

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECT NIGERIAN ONLINE NEWSPAPERS COVERAGE OF VOTER'S CARD COLLECTION

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Abstract

This study examined the narrative analysis of selected Nigerian online newspapers coverage of voter's card collection with focus on *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The researcher adopted narrative analysis research design to achieve the set objectives. The essence of using narrative research design analysis method is to analyse the manifest contents in summary form. A total number of six reports were narratively analysed. The study was underpinned by the tenets of the Social Responsibility Theory. The finding reveals that Nigerian online newspapers performed their social responsibility credibly well by keeping the citizens abreast with the processes of the collection of PVCs. The work also shows that the online newspapers (*DailyTrust & Vanguard*) succeeded in holding the electoral umpire accountable in line with their constitutionally assigned roles. The analysis further shows that the manifest contents of editorial, straight news and viewpoint are the instruments used to galvanise Nigerians to participate in the process of PVCs collection. The research indicates that the electoral umpire lacks capacity to seamlessly distribute the PVCs throughout the country. The finding shows that these inadequacies make politicians to subvert the process by buying voter's cards from the electorates. Also the investigation confirms that some INEC officials extorted money from the electorates during the process of PVCs collection. The finding further indicates that INEC decentralised the collections points to ward levels and assured Nigerians of their readiness to conduct free and fair elections despite security threats. This study concludes that *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* newspapers satisfactorily played their social responsibility roles to the Nigeria society. Finally, the study recommends that INEC should further devolve the collection points of the PVCs to polling units for easy access by the electorates.

Keywords: Coverage, Media, Newspapers, Nigeria, Permanent Voter's Cards, Independent National Electoral Commission

Introduction

The online newspapers are oxygen that ensure the sustenance of democracy worldwide through timely access to news. As such the newspapers play important roles in the society as part of their corporate social responsibility, most especially to ensure good governance and nation-building. In the words of Buami (2016) as cited in Agberu and Odebiyi (2021), the media is the fourth estate of the realm: a prominent watchdog on the government, safeguarding the transparent and credibility of the electoral process. It is truism that electioneering activities involve collection of permanent voter's card, campaigns, rallies, education, sensitisation as well as gathering of the prospective electorates. Most electorates never get chance to attend any of these events without the media coverage. Hence, voters rely on the

newspapers to get adequate and reliable information on these electioneering activities. It is a disservice to the voters and amounts to infringement of electorate's inalienable rights if the newspapers are not recongnised and not given unfettered access or freedom to inform, educate, enlighten and mobilise the voters by reporting the activities of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and campaigns activities of political parties.

Contributing, Kadiri, Muhammed, Raji and Sulaiman (2015) in Agberu and Odebiyi (2021), revealed that the mass media are considered the brain box of democracy. This is because they are the conduit pipes that supply vital political information that most members of the public who are electorates may base their

voting decisions on. This submission further shows that an individual or groups capacity to have informed and better opinions and take vital decisions on political matters to a large extent determine the quantity and quality of pieces of information that the person or persons has been exposed to through the newspapers coverage. Hence, Buami (2016) as quoted by Agberu et al (2021), opines that although there have been frequent concern about media neutrality, mostly during election periods, the newspapers have remained prevalent and reliable sources of information on politics in democratic societies.

The above submissions clearly show that in every democratic setting, electioneering activities and elections are the main legitimate ways of appointing some citizens to the positions of leadership. Hence, Adebumiti and Sambe (2021) submit that

More vigorous of the process is the presidential campaigns and elections as they determine who becomes the head of state and to whom the masses would entrust guardianship of their sovereignty. Thus, presidential campaigns across the globe attract the interest of newsmen or journalists and gain considerable focus of the newspapers. (p.1)

According to Agberu et al (2021), some authors have conducted studies on the Nigerian 2015 general elections. While Issa (2015) in Agberu et al (2021) assessed the role of media, Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017) in Agberu et al (2021), examined the use of hate speech. Aleyomi, Ajakaye, Otu and Oluwasegun (2018) in Agberu et al (2021), looked at how politically affiliated newspapers reported candidates from other political divides. Aririguzoh (2019) in Agberu et al (2021), study observed that two major political Parties-Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) and their presidential candidates' advertisements were not the whole truth; even though they vigorously used music to pass across their different messages aimed at catching and luring the voters to their sides.

Writing on how social media is changing political campaigns, James (n.d) confirmed that the internet is not going anywhere, and technology will only be further integrated into society:

Nearly two-thirds of US adults use social media, and for many, it is the first source for news and information gathering. Online ads not only put campaigns in a position of power by bolstering efforts, but also provide an easy way to communicate relevant news and messaging to an increasingly captive audience. A lack of an online presence can very well mean that a candidate or cause does not exist in the eyes of a voter. Social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street have grown exponentially by coordinating online activity with live demonstrations and rallies and ensuing media coverage. (n.p)

She further indicates that that social media platforms allow for voters to experience a deeper level of connectivity with a campaign, and every post, tweet, and policy stance is scrutinised by the world. The internet is the great equaliser; everyone has a soapbox and 39% of US adults engage in political activities via social networking sites. It takes a split second to become a trending topic, and all of the presidential candidates have trended on Twitter this election cycle over accusations of flip-flopping on issues. As a result, candidates may have to spend the following new cycle justifying their stance or retracting a statement for fear of losing votes.

In view of the above, James (n.d) concludes that:

The most convenient way for a voter to engage with a campaign is online. At the click of a button, one can donate money, complete a poll, RSVP for an event, or sign a petition to demonstrate their support. In September 2015, Twitter launched \$ Cashtag, an online platform that allows users to donate directly to political campaigns or causes via a Tweet. President Obama notably leveraged the power of online advertising by raising over \$504 million from digital efforts during his 2012 campaign. (n.p)

Today, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the World Wide Web and the internet have expanded the reach and access to newspaper editorials. Hence, Orosa, García, and Santorum (2013) maintain that the editorials also appear in the homepage of the online newspapers, and the online edition offers readers a couple of hyperlinks to documents that expand the editorial

information, read them on various social media platforms and share the editorial as well. The new media now according to Owens-Ibie (2014) reveals that the content of editorials can be everywhere simultaneously and readers also transcend geographical and political boundaries as newspapers now serve their communities and a wider constituency beyond the limits of areas of circulation/coverage. About 7.2 million Nigerians daily use the new media with 97% of them accessing the platform via mobile (Kazeem, 2016). By such adaptations, the expectation on newspaper editorials' influence on voter attitude is heightened as more voters would have more access to such editorials in print or online versions to access information of all kinds of electioneering activities like the collection of PVCs.

The International Press Centre (IPC) (n.d) study on Monitoring of Print & Online Newspapers' Reporting of the 2019 Electoral Process (*An analysis of trends in reportage of the 2019 electoral process by 12 print/online newspapers for June, July and August, 2018*), revealed that *Blue Print*, *The Cable* and the *Premium Times* were monitored as online newspapers. *Blueprint* published relevant 532 reports (5.12%); *Premium Times* published 525 relevant reports (5.05%), while *The Cable* published 425 (4.09%). The study of IPC (n.d) also indicates that there were series of complaints around the issue of under-age voting. Some of these complaints were found in reports published in *Blueprint*, captioned: *To release report on Kano underage voting*. *Premium Times* published: *Kano Underage voting: INEC to release full investigation report*. *The Cable* also published a story on the issue, captioned: *HELDA asks INEC to release report on underage voting in Kano*.

However, none of studies investigated the issue of collection of Permanent Voter's Card (PVCs) during the elections. Therefore, this study examined the coverage of Selected Nigerian Online Newspapers Coverage of Voter's Card Collection. Given the power of the newspapers to influence public opinions and thoughts, it is very critical to analyse how Nigerian online newspapers covered the distribution of PVCs across the country and to know whether such coverages were done within the social responsibility roles of the press as well as their constitutionally assigned role of holding

government accountable to the people in line with the freedom of expression.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to:

1. Analyse the manifest contents of online versions of *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* newspapers on their coverage of voter's card collection.
2. Ascertain whether the online versions of *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* newspapers perform their social responsibility role in their coverage of the voter's card collection.

Newspapers Coverage of Electoral Process

Writing on the successes of newspapers on educating voters during electioneering campaigns, Hollihan (2001) found that newspapers perform more successfully at informing voters than television news. For national political news coverage, the most thorough, comprehensive, and substantive information regarding political campaigns, political issues, and public policies are available to readers through the daily papers. This position by Hollihan (2001) points to the dominant thoughts that the electorate carry about during the elections as they are mostly influenced by the newspapers constant projection of what to think about concerning the electoral process. The submission by Hollihan (2001) is in line with the agenda setting theory which provides explanation to how the media can manipulate the behaviour of the people in the society. Hence, the success or failure of any electoral process largely depends on information in the newspapers. Suffice it to say that the Nigerian newspapers during the 2015 presidential election campaigns played immense roles in connecting the masses with the electioneering process and also serving as tools for political communication.

Amponsah (2012) as cited by Adebumiti et al (2021, p.2) in his study on "*The Daily Graphic* coverage of presidential campaigns in Ghana, 1992-2004," examined the nature of newspaper coverage of presidential election campaigns in Ghana. Using content analysis, the researcher studied 48 issues of *Daily Graphic* newspaper and revealed that advocacy is the most common topic of the campaign coverage. Also Adebumiti et al (2021.p.3) cited a study by Odubote (2014) with the title. "Impact of television broadcasting on electioneering

campaigns." He concluded that in the cause of upholding their responsibilities as responsible media, the newspapers in Nigeria have tried as much as possible to give equal chance to political parties most especially during elections. The study found that the private mass media both broadcast and print are better than the public owned media. Odubote (2014) in **Adebumiti et al (2021)** also noted that the press mobilises the electorate towards the 2011 elections in Nigeria at large.

During the 2015 presidential election campaign, the Press educated Nigerians on the need to get their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) which was to be used by voters during the election (Independent National Electoral Commission Press Release, 2014). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had vowed not to compromise on her stand that only voters with the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) would vote during the election. This also became evident since the electoral umpire used the card-reader machine which can only capture voters with the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). The Press as part of her social responsibility informed the electorate on the need to collect their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) in order to vote for the candidate of their choice. The role played by men and women of the fourth estate of the realm further endeared the people to the process thereby bridging the communication gap between them.

In the same vein, Nwammuo, Edegoh & Iwok (2015) as cited by (Adebumiti et al,2021) in their study on Nigerian press coverage of the 2015 elections discovered that

The Sun newspaper favoured the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which is the political party of the paper's financier - Orji Uzor Kalu. *The Nation*, on the other hand, favoured the All Progressives Congress (APC) which is the political party of its financier - Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The interests of their owners influenced the amount of coverage given to stories, the direction of the coverage, prominence given to the stories and the purpose of the stories. (p.3)

Theoretical Underpinning

This study adopted Social Responsibility Theory as propounded by Siebet, F.S., and Paterson, T., and Schramm, W.L. in 1956. The theory posits

that the press must be free and socially responsible to the society it operates. Odebiyi and Elegbe (2000) cited in Agberu et al (2021), say

The Social Responsibility Theory advocates that the media should be self regulating and pluralist by avoiding violence, respecting the rights of minority groups, allowing divergent views from the masses, and being accountable, not only to their employers and the market but also to society. (p.64)

This theory places responsibility on the press to ensure that the people are well informed of the events and happenings around them (Nwabueze, 2012 as cited in Uzochukwu, and Ikegbunam, 2022). The social responsibility originated from the inventive thinking and ideas of Political free thinkers, the proponents of libertarian ideas and those that introduced and nurtured a democratic leadership spirit like John Milton (1644) cited in (Clay, n.d, cited in Uzochukwu et al, 2022). Relying on the above fact, the social responsibility can be regarded as an evolution from the libertarian ideology (Nwabueze, 2014; Agbanu, 2013 cited by Uzochukwu et al, 2022).

For Owens-Ibe (1994) as quoted by Agberu et al (2021, p.64-65), the theory explains that the:

Media are responsible to their audiences, the government, proprietor and themselves. To their audience, they owe correct news reportage, analysis and editorialising. They owe constructive criticism to the government, a relay of popular opinion, and adequate populace feedback. They owe the media organisations, survival as business ventures, and veritable sources of education, enlightenment, and entertainment to their proprietors. To themselves, who they owe fulfilment in their calling, satisfaction and an entire success story. This that the media have obligations to different sections of society that must be fulfilled. (P.64-65)

For Middleton (2009) in Agberu et al (2021), the social responsibility demands that the journalists keep society's interest a top priority. While Pate (2011) as cited by Agberu et al (2021), states that the theory "reflects that Nigerians rely on the press for information, guidance, and direction. The only way to remain relevant is to be socially

responsible by remembering the people's problems, realities and aspirations in their coverage under whatever circumstances”

Therefore, a socially responsible press is expected to place society's interest as a priority in its coverage of the on-going collection of PVCs. As such Agberu et al (2021), state that:

The press should not fan the embers of sectionalism, tribalism and religious differences. But as such times, the media should promote national unity. It should not be a willing tool in the hands of propagandists, greedy politicians and promoters of violence. The media should black-out sources that promote the same. (p.65)

In view of the above therefore, the media should not be seen as an instrument of dividing the citizenry along their fault lines of sectionalism, tribalism and religious differences, but be in the vanguard of educating and mobilising the citizenry on national goals. Reporting issues concerning the collection of PVCs in Nigeria makes the media an institution for the achievement of credible, fair, transparent and free elections and to serves as checks and balances by holding the government accountable to the people. Against this backdrop, social responsibility theory was considered relevant to the study.

Method

The study of this nature requires an appropriate design. It is on this basis that the study relied on the work of Ntinda (2020) in which the author confirms that “narrative research or inquiry is one of the more recent qualitative methodologies that focuses on life stories as the essence of people-oriented sciences”. As a research inquiry, narrative approaches endeavour to attend to the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the cultural discourses that it draws upon (Bochner 2007; Trahar 2009 cited in Ntinda, 2020). From the author's analysis narrative research is based on the premise that people understand and give meaning to their lives through the stories they tell. Hence, Ntinda (2020) shows that people utilise narratives to compose and order their life experiences. So Bleakley (2000) in Ntinda (2020) indicates that through the use of story forms, people account for and give meaning or significance to their lives.

According to Ntinda (2020) among the early proponents of narrative research include Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who proposed to put the person back to the center of research inquiry ensuring that:

People's voices are not lost in translation. The two main elements comprising this approach are participants' account of a particular experience and the exploration of meaning embedded in the participants' stories. The focus on particular experiences is from the presumption that lives are bounded by events which vary in significance to the people involved. Exploration of personal meaning refers to the fact that meanings are evolving and persons may recognize some meanings and not others. (p.1)

For StudyCorgi Sciences (2022) narrative inquiry, which is also known as narrative analysis, is a specific type of qualitative research that is focused on studying a person's life experience in the context of the whole life story, or a narrative. Data for this research are collected in a narrative form, through presenting by participants of their narratives about their experiences, perceptions, concerns, attitudes, and lifestyle among other personal details. While James (2018) says that “narrative inquiry is “a way of researching which focuses on the whole and the specific, not the fragmented and the general,” and this method “foregrounds the telling of stories as a way of giving and exploring meanings of an individual's experience”. On his part, Muhammad (2022) states that narrative analysis is a qualitative research method that involves the close reading of texts in order to interpret the stories they tell. The stories told by a text can provide insights into the culture, values, and beliefs of the people who created them. It is a way of understanding how people make sense of their experiences and find meaning in them. These stories can be written down, or they can be spoken aloud. They can be told to friends, family, or strangers. They can be private or public. Contributing, Lumsden (n.d), opines that narrative analysis is a valuable data analysis technique in qualitative research. It is typically used in those studies which have already employed narrative inquiry as a qualitative method. Narrative knowledge is created and constructed through the stories of lived experience and sense-making, the meanings

people afford to them, and therefore offers valuable insight into the complexity of human lives, cultures, and behaviours. Narrative analysis uses the 'story' as the unit of analysis, in contrast to thematic and other forms of qualitative analysis

It is on this basis that the study employed the narrative research design. This is because narrative research helps us make sense of our experiences through the exploration of stories told. Chase (2005) as cited in Agberu et al (2021), explains the uniqueness of this design thus:

Unlike a chronology, which also reports events over time. A narrative communicates the narrator's point of view, including why the narrative's worth telling in the first place. In addition to describing what happened, narratives pay attention to emotions, thoughts and interpretations. (p.65)

To ascertain the newspapers to be selected, the multi-stage sampling technique was used. Hence, the online newspapers were examined based on the North-South divide. In the North the study selected *DailyTrust*. For the South, we selected *Vanguard* newspaper. This means a total of two newspapers were selected for narrative analysis on-going collection of PVCs. A total of six stories were harvested from the selected newspapers for analysis. Many stories were downloaded from the websites of the selected newspapers and were carefully perused and six were selected because they help to achieve the objectives of the study. The unit of narrative analysis were manifest contents of the online newspapers which are straight news, editorial and opinion article. This narrative analysis covered the period of December, 2022 to January, 2023. This was the period that INEC step up the distribution processes of PVCs with decentralisation of collection centres from their offices to ward levels, enlightenment campaigns on the collection of PVCs.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

DailyTrust Narrative Analysis of Collection of PVCs

On the 9th January, 2023, the *DailyTrust* editorial titled “*Low PVC Collection, Threat to 2023 Elections*” centred on the lamentations from the electoral umpire, INEC on the low collection rate of PVCs across the country:

The resonating lamentations in recent weeks by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) over the low collection rate of the Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) in many states of the federation have not only become a source of worry but also a threat to the 2023 general elections that are only a few weeks away. The fact that the PVCs have been produced by the commission but are not being collected by registered voters makes the matter appear complex. It also sounds ridiculous that the lamentations over PVC collection are rather coming from the country's electoral body. The INEC recently raised the alarm that no fewer than 6.7 million Nigerians are yet to collect their PVCs in 17 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Of this figure, 2.1m PVCs are in Lagos and Abuja as at December 29, 2022; with over 1.6m unclaimed PVCs in Lagos State. A document from the commission categorises the uncollected PVCs in Lagos State into 916,961 old cards and 777,002 new cards. Meanwhile, 460,643 PVCs were uncollected in 11 years in the FCT.

This editorial pointed out the resonating lamentations by INEC on the low collection rate of PVCs across the country. This editorial brings to the fore the inability of electoral umpire to distribute voter's cards in view of the fact the general elections are fast approaching. The media roles in conducting a successful election is to inform, educate, and mobilise the voters about the need for seamless process of collecting PVCs and point out the inadequacies of the electoral process that must be addressed for the elections to be successful. Through this, the media ensure that INEC perform their roles effectively.

DailyTrust on the 3rd January, 2023 published the viewpoint of Abideen Olasupo titled “*Before We Get into A PVC Collection Crisis*”. The article detailed the frustrations of Nigerians who registered for PVCs, but find it difficult to access the cards despite the fact the general elections will start in February.

As a Nigerian, passionate about the electoral process and willing to participate, you begin to wonder if the entire dynamic electoral process is all designed to either frustrate you or make

participation some kind of survival of the fittest. This is probably the easiest way to describe the entire process of being a registered voter and eligible to vote on Election Day. Right from the process of visiting the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) office, usually some distance from residential areas, joining the queues and eventually getting registered. After enduring conflicting information on the readiness of your Permanent Voters Card (PVC), you eventually take the pain to visit INEC office for collection and get greeted with the response that the voters' card is still not ready. This is the situation of many Nigerians who remain determined to participate in the 2023 general elections as the challenge with PVC collection persists. Beyond these challenges of unavailable PVCs, there has been a series of reports of missing PVCs, poor communication on place and time of collection and alleged extortion by INEC officials in the process. The combination of all these factors is enough to dwindle citizens' confidence from participating in the process. Although the commission categorically stated that the last batch of cards are ready for collection from 12th December 2022 to 22nd January 2023. This information was amplified by organisations working on elections in a bid to mobilise citizens to collect their cards and participate in the 2023 general elections. The ecstasy that followed this news, especially for potentially new voters who just turned 18 was doused by challenges experienced in the collection of PVCs across Nigeria.

The author of the article clearly pointed out that the process of collecting PVCs has turned to a case of survival of the fittest where they are inherent challenges: joining queues to collecting voter's cards, trekking long distance to collect PVCs, unavailable PVCs, poor communication as well as alleged extortion by INEC staff in the process of collecting PVCs. This is despite assurance by the electoral umpire on the availability of the cards as the combination of all these factors have dwindled citizens' confidence from participating in the electoral process.

In the midst of these challenges, the media continued to perform their roles of informing, educating and mobilising the people to participate in the electoral process in the country. These media responsibilities are geared towards holding the government accountable to the citizenry as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution as amended.

Also *DailyTrust* on the 5th December, 2022 in a story authored by Iniabasi Umo with the title “*PWDs Seek Security, Consideration for PVC Collection*” looked at the appeal of the persons with disabilities in Nigeria to INEC and Security agencies.

Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) have called on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to give special consideration to its members during the collection of the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC). Citing the National Disability Act and INEC Framework on PWDs, the Executive Director of the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), Mr David Anyaele, urged INEC to ensure equal voting access to PWDs and security agencies to ensure they provided security during the 2023 elections so that the PWDs and every registered voter can participate freely in the electoral process. “We are calling on INEC to improve on the success recorded in Osun State to ensure equal voting access for persons with disabilities.

The Iniabasi Umo's report pointed out clearly the plights of the persons with disabilities despite the law that provides for equal electoral rights for them. The Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) used the instrumentality of the media to present their case to the electoral umpire and the security agencies to ensure that equal electoral rights as enshrined in the National Disability Act and INEC framework on PWDs are properly enforced so that they can perform their electoral rights in the collection of PVCs. The PWDs called on INEC to improve the success recorded in Osun elections in 2022. The report showed that the media roles in any society is to protect and defend the citizen's inalienable rights irrespective of their social status in the society.

Vanguard Narrative Analysis of Collection of PVCs

A *Vanguard* reporter whose report titled “*Collection of PVCs at registration areas/wards to begin on Friday – INEC*” was published on January 5, 2023 detailed the process and deadline fixed for the collection of the PVCs at the ward level and the local government offices of the Commission:

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) says the collection of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) at registration areas/wards across the country would commence on Friday. In a statement by its National Commissioner and Chairman, Information and Voter Education Committee, Festus Okoye on Thursday in Abuja, the commission said that the collection at ward level would end on Jan. 15. Okoye urged all registered voters yet to collect their voter's cards to use the opportunity to do so. The devolution of PVC collection to the wards commences tomorrow, Friday, Jan. 6 2023, and all validly registered voters who are yet to collect their PVCs are encouraged to seize the opportunity of the devolution to the wards to do so. After Jan. 15, the exercise will revert to the Local Government Offices of the Commission until Jan. 22. All eligible and valid registrants can collect their PVCs from 9am to 3pm daily, including Saturdays and Sundays. All those that applied for replacement of lost, damaged, or defaced PVCs can collect their PVCs at the Registration Area/wards during this period and the same thing applies to those that registered prior to the 2019 general election and are yet to collect their cards. The PVCs of those that applied for transfer are available for collection in the Local Governments and Registration Areas where they intend to vote and not in the State or Local Government where they carried out the transfer.

The above report contained the Commission's decision to devolve the collection process to the ward levels across the country and the deadline, days and times for the collection of PVCs at both the wards and local government offices. The

report also showed the categories of eligible voters that can access their cards within this period and the readiness of the electoral umpire to ensure every electorate gets his/her card. The enlightenment campaign received the attention the media that gave it the required publicity.

On December 13, 2022, Anayo Okoli, Dapo Akinrefon, Davies Iheamnachor, John Alechenu, Peter Duru & Luminous Jannamike's report titled “*Politicians inducing voters with money, buying PVCs — INEC*” revealed how INEC raised alarm on how politicians are inducing voters with money to buy their voter's cards:

The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, yesterday, raised the alarm that some politicians have been buying up Permanent Voter Cards, PVCs, and financially inducing unsuspecting voters to harvest their Voter Identification Numbers ahead of the 2023 general elections. The revelation by INEC, however, elicited angry reactions from the People's Democratic Party, PDP, Labour Party, LP, and regional bodies such as the Pan-Yoruba socio-political organisation, Afenifere, Pan Niger Delta Forum, PANDEF, Ohanaeze Ndigbo and the Middle Belt Forum, MBF. Speaking, the INEC National Commissioner, said: “We are aware some politicians are more or less buying the PVCs. If you collect the PVC and then you sell it out or allow someone else to have it, you are aiding illegal possession of the PVC which is an offence in our Electoral Act. Some of you are aware that only recently, INEC managed to convict two people, who were found guilty of illegal possession of PVCs in Kano and Sokoto. So, I urge people to collect their PVCs, keep it safe, and make sure that on Election Day, you go out there and cast your votes because, of course, without your PVC you cannot vote.

The above story brings to the fore the attitudes of Nigeria politicians which show that politics is a *do or die affair*. The report showed the determination the Commission to prosecute all those caught in this illegal act of inducing prospective voters with money so that they can part away with their voter's cards. This revelation elicited angry reactions from critical stakeholders who described the

development as worrisome and a threat to democracy and if found to be true INEC must invalidate stolen, bought PVCs. The successful prosecution of the culprits in Sokoto and Kano was due to the eagle eyes of the media to cover all the activities surrounding the collection of PVCs in the country. On January 12, 2023, *Vanguard* reporter, Omeiza Ajayi whose report titled “*Polls: 93.47m voters to participate —INEC*”. This report centered on the assurance from INEC's Chairman to the leaders of 18 political parties that will participate in the forthcoming general elections despite fears of the security challenges in the country:

Presenting the register of voters to chairmen and secretaries of Nigeria's 18 registered political parties, yesterday, in Abuja, INEC Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, said the commission had been bolstered by assurances by Nigeria's defence, security and intelligence architecture that it would ensure a conducive environment for the polls “As a further affirmation of the Commission's readiness to conduct the 2023 General Election as scheduled, the final register of voters has been compiled. You would recall that for the 2019 General Election, Nigeria had a voter population of 84,004,084. After the cleaning up of the data from the last Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise (June 2021 – July 2022), 9,518,188 new voters were added to the previous register resulting in the preliminary register of 93,522,272 which was presented to Nigerians for claims and objections as required by law. At the end of the period for claims and objections by citizens, the Commission received 53,264 objections from Nigerians to the prevalence of ineligible persons on the register by virtue of age, citizenship or death. These names have been verified and removed from the register. Consequently, the register of voters for the 2023 General Election stands at 93,469,008. Of this cumulative figure, 49,054,162 (52.5%) are male while 44,414,846 (47.5%) are female. The distribution by age group shows that 37,060,399 (39.65%) are youth between the ages of 18 and 34; 33,413,591

(35.75%) are middle-aged persons between the ages of 35 and 49; 17,700,270 (18.94%) are elderly voters between the ages of 50 and 69 while 5,294,748 (5.66%) are senior citizens aged 70 and above. In terms of occupational distribution, students constitute the largest category with 26,027,481 (27.8%) of all voters, followed by 14,742,554 (15.8%) farmers/Fishermen, and 13,006,939 (13.9%) housewives. The data on disability was not collected for previous registration. However, the cumulative figure of 85,362 persons from the recent CVR indicates that there are 21,150 (24.5%) persons with Albinism; 13,387 (15.7%) with physical impediment and 8,103 (9.5%) are blind.

The report reaffirmed the Commission's readiness to conduct the general election come February and March, 2023 respectively. Also the report confirmed that the INEC Chairman gave the total number of valid registered voters as the umpire was bolstered with the assurances from the security agencies to provide conducive environment to conduct free and fair elections. The report presented detail demographics of the voters and their social status in the society and the readiness of INEC to conduct the elections.

Discussion of Findings

During the period of general elections in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission is always preoccupied with series of activities. The collection of Permanent Voter's Cards is one of such events. In this period, the Nigerian online newspapers performed their social responsibility credibly well by keeping the citizens abreast with the processes of the collection of PVCs. This corroborated the position of Pate (2011) as cited by Agberu et al (2021, p.65) on the role of the media in line with the tenets of social responsibility theory. Also the study of Hollihan (2001) which found that newspapers perform more successfully at informing voters than television news agreed with the above outcome of the study on the role of newspapers in dissemination of information during collection of PVCs. The online newspapers (*DailyTrust & Vanguard*) equally succeeded in holding the electoral umpire accountable in line with their constitutionally assigned roles. The study reveals

the inadequacies of the electoral umpire to ensure seamless distribution of PVCs. These findings are in line with the revelation of Middleton (2009) in Agberu et al (2021, p.-65), which states that the social responsibility demands that the journalists keep society's interest a top priority.

The analysis also shows that the manifest contents of editorial, straight news and viewpoint are the instruments used to galvanise Nigerians to participate in the process of PVCs collection at the various wards headquarters. The units of analysis further indicate that the electoral umpire lacks capacity to seamlessly distribute the PVCs throughout the country. These inadequacies allowed the politicians to subvert the process by buying voter's cards from the electorates. This development will disfranchise them, hence dwindled people's confidence in the capacity of INEC to conduct free and fair election come February and March this year. Also the analysis confirms that the corrupt attitudes of some INEC officials who extort money from the electorates during the process of PVCs collection in some parts of the country. Looking at these challenges, the Persons With Disabilities sought the full compliance to the provisions of the National Disability Act in order to guaranteed their full electoral rights from INEC. These outcomes are in line with the study of Buami (2016) as cited in Agberu and Odebiyi (2021), which revealed that the media is the fourth estate of the realm: a prominent watchdog on the government, safeguarding the transparent and credibility of the electoral process.

In order to mitigate the effects of these problems, INEC decided to decentralised the collections points to ward levels and extended the collection the period. These arrangements necessitated the electoral umpire to assured Nigerians of their readiness to conduct free and

fair elections despite security threats in the country. This is in line with the study of Owens-Ibe (1994) as quoted by Agberu et al (2021, p.64-65), which explained that the media are responsible for constructive criticism to the government, a relay of popular opinion, and adequate populace feedback.

Conclusion/Recommendation

This study explored the narrative analysis of the editorial, news stories and viewpoint as reported by online versions of *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* newspapers to uncover the emotions, thoughts and interpretations behind the reports. The researcher perused through these online manifest contents of the selected newspapers and the outcomes clearly showed that the papers displayed national interest above their ideological or ownership interests. This means that the selected newspapers were socially responsible to the Nigeria society. The coverage has enabled INEC to periodically come with different innovations to make the collection of the PVCs seamless and easy to the electorates. The social responsibility roles have given INEC the opportunity to connect to Nigerians and always assured them of their readiness to conduct free and fair elections come February and March,2023. In view of the above, this study concludes that *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* newspapers satisfactorily played their social responsibility roles to Nigeria society.

Finally, the study recommends that INEC should further devolve the collection points of the PVCs to polling units for easy access by the electorates. While, Nigerian newspapers should put their pen eyes on the role of security agents in the collection process as little about the role of security is covered by the selected newspapers.

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