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## FRAMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE NTA NEWS AT NINE

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper was conceived to evaluate how media construction of reality could affect society's evaluation of same. The main objective of this paper was to determine the extent NTA's news at nine broadcasts was biased during the 2007 election circle which also formed the Research question. It is a content analysis with the news, advertisement, announcements and endorsement as the units of analysis categorized for Bias to determine the news frame. The sample was 46 news episodes, systematically drawn from a possible population of 365 of the election year. Every day of the week was represented. An interval of eight days was chosen starting from the first day of May 2006 to the last day of April 2007 which was the month of the election. Apart from the month of February 2007, which yielded 3 samples, every other month within the period under study had at least four samples each. This is against the background that Sundays are usually abridged versions because of the Newline. The study revealed that NTA was structurally Biased in its coverage of the 2007 Election and concluded that Government influence over the NTA was responsible.*

**KEYWORDS:** Framing, Presidential Elections, Nta News.

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### INTRODUCTION

Political systems depend on the media to reach the public and form opinions during electioneering. This account for the control governments and politicians seek to have over the media. Depending on the media system of governance, politicians and indeed governments may have direct or indirect control over the media.

This is against the background that the media may not tell the people what to think, but certainly tell them what to think about. The media in presenting reality may make aspects of it more salient and by so doing frame the way issues are perceived by the public. It is this systematic control of media presentations to influence how such issues are perceived by the public that is regarded as framing. If this is done with the news, then it is news framing. Arguably, the public depend on news presentations of issues,

political parties and their candidates in the opinion formation and to some extent, voting pattern.

News framing and how it affects electoral outcomes has engaged the attention of media scholars across the globe. In Nigeria, the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) acclaimed to be the largest television in the African continent has been alleged over the years to support the government in power through its news frames. This is the reason for this content analysis of NTA news frames of the 2007 Presidential Election to determine the extent of bias in its news.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

To what extent was NTA's news at nine broadcasts biased during the 2007 election circle?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

This research is premised on two communication theories: the Agenda-setting and media ownership theories.

The agenda-setting theory propounded by McCombs and Shaw, is premised on some assumptions and principles which are:

- i. The mass media, such as the press (Television) do not reflect social reality because news is filtered, chosen and shaped by newsroom staff or broadcasters.
- ii. People get their news from limited sources, because people do not pay attention to all outlets; thus they rest on the mass media, and
- iii. Few media agenda which were chosen by professional gate-keepers lead people to perceive given issues as important ( Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso p. 89).

By its intermediary role, the media determine public agenda as well as the importance attached to issues based on a number of criteria such as the number of times such issues are mentioned, the primacy and "points and counter points". As suggested by Fico, Zeldens, Carpenter, and Diddi (2008), "second level agenda-setting finds the strongest media effects produced by differences in media attention to specific issue attributes, which audience members then use in their assessment of the issues" (p. 319). They further support the view that the "primacy" effect is crucial to convincing nonpartisan news consumers who may favour the sides that succeed in

getting its assertions presented first and most extensively in the news report on a political contest.

### **Television and News Framing**

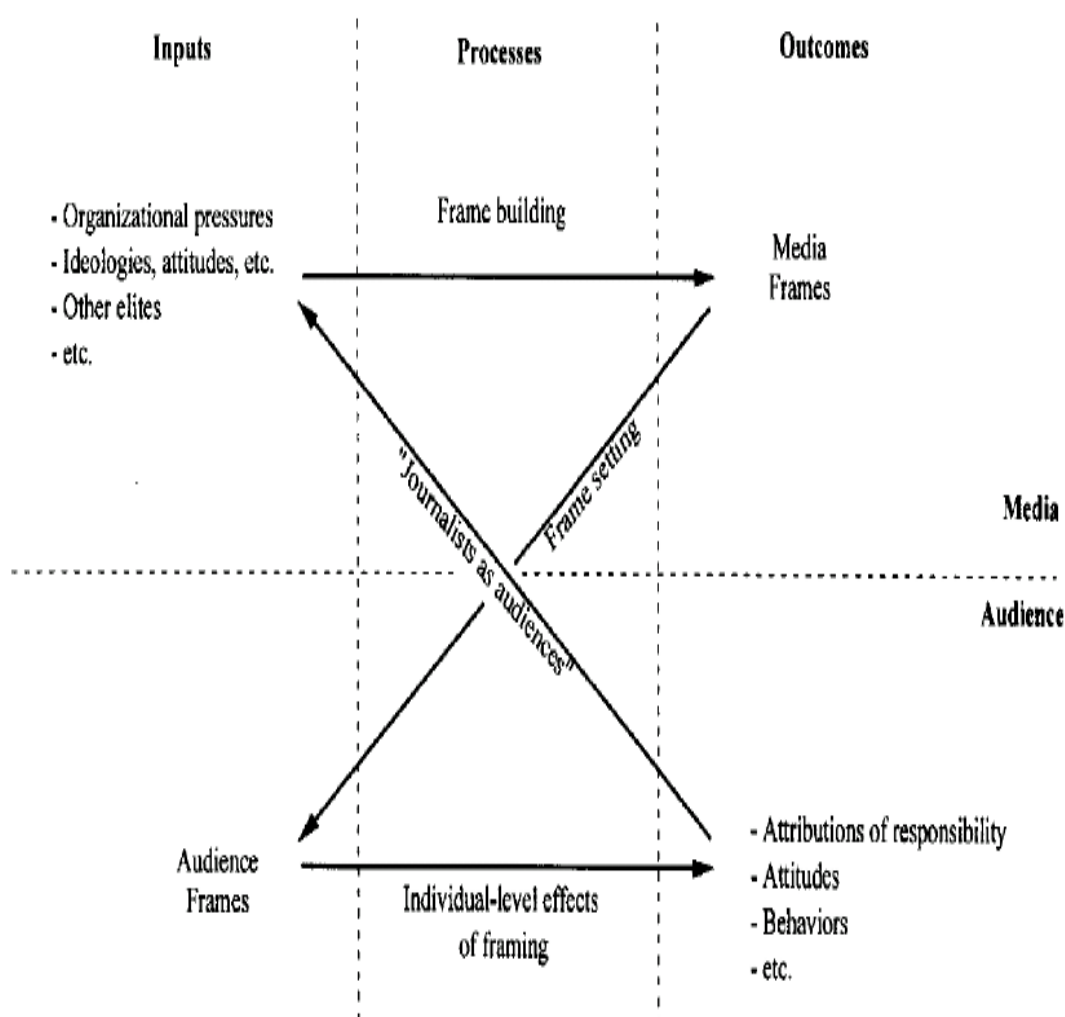
According to Entman (1993), framing involves the selection of "some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, normal evaluation and/or treatment recommendation"(p. 52). By so doing, the media can systematically control what is said to the public, how it is presented and by extension how the public react to what is presented. So, media's construction, of reality significantly affects the society's evaluation of same (McQuail 1994). During elections for instance, it is the media's presentation of parties and candidates that form the basis for assessing suitability to the resolution of societal conflicts. The public or society's world view is affected by the frame presented by the media. McQuail (1994) agrees that the "mass media is a major determinant of social reality by framing images of reality...in a predictable and patterned way" (P. 331).

The factors that may influence media frames include social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressure of interest groups, journalistic routines and ideological or political orientation of journalists (Tuchman, 1978; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). These factors interplay to produce the media frames which may be considered as dependent or an independent variable. It is assumed that organisational structure or work routines are at the heart of how media frames as dependent variables are constructed (Tuchman, 1978). Some researchers have however argued that media frames can be independent variables. Pan and Kosicki, cited Scheufele(1991) who

Identified four types of structural dimensions of news that influence the formation of frames: (a) Syntactic Structures, or patterns in the arrangement of words and phrases; (b). Script structures, referring to the general newsworthiness of an event as well as the intention to communicate news and events to the audience that transcends their limited sensory experiences; (c) Thematic Structures, reflecting the tendency of journalists to impose a causal theme on their news stories, either in the form of explicit causal statements or by linking observations to the direct

quote of a source; and (d) Rhetorical structures, referring to the "stylistics choices made by journalists in relation to their intended effect"(p. 111).

When considered as an independent variable, framing is determined by the news attributes. However, the process of framing is controlled by journalists whose individual frames are considered as the dependent variable.



**Fig 2.1 Showing Scheufele's Process & Model of framing Research**

Scheufele's Process model depicts a relationship among frame building, frame setting, individual-level effects and journalists as audiences.

Frames can be episodic or thematic (Iyengar, 1991). EPISODIC frames portrays public issues as concrete events, while THEMATIC frames present issues in a more general and abstract way. When emphasis and focus of news is on a particular political party or candidate, as opposed to the entire political campaign, (episodic frame), viewers will be limited in the assessment of the other political parties and candidates. Framing therefore, involves choices by journalists and the choice of what they portray or fail to portray has some consequences in the electoral process. As Price, Tewskbury and Powers (1997) pointed out, "by activating some ideas, feelings and values rather than others, then, the news can encourage particular trains of thought about political phenomena and lead audience members to arrive at more or less predictable conclusions"(p. 483). When frames are in sync with cultural beliefs, the power of the media to influence is enhanced or elevated. This is why political actors seek to have control over the media.

Framing has become central to understanding issues generally, including political reporting. Frames work to "select, organize and emphasize certain aspects of reality, to the exclusion of others" (De vrees, Peter and Semeko 2001, p. 108). Cappella and Jamiesen(1996) agree that "frames can have substantial effects on citizens attitude to politics" ( p. 79). In the view of Goffman (1974), frames are "schemata of interpretation" which are useful in organizing reality "into something that is meaningful" (p. 21). Just like the picture frames, media frames define the border of reality. The media can highlight or obscure any public issue and through that process determine what and how the public construct reality. According to Kosicki(2001), framing is a "conceptual framework for examining the details of how issues are conceptualized in public discourse as highly contested matters over which there is often considerable disagreement" ( p. 18). Gamson and Modigliani's (1987) define framing as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them" (p. 143) is useful for understanding media frames. And Entman (1993), Gathin (1980), Scheufele and (2004), Tuchman (1979) have all defined framing in a similar way.

Media frames are generally conceptualised as either dominant ideology, elite ideology or journalistic ideology. According to McMnamin, Flynn, O'Malley and Rafter (2012), dominant ideology "refers to views and ideas shared by the majority of people in society" (p. 134). Elite ideology refers to "the particular ideology of policy orientation on the part of government or administration in power at any given point in time" (p. 134), and journalistic ideology refers to "media routines and occupational values" (p. 134). In the

view of Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad (1998), often times there may be an overlap between the dominant and elite ideologies even though this may not be true all the time. Where there is a difference in the dominant and elite ideologies, the third ideology, perhaps the most potent - journalistic ideology could be the determinant of the news frame. Journalistic routines and values are subject to factors which include ownership, regulation and philosophy of editors at the media.

Frames could also be conceptualised as strategy and issue frames. Strategy frame refers to situations where news focus on horse race - who is ahead based on polls and campaign strategy of parties and candidates. Issues frame, on the other hand, refers to news media focus on policy issues, problems and solutions. According to Capella and Jamison (1996):

Strategy coverage is marked by several features: 1) Winning and losing as the chief concern. 2) The language of wars and competition. 3) Mention of performers critics and audience (voters). 4) Emphasis on performance, style and perception of candidates. 5) Great weight being given to polls and position in evaluating campaigns and candidates. (p. 74).

The contest for power by political parties is a contentious battle fought at the media arena. The presentations given to public issues aid the public appreciation and understanding of such issues. In fact, "political communication requires the framing of events, issues and actors in ways that promote perceptions and interpretations that benefit one side while hindering the other" (Entman, 2003 p. 417).

There is no doubt that public opinion formation benefits from the way news media frame issues, particularly where competition is limited due to the inherent limits of communication development and ineffective control or regulations. An example of framing effect is the coverage of election campaigns. The reporter covering a campaign trail makes the choice of who to interview and what to take from such an interview. A typical framing situation will involve a tripartite relation (competition) of government or political institutions, the media and the public. In this contest of unequal partners, the institutions and media given the communication arsenal at their disposal are the dominant partners over the public. The competition is therefore between the political institutions and the media. According to Cappella and Jamieson (1997), frames affect thought pattern "cultural morals and values and create contexts" (p. 47). It is concerned with the

perspective given to an issue. In the opinion of Entman (1993), the "presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (p. 52) are indices of determining news frames. A very useful list of framing mechanisms to identify and measure news frames has been suggested by Tanhard (2001):

1. Headlines
2. Subheads
3. Photos
4. Photo Captions
5. Leads
6. Source Selection
7. Quotes Selection
8. Pull Quotes
9. Logos
10. Statistics and Charts and
11. Concluding statements and paragraphs. (p. 10)

And given Gathin's definition of frames as persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse" (p. 7), identifying and measuring news frames is considerably less complex.

The power of the media in the determination of public opinion is not in doubt. Generally people tend to attach importance to issues according to the importance the media attach to such issues measurable by the quality, quantity and tone of their reportage. As outlined by the Frame Works Institute (2002), research suggests that:

- People use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world.
- Incoming information provides cues about where to "file" it mentally.
- People get most information about public affairs (elections) from the news media which, over time, creates a framework of expectation, or a dominant frame.
- Overtime, we develop habits of thought and expectation and configure incoming information to conform to this frame.

The news therefore, is a construction of reality. In other words, the media tell stories of events, and the perspective of their narration forms the frame or boundaries within which the public see those events. At election time, rival frames are in contest of visibility at the media plane and what party or contestant wins may not entirely depend on the media narrative, but it does definitely have some impact. Iyenger (1991) suggests that

the use of either the episodic or the thematic news frame affects how individuals assign responsibility for political issues; episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather than societal attributions or responsibility while thematic framing has the opposite effect. Since television news is heavily episodic, its effect is generally to induce attributions of responsibility to individual victims or perpetrators rather than to a broad social force.

The media is a battle ground for political actors striving to influence the public. Stone (2002) believes that "ideas are a medium of exchange and a mode of influence even more powerful than money, votes or guns. Shared meanings motivate people to action and meld individual striving into collective action ideas are at the center of all political conflict "(p. 11).

As Entman (1993) succinctly put it

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral valuation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described ( 1993, p. 3).

The making of information more noticeable and meaningful over another could affect how audience receives and makes judgment about such information. Kahreman and Tversky (1984) exemplify how framing could change or affect public opinion. By asking the same questions differently, different answers, according to the frame, were elicited with the same programme option receiving 72 percent and 22 percent respectively according to the framing.

In the opinion of Nisbet, Brossard and Kroepsch (2003):

If an interest can control media attention to an issue, then it has succeeded in controlling the media and public agenda. Moreover when an issue does appear in the media, if interests can define their stand as well as the alternatives available for discussion, then they have "framed" the situation in more winnable terms, delimiting the arguments the opposition can make and screening them off from participation (p. 38). "Framing an issue is therefore a strategic means to attract more supporters to mobilize collective actions, to expand actor's realm of influences, and to increase their chances of winning" (Pan and Kosicki, 2001 p. 40)

Journalists may deny viewers the opportunity of accessing all the candidates through the choice of news selection and presentation. The slant and focus of media on issues can also have some considerably significant impact on how the public perceive candidates and the votes they may receive at elections. In other words, editors' decision on what to cover and how they cover such issues is an important element that could affect parties and their candidates at elections.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is a content analysis of NTA news during the 2007 presidential election. It is adjudged suitable because content analysis is not vulnerable to research control and emotion once the categories are properly defined. The population of this study includes all the *News at Nine* bulletin of the 2007 election circle covering the period from May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 to April 2007. The composite week sampling technique was adopted to generate a sampling frame of all the days of the period and samples systematically selected from the sample frame. An interval of eight days for that period generated 46 sample sizes. The units of analysis were campaign news stories, campaign advertisements, endorsements and announcements. These units were categorized for bias. Two independent coders were trained to code for bias as a means of ensuring reliability. The coders coded blindly and reliability was tested adopting the P1 index developed by Scott (1955) as follows

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\% \text{ observed agreement} - \% \text{ expected agreement}}{1 - \% \text{ expected agreement}}$$

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The data to be presented and discussed below were got from the content of NTA news at nine over a period of one year, from May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2007. The days that qualified for sampling were determined by a composite week sampling that generated a sample size of 46 news broadcasts. The data are presented as simple percentages but the hypotheses are tested, using the chi-square at 0.05 level of significance and three degree of freedom.

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

#### Content Analysis

**TABLE 4.1**

#### Videos of news at nine analyzed

Months	No. of Issues	%
May 2006	4	8.69
June 2006	4	8.69
July 2006	4	8.69
Aug. 2006	4	8.69
Sept. 2006	4	8.69
Oct. 2006	3	6.52
Nov. 2006	4	8.69
Dec. 2006	4	8.69
Jan. 2007	4	8.69
Feb. 2007	3	6.52
March 2007	4	8.69
April 2007	4	8.69
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1 above shows the total number of NTA news at nine videos that were sampled. Each month of the election circle (May 1 2006 - April 30, 2007) contributed four videos or 8.69% of the total apart from the months of October 2006 and February 2007 which contributed 3 or 6.52% of the total sample respectively. The table further shows that Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday each contributed seven videos or about 15.21% of the total sample, while Sunday, Wednesday and Saturday contributed 6 videos or about 13.04% of the total respectively. Those figures indicate that six

(13.04%) videos were of the Newslines, News Extra and Weekend File respectively. They are all weekly programmes that feature abridged version of news with focus on human story and in studio discussion and analysis.

**TABLE 4.2  
CONTENT TYPE**

Parties	Campaign News	%	Campaign Advertising	%	Endorsements	%	Announcement	%	TOTAL
ACN	1	4.7	2	13.33	0	0	0	0	3
ADC	1	4.7	-	0	0	0	0	0	1
ANPP	3	14.28	1	6.66	0	0	2	50	6
APGA	1	4.76	-	0	0	0	0	0	1
DPP	1	4.76	2	13.33	0	0	1	25	4
FDP	-	0	2	13.33	0	0	0	0	2
NAC	-	0	1	6.66	0	0	0	0	1
NPP	1	4.25	-	0	0	0	0	0	1
PDP	12	57.14	5	33.3	2	100	1	25	20
PPA	1	4.76		13.33	0	0	0	0	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>42</b>

Table 4.2 shows distribution of content types for this study. From the table, 21 (50%) of the units belong to Campaign News, 15 (35.7%) are of Campaign Advertising, 2 (4.8%) are of Endorsements, while 4 (9.52%) are of political parties campaign announcements. It is apt to note that out of the fifty registered political parties at the time of the 2007 Presidential election, twenty five or 50% of the parties fielded presidential candidates. As table 2 shows, only eight political parties had any form of mention in the NTA news at Nine for the period under study. Only the PDP had endorsement by two groups covered by the News at Nine during the 2007 election circle. Two parties, FDP and NAC did not have any news about them covered by the NTA News at Nine during the 2007 election circle. The table further shows that the PDP had 12 (57.14%) of the entire campaign news for the period under study. The closest rival political party was the ANPP which had a share of 3 (14.28%) of the total campaign news for the same period. The other political

parties with a share of the NTA campaign news coverage - ACN, ADC, APGA, DPP, NPP and PPA had only one (4.76%) each throughout the period under study.

Campaign advertisement during the period was 15 in total. The PDP had 5 (33.33%) i.e one third of the entire campaign advertisement on the NTA News at Nine. The closest rival political parties to have advertisement during the same period are the DPP, FDP, ACN and PPA. They all had 2 (13.66%) of advertisement respectively aired during the period of study. The ANPP and APGA had only 1 (6.66%) of the featured advertisements respectively.

There were a total of four announcements of parties election related matters covered by the NTA News at Nine during the 2007 Presidential election circle. The ANPP had 2 (50%) announcements relating to the Presidential election in the news belt under consideration. The PDP and DPP had one (25%) each during the period.

### Research Question

**To what extent was the NTA's news at nine broadcasts during the 2007 Presidential election circle biased?**

**TABLE 4.3**

### Measure Of Bias In The NTA News At Nine Coverage Of The 2007 Presidential Election

Categories	Favourable positive	%	Neutral	%	Unfavourable negative	%	Total	%
CAN	1	11.11	0	0	0	0	1	2.77
ADC	0	0	1	3.7	0	0	1	2.77
ANPP	0	0	3	11.11	0	0	3	8.33
APGA	0	0	1	3.7	0	0	1	2.77
DPP	0	0	1	3.7	0	0	1	2.77

NPP	0	0	1	3.7	0	0	1	2.77
PDP	8	88.88	19	70.37	0	0	27	75
PPA	0	0	1	3.7	0	0	1	2.77
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>

The question of balance and bias in media reportage or representation is controversial for the basic reason that bias can mean different things to different people. However, it is central to understanding how media perform the gate keeping function in the process of news reporting. What makes the analysis of bias imperative with respect to NTA is that, unlike a commercially or privately-owned medium - whose philosophy is determined by the owner, NTA is a publicly-owned medium. It is expected that a medium funded by tax payers money should provide a level playing field for all parties and candidates.

Table 7 shows the share of sound bites by Presidential candidates, party chieftains, and experts beside the newscaster. The total of sound bites was recorded for the period of study.

The Presidential candidate of the party in power, the PDP had 8 or 88.89% of sound bite by Presidential candidates. The only other party whose Presidential candidate had a sound bite is the ACN, with just one sound bite for the entire period. The PDP also had the overwhelming sound bite by its party chieftains. It recorded 7 out of 8 or 87.5% of sound bite by its party chieftain. The only other party whose chieftain had one sound bite was the ANPP. There is consistency in sound bites by candidates and chieftains in favour of PDP not just in the number of mention but also the duration of such bites. In all, the PDP had twelve or 57.14 slots of news during the period. The ANPP had three mentions and only six other parties had one news slot or 4.76% of campaign news during the 2007 Presidential election circle.

Furthermore, of a total of 9 news slots categorized as favourable, the PDP obtained eight or 88.88%, with ACN the only other party with just one favourable news slot. The neutral category was 27 in all and PDP had 19 or 70.39%, more than two-third of stories.

In both number of news items and direction, there is evidence of bias in the NTA news at nine coverage of the 2007 Presidential election. The question to ask is why were the other political parties not given attention? The NTA

claims to be the largest network in Africa and its platform no doubt will give candidates at election tremendous leverage. The absence of a balanced baseline in campaign coverage is a manifest exhibition of bias.

In both quantity and quality of coverage, the largest television network in Africa, the NTA was guilty of structural bias. A gate keeper who allows the passage of a particular shade of opinion or view to the detriment of others cannot claim to be fair, accurate and depersonalized. The absence of fairness and balance robs a report of objectivity. In a world characterised by stiff competition, a fair, accurate and true presentation of views is not only difficult to attain. It is in fact impossible, and the media cannot be excused from the responsibility of objectivity because of this difficulty. Over a period of one year, measuring objectivity is less difficult than in every news story, because naturally different views will be canvassed by different or opposing interests. It will take political neutrality to critically examine all sides of an argument or issue, Benneth (2001). Without political neutrality, bias is made manifest in media reporting, such as in the case of NTA at nine news coverage of the 2007 Presidential election. This failure of NTA to provide the public with a fair and balanced presentation of parties and candidates is a gross violation of one of the basic requirements of the media - to provide citizens with information that will aid their decisions or choices not only during elections but at sundry times. The overwhelming volume of report on the ruling PDP is a clear evidence of bias in its news coverage of the 2007 Presidential election.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concluded that NTA was guilty of structural bias. Bias is made manifest in media reporting when the purveyor fails to provide the public with a fair and balanced presentation of contesting interests. Both in quantity and quality of representation the then ruling People's Democratic Party and its candidate far outweighs that of other parties and their candidates during that election circle.

## **Contribution to Knowledge**

From the finding of this paper, it is proclaimed without doubt that the development of our democracy is a function of the level of liberalism of the media generally and the NTA in particular. Furthermore, this study has provided data on the coverage of NTA news coverage of elections to bridge the gap of paucity of data in this area of media research in Nigeria.

## **Recommendation**

This research recommends that an “Independent Trust” with trustees appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the National Broadcasting Commission after duly advertising the positions and interviewing shortlisted candidates. The trustees should have a term of five years renewable for another term.

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