Pate & Idris, 2017). Ownership of newspapers became a competition among the politicians to project different political philosophies. The newspapers at the time engaged in political wars and ethnic rivalries with one another. *Daily Service* tolled a competitive lane with *West-African Pilot* in a struggle to project the image of Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) against the brake-away version of the party, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC). As the political strength of NYM blinked deem, Western region used *Nigerian Tribune* (1949) as political megaphone. *Daily Service* (1949), *Irohin Yoruba* (1958), *Eastern Observer* (1958), *Middle Belt Herald* (1958), *Northern Star* (1958), *Bornu People's Voice* (1958) and *Mid-west Echo* (1958) among others were also used to project the political aspirations and principles of the Action Group (AG) and the party aspirants across the country. *West-African Pilot*, *Eastern Nigerian Guardian*, *The Nigerian Spokesman*, *The Southern Nigeria Defender*, and *The Daily Comet* among other Zik's chain of newspapers were patriotic to National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) and the party aspirants across the country (Oso, 2012). During all these periods, the press was caged under the political ideologies of the parties while journalists were on politicians' pay-rolls as staffs of party press and as political cronies. Working as a journalist was with the condition that one must substitute ethical principles of the profession with the political ideologies advertised by the newspaper proprietors.

Long years of military rule ended a lot of party-press but came with stiffer measure on journalists (Layefa & Johnson, 2016). The press was considered as a strong opposition which should be dealt with in similar proportion as coup plotters or those guilty of treason and felony. The principle of truth and objectivity lost its fundamental consideration in the media parlance in fear of illegal detention, proscription, assault, and indiscriminate killing of the press men. The statement credited to Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, "There is freedom of speech but I cannot guarantee freedom after speech" adequately depict the danger in journalism practice during the

regimes of military dictators. Despite the intimidation and killing of journalists by various military administrations in Nigeria, the struggle for press freedom and survival was reinforced with hit-and-run strategy. Journalists were always on the run whenever press principles rather than economic predicament were given hope to dictate news directions and contents. The struggle eventually merited a partial return to civil rule in 1979 and 1992 and full democratic dispensation in 1999.

Since democracy does neither limit the freedom to own and operate mass media to professionals on the field nor block out politicians and party affiliations from party-press, press freedom enliven the chance of politicians to affiliate mass media to their political struggles. Politicians find it highly expensive and unattainable to buy out all journalists during unfavourable media coverage; they result to establishing mass media and depend on the journalists, who are on their pay-rolls to leverage the effect of the negative coverage. Most of their press conferences are stage-managed to limit the extent of investigative function of the media towards uncovering their vices. The option of direct attack, intimidation as well as death or financial threat are used on the journalists to save the occasion when the story is likely to strip them off the acclaimed dignities. Even in the US, which is considered the hub of democracy, Trump acted unjustly on the journalists to discredit them and the profession before the reasonable people in the state (Kenny, 2020). This impediment to press freedom has been a very difficult war to fight as the fear of losing job, the threat to lives, and the fear of industrial and peers denial kill professionalism in journalism and encourages humiliation of the press with impunity (Harrison & Pukallus, 2018; Kilman, 2017).

Mass media have won several wars for public good and social justice by revealing the concealed, sensitise the people, mobilise for common aspirations and set agenda for public discusses. A return to democracy has removed forceful and oppressive government actions towards the media. Illegal arrest and detentions of the press men, unlawful proscription of their publications, illicit closure of media stations, and other predatory actions on media professionals and profession could not be used to control the media in the democratic dispensation as such would be challenged in the courts of law. In a bid to still suppress the press activities, government officials, private institutions and individuals with vested interests in the media outputs have resulted to other means among which are intimidation and financial threat.

The so-called internal regulation or self-regulation of the press activities cannot be another option of what the external forces compel. If such is the case, some standards set for the media operation in some media ecosystem and self-regulation or internal regulations are also an impediment to press freedom. The concept therefore can only be discussed with reference to the social structures that shape the ethics of media practice. Empirical evidences only examined and emphasised on the major factors that glaringly influence press independence while silencing on numerous others. Many regulating bodies or institutions in the media industry enslave the partakers rather than empowering them to protect truth and objective information through investigative journalism. No regulating body has ever addressed the remuneration of the journalists that lure them to sycophancy, brown envelop syndrome as well as other unethical practices in the industry. With this insincerity pervading the industry, journalists' interests are sunken by the influenced ownership or editorial philosophies of the media houses. Since the voice of the journalists is the voice of the press and the voice of journalists is impoverished and shattered along political/economical degradation, press autonomy remains unending battle.

2.2. Social media influence on Press Freedom struggle: Agenda and Framing focus

The extent of mainstream media is apprehensively discussed in some media effect theories and hypotheses. While the argument on absolute media effect or influence could not be empirically substantiated, the immeasurable degree of influence that the media assert does not only leave the argument open but also accommodates further theoretical and hypothesised studies on the media effect dialogues (Wasike, 2013). Innovation of the social media into the media effect trends compounds the discussions as some theoretical submissions are rewritten while some models and hypotheses are debunked and uprooted with superior empirical justifications (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Issues about social media influence also stimulate media agenda theoretical modification and add fresh angles to the understanding of framing patterns. Social media do not displace the mainstream media but rather play complementary roles as against some speculations (Mustapha & Wok, 2015). Being regarded as a 'promised speedier alternative' (Chan, Nickson, Rudolph, Lee, & Joynt, 2020, p. 1), social media have been rated higher in relation to quick response to issues that require urgent treatment than the mainstream media. The new media are also credited for giving voice to the voiceless and ensuring active audiences that contribute to what they consume to make ways for two-way communication model.

The fear that social media may displace the mainstream media and strip media industry of professionalism partly influences the struggle for press freedom. Self-generated contents online and on social media fade out information monopoly and leverage the agenda might of the mainstream media (Adelakun, 2018b). The online information trends forced many journalists to be digital compliance and digress to online media to recoup and strengthen their agenda role. As much as social media profit political movement with projection of their image, policies and identities, it also eases journalistic tasks of investigative and fact-finding process into political activities. Much of the media influences are what the social media build agenda on and forced people to think about in the direction that is favourable to the party supported. #EndSARS protest was a product of such social media unification of like-minds and an avenue for championing public opinions towards a common aspiration of the youths. The agenda was quickly formed and transformed into impactful pressure group on social media towards the actualisation of the youth aspirations. Social media functions towards influencing policies has been documented across areas and angles of human relations hence, the reason for engaging the media

2.3. Fani-Kayode versus Eyo Charles of *Daily Trust*: A show-down

Prior to Fani-Kayode versus Eyo Charles saga, there were a number of similar or graver cases where politicians oppressed media men with little or no effort towards seeking redress within the media industry regulatory bodies, tribunals or courts of law. Since 2011 till 2015, the rate of assaults on the media was inestimable with the highest proportion of it coming from politicians, political office holders and the police. A substantial number of such could be linked to contempt of court. Documented cases of assaults on Nigerian journalists based on newspaper reports were more than 60 in 2019 and the figure a bit higher between January and October 2020. For example, in May 2020, about four months before Charles' case, Fani-Kayode addressed UK journalist, Femi Okutubo as 'stupid surface'. These trends of disparagement of Nigeria journalists with impunity pervaded the country until Thursday, August 20, 2020, when the former Minister of Aviation, Femi Fani-Kayode invited men of the press from a number of media houses to a press briefing in Calabar, the capital city of Cross River State in Nigeria through Alhaji Rasheed Olanrewaju of the African Independent Television (AIT).

Based on the full video of the press briefing, the essence of the briefing was to relay report about his extensive guided tour of Governor Ayade's projects mostly in the southern part of the state. Media personnel present at the briefing were: the government house press crew

including Channels Television, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), state-owned Cross River Broadcasting Corporation, AIT led by Christian Ita, the Chief Press Secretary, Imani Odey (Special Adviser to Governor Ayade on Electronic Media) and Rasheed Olanrewaju, correspondent of AIT (Chairman of Government House Press Crew). Other journalists from some national newspapers present included Gill Nsa-Abasi of *The Nation*, Aniekan Aniekan of *Oracle Today*, David Odey of *The Punch*, Richard Ndoma of the *Leadership*, George Odok of News Agency of Nigeria, Ikechukwu Uche of *Vanguard* and Eyo Charles of *Daily Trust Newspaper*. What seemed controversial in the press briefing was on what capacity did the former minister call for such press briefing and for which purpose for the press men to honour the briefing.

After over one hour of discussion with the media men, opportunities were given to the journalists present to ask questions initially within the context of the briefing which purely was extolling the personality and the administration of Governor Ayade. Fani-Kayode later allowed the journalists to ask questions in any area of their choices as the former minister was not afraid to respond to any question. Not less than four questions within and outside the context of the briefing had been asked and responded to before Eyo Charles of *Daily Trust* newspaper was recognised to ask his questions. Gill Nsa of the Nation, for instance, asked whether Fani-Kayode national tour had any political undertone such as having presidential ambition. A reporter from the state owned TV asked whether some of the 33 projects he said Ayade has embarked upon such as the 278km superhighway from Bakassi to the border of Benue State as well as the Deep sea port were not, in fact, White Elephant projects. Fani-Kayode disagreed strongly and said what Ayade needs is for the Federal Government to take over the projects and that Nigerians would see that the superhighway for instance will boost trade and ensure an integrated Nigerian.

The question asked by Eyo Charles that provoked the ex-minister to disparage the journalist and made heavy threat on his life and security of his job was simply “Sir, please you did not disclose to us who is bankrolling your tour of states....”. The question according to Eyo Charles stemmed from the fact that Fani-Kayode is not holding any public office either at the state or national level, but had of recent embarked on “official visits” to states to assess the performance of governors. This question prodded the ex-minister to shock the attendees and members of the public who were expecting a soft response to the question with a serious attack not only on the personality of the journalist but also on the profession. He Said:

“How dare you ask me such a very stupid question?” I know that you, a hungry-looking, brown envelop journalist, you are sponsored to ask me such insulting question. You can look into my eyes and ask me such demeaning question! I cannot take that! “I am a very rich lawyer, who has been in government; who has been detained many times by governments. I have a very rich background. How can you ask who is bankrolling my tours of the states. It is very insulting, and I cannot take that. You are very stupid. Don’t ever try that with me. I have a short fuse, I will hit you hard. I know your publishers; I will call them in next few minutes. You have to be fired. I cannot answer any more questions from you or from any other reporter. This conference has ended. I have very short temper.....”,

3. Research Methodology

Discussing agenda structure of issues in the media requires a thorough examination and assessment of the media contents. Analysis of the mainstream media contents has been the major focus of the large sum of previous studies on media messages. The argument that the social media contents do not oblige to content analyses procedure due to the credibility challenge as a result of faceless sources as well as impermanence structure of the content has been debunked (Feezell, 2018; Grzywinska & Borden, 2012; Mustapha & Wok, 2015). Since this study intended to compare the agenda setting structure of the mainstream and social media concerning salvaging the press freedom in the case under review, content analysis research design was employed. The contents (reportage and responses to the assault on Charles) of three mainstream media (one newspaper, one radio station and one television station) and three social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) were empirically discussed alongside three major variables. The mainstream media were randomly selected among those in attendance at the briefing where the issue originated while the social media were purposively selected based on their degree of popularity and use in Nigeria. The contents were limited to the period within which the issue enjoyed media attention and coverage climax (between August 20 and August 30, 2020). The three major variables subjected to empirical discussion were: a) The frequency of the issue in both mainstream and social media; b) The period of the post within the three quadrants of the duration under study to compare how early either of the media types responded to the issue; and c) Central focus of the media contents and the directions of the media messages concerning the issue.

A Pilot test was conducted with five per cent of the sampled texts data from all categories of the media selected to confirm the degree of agreement among the coders and to relate the relationship between the variables and what they were meant to measure. Employing Scott’s pi inter-coder reliability on the three major variables emanating from the media contents gives

0.91 mean reliability coefficient within the range of 0.84 to 0.97 inter-coder reliability, which is within the recommended range of inter-coder reliability coefficient value for the liberal index employed (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The data generated from all categories of media were subjected to triangulation analysis approach. Frequency of the media contents on the case under study were subjected to quantitative content analysis using distribution tables and line graphs where appropriate while the direction of the contents were subjected to qualitative discussion to establish the relationships among the variables as well as framing patterns employed.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The quantitative analysis of the data generated present the relationship in the degree of attention that each selected media outlet gave to the issue as presented in the tables and line graphs below. The qualitative aspect discusses the framing perspective as well as patterns used by the media to make their news angle salient.

Table 1: Distribution of the Media Coverage of Issues around Femi Fani-Kayode Press Briefing on Governor Ayade's Developmental Project

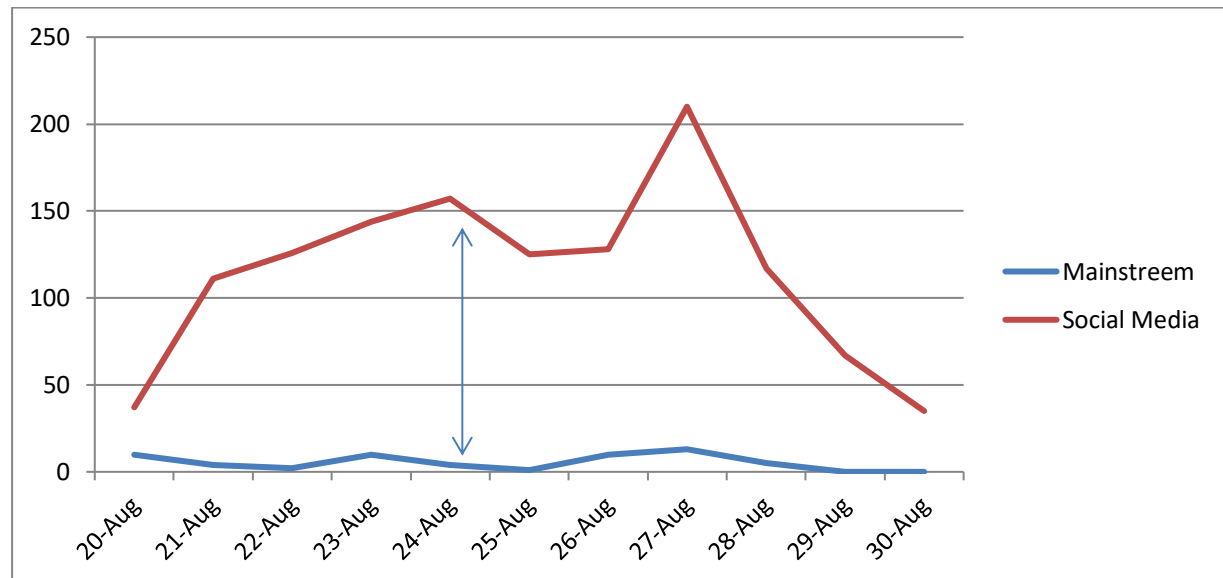
Frequency of media coverage relating to the press briefing						
Date of Coverage	Channel TV	CRBC	Vanguard Newspaper	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
20-Aug	3	3	1	24	11	2
21-Aug	6	1	0	87	19	5
22-Aug	2	0	0	108	11	7
23-Aug	7	2	1	118	13	13
24-Aug	4	0	0	133	15	9
25-Aug	1	0	0	96	18	11
26-Aug	5	2	3	101	16	11
27-Aug	6	2	5	168	33	9
28-Aug	2	0	3	103	11	3
29-Aug	0	0	0	63	4	0
30-Aug	0	0	0	34	1	0
Total	36	10	13	1035	152	70

Source: Contents from the selected media stations/platforms

The structure of the media coverage of the issues weaved around the press briefing held in Calabar, the state capital of Cross River in Nigeria as in the table above reflects not only the influences behind media news focus but also the activeness of the media audience. The distributions under the broadcast media include news item (either fresh news angles or repeated news items) as well as other public affairs programmes on the subject matter. All newspaper items including straight news, feature articles, editorial, letter to the editor, opinion articles, cartoons or comics and any other item on the subject matter were considered as part of the newspaper coverage of the issue. Only the social media posts/twits (excluding accompanied comments) were considered as part of the coverage for each of the social media platform sampled. About three percent of the total coverage of the issue could be credited to Channel Television while less than one percent is attributable to Cross River Broadcasting Corporation. Vanguard newspaper could only account for approximately one percent of the total coverage of the sampled media outfits. The three mainstream media sampled could only account for less than five percent of the total media coverage of the sampled media. Facebook has the highest ratio of the coverage within social media category (82%) as well as among the general sampled media (77%). Twitter could account for about 12 percent of the total coverage of the sampled media while YouTube posts was a bit higher than five percent of the total coverage on the issue.

Despite that the accompanied comments on social media posts and twits were not considered as essential part of the media coverage for the social media category, the margin between social media and mainstream media coverage of the issues around the controversial Fani-Kayode's press briefing in Calabar is exceptionally wide (5 percent to 95 percent). The argument that most of the social media contents on the issue are self-generated and self-published may not be a tenable excuse to debunk the social media attention to the issue. The mainstream media, particularly newspaper could allow similar opportunity by prioritising opinion articles, editorials, feature articles, and cartoons or comics on the issue over other competing news items. The competition for the limited space and airtime in the mainstream media between the issue in focus and other pressing issues to substantiate the excuse could be a subject of further studies.

Figure 1: The Relationship Between Social and Mainstream Media Coverage of Fani-Kayode's Press Briefing in Calabar



The analysis of the media contents on the issue under focus shows that about three out every five (60%) of the mainstream media contents focuses on the primary objective for staging the press briefing while the remaining part focuses on the emerging trends from the press briefing particularly Fani-Kayode's brutality on Eyo Charles of Daily Trust newspaper. The analysis further buttresses that a significant percent of the mainstream media contents in the early part of the case (the first three days after the press briefing) documents the highest proportion of news angles from Ayade's project perspective, which was the central focus of the briefing. Subsequent mainstream media contents after the early period of the event picked news angles from the emerging issue from the briefing. This shows that the agenda of the mainstream media shifted from Ayade's project news angle to the brutality on Eyo Charles at a later period when agenda had already been built on the brutality against the journalist by the social media.

Table 2: Promptness of Media Coverage of the Attack on Eyo Charles of Daily Trust

	Mainstream Media Contents		Social Media Contents	
Coverage Period	Ayade's Project	Brutality on Eyo Charles	Ayade's Project	Brutality on Eyo Charles
Early stage	6	10	4	270
Middle Stage	5	20	0	554
Last stage	0	18	0	429

Source: Contents from the selected media stations/platforms

The news angle and media agenda focus of the social media were rapt on the brutality on Eyo Charles at all stages of the issue as in Table 2. The social media emphasis on the subject matter made it popular and weaved public agenda around it. New trends emerged from the issue and these constituted fresh new angles for the mainstream media. Among the trends that made the issue more popular and upon which the media frame their contents were: the requests made to Femi Fani-Kayode to apologise publicly to Eyo Charles; court case treat by Femi Fani-Kayode on character assassination against some media houses: apology from Femi Fani-Kayode to Eyo Charles in particular and professional journalists in general; and warning to all politicians, individuals, and institutions who disparage journalists or block them from carrying out their professional obligations.

Framing Pattern and Perspective

About ninety-eight percent of the social media contents were framed in favour of Eyo Charles of *Daily Trust Newspaper* and the media profession. The social media posts and twits addressed the issues around the dignity of the media profession; protection of truth and objectivity in the profession; protection of life, gadgets and property of journalists; Rebuke political excesses and violation of fundamental human rights; adequate support for the journalists within the industry, freedom of information, access to information and freedom to share information. Sample of the social media contents are:

In a post on his Facebook page, Asaju said:

I am disturbed and totally angry that a rabble-rouser, a lickspittle, an abysmally corrupt, inept and uncouth Femi Fani-Kayode would insult a journalist the way he just did and get away with it

But above all, I am totally disturbed, that colleagues who were present did not see this as an assault on their profession, on their own integrity and on their noble profession – they were nodding heads and apologising like agama lizards that they all are. “I am disturbed that a TV station even uploaded it with a caption that FFK reacts to a rude journalist! I am shocked that this is happening in 2020. I mean, Donald Trump has done worse to journalists, but he has also received worse

Tunde Rahman’s view:

Now, my take on what happened! Our journalists don’t stand up for anything again, not even the ethics of their profession or their integrity if they have any. All the guys there should have risen in unison to condemn the bully. The reporter too allowed himself to be cowed to say sorry because he has not done any wrong. We should demand more from our reporters. But the journalism profession is endangered. The values are down. The journalists there must be blaming the Trust guy for spoiling their day because FFK may not drop again. We must all condemn FFK for his show of shame,

Farooq Kperogi account:

Rude question? Well, there’s no such thing as a “rude question” in journalism. A Chicago journalist and humorist by the name of Finley Peter Dunne once said, more than a century ago, that, “the job of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” In other words, journalists have no obligation to comfort the comfortable. Their duty is to afflict the comfortable or, if you like, to be “rude” to the comfortable.

Asking questions that get a politician’s dander up, that inflame a politician’s passions, is a prized skill in journalism. Here’s why: Politicians reveal the most headline-worthy information when reporters cause them to lose control of their emotions. Loss of emotional control forces them to depart from their scripted, predictable, choreographed, and often mendacious and boring performances.....

The contents of the sampled mainstream media were also favourable to fighting for the right of the journalist and the dignity of the profession but not in similar proportion to social media. The choices of words were not as blatant as social media contents and the frames were not given in-depth treatment and supporting evidences to emphasise their saliency. A typical sample of the contents was noticed in the Management of Media Trust; publishers of the Daily Trust which was released to describe the former minister’s response to its reporter as “reprehensible action” and called on the Nigeria Police Force to be on watch in the event

something bad happens to Mr Charles.

In the statement released on Tuesday 25, August 2020, Media Trust's Executive Director/Editor-in-Chief, Malam Naziru Mikailu, said:

We condemn the reprehensible actions of Femi Fani-Kayode, who in a video clip now gone viral, verbally assaulted – repeatedly – our reporter, Eyo Charles in the course of doing his job.

The video clip also released on one of the ex-ministers social media accounts was conveniently edited to exclude the question asked by Charles, totally devoid of mischief, simply sought clarification and information, like good journalism, should. Said editing paved the way for a social media lynch mob to rain expletives on our reporter, labelling him as 'rude'.

"This could not be further away from the truth, and we stand by Charles, and commend him for his calmness during the ordeal. Daily Trust reporters are responsible professionals, who uphold the tenets of journalism, as well as best practices.

Another similar sample of mainstream media framing of the issue was much captured in the September 3 edition of Vanguard under the headline "NUJ directs members to cease fire on Fani-Kayode". The treatment of the issue in the news story was subtle rather than how such was treated in the social media platforms. The newspaper reported:

The leadership of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) has directed its members across the country to cease all fireworks against the former Minister of Aviation, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode forthwith. The national secretary of the union, Mr Usman Leman in a memo sent to members of the National Executive Council (NEC) of the union, said the NUJ has accepted the apology of Fani-Kayode. (Vanguard September 3)

5. Conclusion

According to Malcolm Muggeridge (2003), "News is anything anybody wants to suppress; everything else is public relations." The struggle for press freedom is weakened within the industry as economic, ethnic, political and religious dichotomy persists. The professional journalists are turning to public relations practitioners. The evidence for this could be noticed in the reactions of other journalists present at the briefing. Apologising to Fani-Kayode suggested that the journalists were either unwary of their rights and their professional obligations or are incompetent or sycophantic. Whichever of these attributes displayed by the journalists decries the profession and pollutes the noble craft. The battle that the journalists refused to fight was taking to the social media for rendition. The social media, as portrayed in

the discussions of findings, built agenda on the issue, made the brutality against the journalist the most salient news angle, gave the voice back to the voiceless, and brought the erring politician to his knees (Ensured he apologised to the embittered journalist, the profession and the masses to serve as deterrent to others who disparage Nigerian journalists).

I'm deeply sorry for the manner I reacted to the said reporter. I was too hard on him. The question was mischievous, but I fell for it. I should have been smarter than that. I am using this opportunity to reach out to him, and I hope he will be kind enough to forgive me. I disappointed myself, my family and friends, my colleagues and even my bosses, those who hold me in high esteem. I have regrets, it was not my finest day. No leader or public figure should ever react like that. I disappointed myself. I deeply regret it and I believe it will never happen again. Femi Fani-Kayode (Vanguard, August 29, 2020).

One of the recommendations to ensure an enabling environment for media practitioners is to ensure cooperation, common aspiration and interest, within the industry in order not to fall prey to religious, ethnic, political, or economic dichotomy. This work would also adopt the submission of the Regional Director of Article-19 West Africa, Fatou Jagne Senghore as part of the recommendation that can salvage Nigerian journalists and the profession from brutality, molestation, intimidation, bribery or any other predatory act on them with impunity. The Regional Director said:

As we commemorate International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, I would like to urge the African Union and United Nations not to turn a blind eye to Nigeria. The climate in Nigeria is increasingly hostile for media and journalists that I am pleading with the international community to support Nigeria to end impunity, protect journalists and strengthen the legal framework governing the media. The complete impunity for crimes against journalists in Nigeria is suffocating the media. Without a free media, no country can realise the rights included in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals. Nigeria must act now.

REFERENCES

- Adelakun, L. A. (2018a). Online-Newspaper Reports of 2015 Nigerian Presidential Election: The Impact of Readers' Comments on Voters. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 26(2).
- Adelakun, L. A. (2018b). Trends in Using Social Media as Substitute for Class Interaction in Open & Distance Learning (Odl) Education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Pedagogy, Policy and ICT in Education*, 6(1), 33-42.
- Akinwale, A. A. (2010). Repression of press freedom in Nigerian democratic dispensations. *Africa Development*, 35(3), 47-70.
- Ananny, M. (2014). Networked press freedom and social media: Tracing historical and contemporary forces in press-public relations. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(4), 938-956.
- Apuke, O. D. (2016). Exploring the Factors Affecting Press Freedom in Nigeria. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 11(2), 32-34.
- Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., & Nusser, N. (2007). An evaluation of press freedom indicators. *International Communication Gazette*, 69(1), 5-28.
- Chaffee, S. H., & Metzger, M. J. (2001). The end of mass communication? *Mass communication & society*, 4(4), 365-379.
- Chan, A., Nickson, C., Rudolph, J., Lee, A., & Joynt, G. (2020). Social media for rapid knowledge dissemination: early experience from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Anaesthesia*.
- Dare, O. (1996). Nigeria: The polarized press. *Nieman Reports*, 50(1), 50.
- Ekanem, I. (2008). Press freedom: A catalyst for the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 66-74.
- Feezell, J. T. (2018). Agenda setting through social media: The importance of incidental news exposure and social filtering in the digital era. *Political Research Quarterly*, 71(2), 482-494.

- Grzywinska, I., & Borden, J. (2012). The impact of social media on traditional media agenda setting theory. The case study of Occupy Wall Street Movement in USA. *Agenda setting: old and new problems in old and new media, Wroclaw*.
- Hajara, E. O., Sanda, U., & Msughter, A. E. (2018). Journalistic Practices on the Professional Safety among Journalists in Oyo State.
- Harrison, J., & Pukallus, S. (2018). The politics of impunity: A study of journalists' experiential accounts of impunity in Bulgaria, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Mexico and Pakistan. *Journalism*, 1464884918778248.
- Kenny, P. D. (2020). "The Enemy of the People": Populists and Press Freedom. *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(2), 261-275.
- Kilman, L. (2017). *An attack on one is an attack on all: Successful initiatives to protect journalists and combat impunity*: UNESCO Publishing.
- Layefa, G., & Johnson, W. A. (2016). The Quest for Press Freedom in Nigeria: Not a Forlorn Struggle. *Journal of Research and Development*, 187(3418), 1-13.
- Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human communication research*, 28(4), 587-604.
- Mordi, E. N. (2017). Imperial Britain and the challenge of press freedom in Nigeria during the Second World War. *Journal of Development and Communication Studies*, 5(1), 98-121.
- Muggeridge, M. (2003). *The Very Best of Malcolm Muggeridge*: Regent College Publishing.
- Mustapha, L. K., & Wok, S. (2015). Volatile but Cue-Laden: Measuring Agenda-Setting in the Online Newspaper Environment. *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies*, 17(1), 45-57.
- Nwanne, B. U. (2014). Another look at press freedom In Nigeria. *European Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 2(4).
- Oduah, F. M. (2015). Freedom of information act, Official Secret Act and press freedom in 21st Century Nigeria: How free is the press? *Communication Panorama African and Global Perspectives*, 1(1).

- Okoro, N. (2004). Constitutional limitation of press freedom in Nigeria: Cases, indices and implications. *University of Nigeria Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication Studies*, 1(1).
- Olayiwola, R. O. (1991). *Political communications: press and politics in Nigeria's Second Republic*: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London.
- Oso, L. (2012). Press and politics in Nigeria: On whose side. *The 47th Edition of the Inaugural Lecture Series of Lagos State University, Ojo*, 2-40.
- Pate, U. A., & Idris, H. (2017). How Journalists Survived to Report: Professionalism and risk management in the reporting of terror groups and violent extremism in North East Nigeria. In U. Carlsson & R. Pöyhtäri (Eds.), *The Assault on Journalism: Building knowledge to protect freedom of expression* (pp. 159). Sweden: Nordicom.
- Sadrettin, H., Bayram, P., & Emeagwali, L. (2016). Media Systems, Politics and Press Freedom: Perspectives on Contemporary Russia and Nigeria. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 6(3).
- Sani, A. A. (2014). Press Freedom: Analyzing the portrayal of Nigerian-State on National dailies cover-page headlines. *Journal of Yaşar University*, 9(35), 6255-6260.
- Wasike, B. S. (2013). Framing News in 140 Characters: How Social Media Editors Frame the News and Interact with Audiences via Twitter. *Global Media Journal: Canadian Edition*, 6(1).