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A Content-Analytical Study of *The Vanguard* Newspaper Online Coverage of the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the Vanguard newspaper's online coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The objectives of the study were to examine the tones and frames used by the Vanguard newspaper (online) in the coverage of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The researchers anchored the study on the content analysis research design and developed issue specific tone and frame categories for the analysis. The researchers analysed 136 news reports and found out that The Vanguard newspaper (online) majorly used the attack tone and strategy frame to report the campaign issues to the public. It was therefore recommended that the Vanguard newspaper and other Nigerian media outlets should make more use of policy issue frame because it would help Nigerians make informed decisions on whom to vote for during the election. The researchers also discouraged the dominant use of attack tone as it can trigger rift amongst supporters of the electoral candidates.

KEY WORDS: Nigeria, Election, Newspaper, Content Analysis, Vanguard Newspaper

INTRODUCTION

The media, emphatically newspapers, are given a significant amount of attention during elections. In point of fact, it is not an exaggeration to state that a transparent election in Nigeria and elsewhere is impossible if there is no media present to cover it. This is because the media are expedient channels that can be utilised for monitoring, correlation, teaching and spreading information (Arijeniwa, Nwaoboli, Ajimokunola & Uwuoruya 2022; Nwaoboli, 2021, 2022, 2023) to electorates. The reason for this may be found in the fact that the media are effective in bringing about behavioural and attitude change.

Omoera (2010) agrees with the above assertion when he stated that the Nigerian press has always been useful as a vehicle for constructing the political landscape of the country, an avenue for agitation and proper political leadership. To express this in another way, we could say that the Nigerian press has always been useful as a vehicle for structuring the political landscape of the country.

This illustrates that the mass media have an important role to play in the electoral process of any democratic government which is indisputable and crucial in its own right. Elections take place all over the world in the contemporary, modern civilisation and as a result, they are the focus of a great amount of interest and coverage from the media. People from all over the world pay attention to the elections in Nigeria since it is the black nation with the most



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people and is considered to be the giant of Africa. As a consequence of this, greater dependencies on the media for obtaining information on the electoral process, the parties and campaigns in the media are closely followed by citizens for the purpose of deciding on their voting behaviour (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023).

In addition, citizens place a higher amount of reliance on the media as their primary source of information regarding the political process, as well as the parties and campaigns that are covered in the media. This is done with the intention of making voting choices (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Newspapers have a reputation for having a significant impact on the populace, particularly in regard to the manner in which individuals participate in the electoral. The mass media have the ability to impact our cognitive processes. It follows that the vast majority of what we know about both our internal environment and election is the product of information that has been distributed through the various forms of the media. This is true for both our knowledge of the election and our knowledge of our internal environment.

Elections are carried out in every democracy. Democratic government, which is presided over by individuals who were elected to their positions, is the system of administration that continues to have widespread support and approval in the contemporary world. Voting by the populace to choose their leaders is the defining characteristic of this form of democratic administration. According to Omoera (2010), the metaphor of a watchdog being a member of the media is a reflection of the vigilant function that the media plays in any administration. The Nigerian presidential election was slated for February 25, 2023. Although there are more than eight parties and people who contested for the 2023 presidential elections, the major ones include Prince Malik Ado-Ibrahim who is representing the Young Progressives Party (YPP) party, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso who is representing the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), Omoyele Sowore representing the African Action Congress (AAC), Peter Obi representing the Labour Party (LP), Prince Adewole Adebayo representing the Social Democratic Party (SDP) Kola Abiola representing the People's Redemption Party (PRP), Asiwaju Bola Tinubu of All Progressive Party (APC) and Atiku Abubakar representing the People's Democratic Party (PDP). This study is therefore carried out to examine how newspapers, specifically The Vanguard, covered the campaigns of the contestants.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Newspapers face a plethora of challenges that act as obstacles to the stabilisation of legislative activities in Nigeria as well as to their contributions, the sensitisation of the masses and reportage during electioneering campaigns and elections. For example, when it comes to election news coverage, newspapers are under constant pressure from the general public, political parties, interest groups and the government respectively to engage in favouritism, gatekeeping, yellow journalism and biased reporting that would benefit the election's sponsors or newspaper owners.

This pressure often leads to a scenario in which newspapers are obliged to take sides while reporting on election events in order to support the interests of a specific political party or interest group. This was also the case in the presidential election news coverage of 2015 and 2019 in Nigeria, where government-owned newspapers reported events about the presidential elections and campaigns in a way that favoured the government, while anti-government



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media houses also reported the political events in a way that would tarnish the image of the All Progressive Congress (APC), regardless of the bias in the reports (Ugwu, 2015; Ukwa 2019).

Although the contributions of newspapers to the 2023 Nigerian presidential election via news coverage is significant and were ostensibly expected to be objective and serve the national interest, some seem to be extremely biased, either pro or anti-government and may not serve the national interest but rather serve their own interests of greed and personal gain. This study therefore seeks to answer the question: How did the *Vanguard* newspaper cover the 2023 Nigerian presidential election?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to:

- 1. examine the tones used by the *Vanguard* newspaper (online) in the coverage of the 2023 presidential election;
- 2. examine the frames used by the *Vanguard* newspaper (online) in the coverage of the 2023 presidential election.

CONCEPTUAL AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Election Defined

An election is a formal procedure that helps select a person or group of people for public office or that accepts or rejects a political proposal by voting. Elections may also be used to approve or reject a political proposition. The voting process is the most important institutional component of democratic governments and electoral systems. This is due to the fact that under democratic systems and voting procedures, the legitimacy of the government comes directly and exclusively from the permission of the population (Adibe, 2015). The conduct of elections that are free and fair is the primary process that converts that consent into governmental power. Elections are the process that are used to choose candidates for public office as well as various types of private jobs. According to Chibuike and Fafiolu (2015), an election is the process through which the members of a community or organisation pick one or more individuals to exercise power on their behalf. Elections may also be used to choose representatives for organisations. In a democracy, the provision of elections is meant to guarantee that the government will use its powers with the agreement of the governed, and this is the goal of the provision (Chibuike and Fafiolu, 2015). To put it in another way, having legitimately elected representatives adds credibility to the power that the government has. Hence, election is the process through which members of a group, club, society, community, or organisation pick some of its members to occupy posts at regular intervals.

Elections are a cornerstone of every contemporary democracy, yet not every election is conducted in a democratic manner. Authoritarian governments of all stripes, including Marxist regimes and one-party states, hold elections in order to provide the appearance that their authority is legitimate. In these kinds of elections, there may be just one candidate or a list of candidates and there may not be any other options.

Udeze & Uwem (2013) notes that democratic elections are not merely symbolic, they are competitive, periodic, inclusive and definitive elections in which the chief decision-makers in



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a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticise government and to publish their criticism and to present alternatives. Thus, democratic elections have a level playing field for candidates. It is essential that opposition parties and candidates have the freedom of expression, assembly and movement that is required in order for them to be able to publicly criticise the administration and provide voters with alternative candidates and programmes. It is not sufficient to just provide the opposition access to the balloting process. Elections that are not democratic include those in which the opposition is either prevented from using the media, has its rallies hounded, or has its periodicals suppressed. The party that is now in power may enjoy the benefits of being in power, but the rules of the election fight and how it is conducted must be fair.

The Press and Politics

From the beginning of recorded history, members of the Nigerian press have played a key role in the country's democratic, political and electoral processes. In point of fact, modern elections are now seen as a three-way alliance that includes the voter, the competitors and the media, with the media functioning as the connection between the other two. This is because the media acts as the link between the other two. According to Chibuike and Fafiolu (2015), the press extends its role further by not only surveying and bringing the day's events to the public and private attention, but also interpreting the meanings of the events, putting them into context and sometimes speculating about the consequences of their actions. This is in addition to surveying and bringing the day's events to the public and private attention.

The public is also informed by the press as to which problems and endeavour are worthy of special attention and should thus be placed high on the agenda of the public's political concerns. Its significance is communicated by signals such as banner headlines and frontpage placements in newspapers. Stories that are published in the front section are considered to be more important and accessible to readers than those that are placed in other parts, such as the sports or business sections. This is because frequent coverage also conveys relevance (Ngara and Esebonu 2012).

In addition to the conventional means of disseminating election messages, such as television, radio, and newspapers, the most recent use of new media technologies, such as online social media, has the potential to expand both reach and interaction. Omoera (2010) noted that the media was in the Vanguard of the campaign for electoral changes, reporting anomalies and malpractices that marked the elections in 2003 and 2007, and calling for urgent steps after elections (Omoera 2010). According to Ngara and Esebonu (2012) the duties of the press extend to the following:

- a) making the people and government informed;
- b) providing a means of communication among the people;
- c) serving as watchdog on the activities of government, government officials and members of the public in general;
- d) providing a voice for the people by giving the strong, weak, rich, poor, young, and old the right to express their views irrespective of how primitive, sensible or irrational the view may be;
- e) serving as a trend setter as a medium for socialization and social engineering;
- f) a market for the presentation of ideas and opinion;
- g) a vehicle for change;



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- h) a medium of enormous influence on people's views, attitudes, judgments, lifestyles and values;
- i) a means of entertainment and relaxation; and
- j) helping the people in the making of an informed decision.

Imperatives of Newspapers in Times of Elections

In democratic governments like Nigeria, elections are the primary source of political recruiting. This is true even when the procedure by which parties nominate candidates for office is taken into consideration. Therefore, politicians have a propensity to possess talents and skills that are related to electioneering, such as charisma, and oratorical skills but not necessarily those that suit them to carry out constituency duties, serve on committees, run government departments and so on. Nonetheless, this recruiting would not be feasible in any way, shape or form without the support of newspapers. This is due to the fact that the mass media are responsible for establishing the agenda for recruiters, also known as voters, by doing research on the available candidates to vote for and directing electorates in the path to guarantee they choose the most suitable candidate (Ngara & Esebonu, 2012).

Another factor in the formation of governments is the election of political leaders and the publication of news in states in which the political executive is chosen by popular vote. Among the most prevalent types of parliamentary systems, elections have the greatest amount of impact on the formation of governments in situations in which the electoral system has a tendency to award a clear parliamentary majority to a single party (Uwa, 2013). However, the slants and tones in which newspapers frame political contestants could help form the governments by making electorates support or fight the government.

Also, newspapers endorse that the appropriate candidates be chosen and that there is a free and fair election. When elections are free, fair and competitive, they are a vehicle through which demands from the public are funnelled from the people to the government. Newspapers further have an important role in determining the outcome of elections. In addition, elections almost always dissuade governments from enacting measures that are very controversial and widely unpopular; yet, elections may only be considered to directly affect policy in rare circumstances, such as when a single subject dominates the election campaign (Ugiagbe, 2010). It is also possible to claim that the variety of policy alternatives that are presented in elections is often so limited, which means that the outcome of the election may only have a little impact on policy.

Moreover, the act of campaigning via media provides electorates with a wealth of knowledge on parties, candidates, policies, the records of the present government, the political system, and other related topics. On the other hand, this will only result in education if the information that is presented, as well as the manner in which it is delivered, arouses the attention of the public and encourages discussion, as opposed to indifference and alienation. Since politicians and parties are more interested in convincing voters than educating them, politicians have a strong incentive to deliver information that is either insufficient or inaccurate (Ugiagbe, 2010).

Electioneering efforts conducted via newspapers may also serve as a medium for elites to influence and control the populace. Newspaper electioneering campaigns may be used to defuse political dissatisfaction and resistance by directing these forces in a direction that is consistent with the constitution. This allows for administrations to come and go while the



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regime as a whole continues to function (Ugwu, 2015). Electioneering efforts are especially successful in this regard due to the fact that, at the same time, they offer people the feeling that they are exerting influence over the government.

Review of Empirical Studies

This section discusses a number of studies that are pertinent to the current research. Arijeniwa and Nwaoboli (2023) study shed light on the impact of social media in electioneering campaign and political participation amongst Nigerian youths. The study was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory. The researcher employed survey research method and simple percentage was used for the analysis. In the survey, a sample size of 400 respondents made up of youths was selected through convenience sampling in Benin City, the capital city of Edo State. The study found that social media during electioneering campaign is used in promoting aspirants and their political parties to the electorates. The study also found that social media has been largely successful in their agenda-setting function on political issues in Nigeria especially as the race for 2023 general elections kicks off. This study recommended that social media information about politics, political parties and their candidates should be verified by users before engaging them. It was recommended that political parties and aspirants should refrain from spreading falsehood in their electioneering campaigns on the social media.

Ugwu (2015) examined the contributions made by the media to the upkeep of democracy in Nigeria. The goal of the research was to ascertain the degree to which media coverage of democratic processes has increased political engagement in politics and democratic transparency. Additional goals included evaluating the mass media's efficiency in lowering election violence in Nigeria and assessing its effectiveness in avoiding electoral violence in Nigeria, as well as analysing the relevance of the link between democratic sustainability in Nigeria and the media. The study was built on the idea of agenda formation. Survey was used as the research design and questionnaire was the research instrument. On purpose, 200 copies of questionnaire were distributed to citizens of Benin City. After completion, each questionnaire was collected, reviewed, and approved as valid. The study's findings showed that the mass media had a significant impact in preserving Nigeria's democracy. Additionally, the research showed that some environmental elements that have a propensity to weaken democratic values constrain the Nigerian type of democracy. It is crucial that the media continue to support democracy by supporting peaceful election procedures. The study's findings led it to the recommendation that the mass media must avoid from taking political sides in order to be impartial in its support and promotion of democracy and elections free from violence. This suggests that media owners should always uphold the ethical norms of journalism while covering political issues rather than using their platforms as means of unethically achieving their political aims.

Ukwa (2020) studied *The Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in Nigeria in order to look at how violent occurrences that happened during Nigeria's 2019 presidential election were covered. The study employed Development Media Theory as theoretical framework and content analysis as research design. A total of 70 issues of newspapers were examined for the investigation, including 35 issues from *The Punch* and 35 from *The Vanguard*. Thereafter, the information in these newspapers were examined and analysed. The results showed that media coverage influenced the decision on the 2019 presidential candidates and informed the electorates about the importance of voting, their voting rights, and the necessity to refrain

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from electoral violence. The study came to the conclusion that while reporting and interpreting instances of electoral violence in elections, newspaper journalists, editors and managers should use sound journalistic judgement. The main intersection of interest between the aforementioned studies and the current one was the fact that they all studied about elections. The studies, however, were different from this one since, in contrast to the previous research, the focus of this one was on the 2023 presidential election.

Theoretical Framework

and Studies

Framing theory

Arowolo (2017) describes framing theory as the one that describes a frame as a concept used for making sense occurrences in media texts, and the theory explains the way mass media report news to the public through the use of frames. Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma (2022) opine that media frames influence the choices people make about how to process the information, and describes framing as the temporal bounding of interactive messages.

Erving Goffman developed this theory in 1974 and it asserted that framing theory explains framing as a mental schema that helps people to organize their experiences, interpret it, and communicate it (Funderburk, 2019). Therefore, the framing theory explains how media coverage impacts public perception of reported news, and enhance the message meaning to them. Frames can be used to enable the understanding of media messages, or portray the media stand on the messages they propagate.

Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) state that the theory depicts how media purposefully making use of, pictures, , headlines, slants, and tones to influence public perception of the issue. This is because it highlights certain over others so as achieve its aim with the message delivery, and governs what members of the society consider as important, or not important. The theory is relevant to this study because it explains how the 2023 presidential campaign messages are presented to audience in consciously shaped forms.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted quantitative content analysis as the research design and the researchers used all *Vanguard* newspaper online edition reports on the presidential campaign from the first day of this year (January 1, 2023) till the time this research was carried out (January 25, 2023). Census was adopted as sampling technique and this propelled the use of all the 136 news items available under the study's time frame. Specific-issue tone and frames were designed for the analysis and they are explained in the table below.

Background	V.0 Title of news	Explanation
information	item	
Tone categories	V.1 Attack	This would capture news items that were toned to attack
		a political candidate or party during the campaigns.
	V. 2 Supportive	This would capture news that were toned to show
		support for a political party or candidate.
	V.3 Persuasive	This would capture news that were toned to persuade
		people to endorse, support, and vote for a political

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	candidate.		
	V.4 Discouragement	This would capture news that were toned to discourage people from supporting a political candidate or party.	
	V.5 Indifference	This would capture news that were toned in a way that showed indifference towards supporting, persuading,	
		discouraging, or attacking any political candidate or party.	
Frame categories	V.6 Strategy	This frame category would capture news that focused on the campaign activities and poll.	
	V.7 Personal issue	This would capture news that focused on candidates personal issues like health, educational background,	
		religion, ethnic group, and age.	
	V.8 Policy issue	This would capture news reports that highlighted the policies,, plans, or agenda the presidential candidates have for the citizens.	
	V.9 public records	This would capture news that focus on the public records of the presidential candidates.	
	V.10 Free election processes	This would capture the news that focused on the promotion of free and fair election, free election processes, as well as encourage people to vote and avoid selling their votes.	
	V.11 Misinformation	This would capture news items that were used to correct misconceptions about political parties and their presidential candidates during the campaigns.	

Table 1: Coding Guide

Data Presentation

Table 2: Categorisation of Vanguard coverage of the 2023 presidential campaigns according to the tone of reports

Tone categories	Frequency	Percentage	
Attack	45	33	
Supportive	27	20	
Persuasive	23	17	
Discouragement	7	5	
Indifference	34	25	
Total	136	100	

Table two

This table shows that majority of the campaign news were toned to attack political candidates and political parties, and this category accounts for 33% of the analysed reports. It also shows that several news items were tone to display support for a political party or presidential candidate, and this accounts for 20% of the analysed reports, while the lowest number reports were toned to discourage members of the public from voting for some presidential candidates, and this account for 5% of the overall reports.



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Table 3: Categorisation of *Vanguard* online newspaper coverage of the 2023 presidential campaigns according to the frames of the reports

Frame categories	Frequency	Percentage
Strategy frame	50	37
Personal issue frame	19	14
Policy issue frame	19	14
Public records frame	15	11
Free election process frame	19	14
Misinformation frame	14	10
Total	136	100

This table shows that the most dominantly used frame in the coverage of the campaign is strategy frame, and it accounts for 37% of the analysed reports, while the personal issue frame, policy issue frame, and free election process frame all followed through with 19%, and the misinformation frame accounts for the lowest numbers of reports with 10%.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study was aimed at confirming the most dominantly used frame and slant used by Vanguard newspaper (online) in the coverage of 2023 presidential election campaign, and the researchers discovered a lot of things while coding the reports. Firstly, the researchers discovered that the Vanguard newspaper gave high prominence to the 2023 Nigerian presidential election campaign as 136 reports were on its website between January 1 and January 26, 2023. The study's findings supported Ajibulu (2022) assertion that frames and tones are usually present in media news. The implication of this finding is that the election campaign was seen by the media as an important issue to report to the society and that the media gave up-to-date campaign news that were framed and toned in certain about the campaign developments.

While finding answers to the first research question of the study, which was to find out the most dominant tone of Vanguard newspaper (online) in the coverage of the election campaign, the researchers found out that each of the reports had specific tones they were reported with and this tone showed the emotions and motive behind the campaign news. Attack tone was majorly used to report the campaign news and this reveals that Nigeria polities is a game of word banters. This also showed that a lot of antagonism took place between presidential candidates, especially between Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party, Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressive Partyand Peter Obi of the Labour Party. Words like "stingy", "unhealthy" and "thief" were used by the candidates to attack one another, thereby influencing the tone of the reports to be toned that way.

The indifference tone was also significantly used by *Vanguard* newspaper (online) and this accounted for 20% of the news. News under this frame were toned to be indifferent to the election tussles, as many of the source of these news were sitting on the fence about who they support or oppose. Many of the reports that fell under this category were from the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). Also, 20% of the news were toned under the supportive category and news under this section were used to show support for a political candidate, or endorsement of a political party. Vanguard newspaper (online) campaign news

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that were toned to persuade Nigerians also account for 17% of the analysed reports. This category consisted of news encouraging people to either participate in the election by voting, or to persuade people to choose a candidate over others.

Furthermore, the discouragement tone had the least numbers of reports with 5%, and reports under this discouraged the sales of vote, or discouraged the choice of certain candidates. These results imply that *Vanguard* campaign reports were dominantly toned to attack. For the frame categories, it was discovered that the strategy frame dominated Vanguard reports on the campaign with 37%. The reports under this frame category were used to discuss polls, election activities, and other campaign strategies used during the campaign. The personal issue frame, policy issue frame and free election process frame each accounted for 19% of the reports, and the implications of these results is that *Vanguard* gave equal attention to issues concerning the candidates' personal life, their agenda and policies the candidates have for Nigeria, and the fairness of the election equally. Under the personal issue frame, matters like educational background of APC and PDP candidate frequently came up, while issues of the agenda, plans and policies the political candidates came up under the policy frame, and matters relating to the fair election, election and rigging came up.

Public records frame and misinformation frame account for 11% and 10% of the analysed reports respectively, and it implies that Vanguard newspaper (online) also gave attention to the public records to political candidates and their supporters. Most of the reports under this category also discussed how the candidates performed in their old public offices. While news under the misinformation frame were used by Vanguard newspaper (online) to correct wrong news, accusations, or opinions about the candidates, and to clarify issues about their personal lives.

In all, the findings support Adibe (2015) and Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli (2023) notion that the media have significant influence on political participation and Asemah et al (2022) assertion about the validity of the framing theory, as the study confirmed the presence of frames in the analysed news.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers conclude that *Vanguard* newspaper (online) majorly reported the presidential campaign in order to give updates about the polls and developments achieved by the candidates or their political parties during the election campaign, and that its reports are majorly toned to depict attacks between political candidates and supporters. As a result, it was recommended that:

- Newspapers should strive to report political stories without using the attack tone, as 1. this would shift focus from the antagonism experienced between candidates and their supporters, to tones that would assist Nigerians make informed decisions on their candidate choices.
- 2. The Vanguard newspaper (online) and other media outlets should use more of the policy frames in their election coverage in order to allow Nigerians know more about the plans the candidates have for Nigerians, and help them in deciding on who to vote for.



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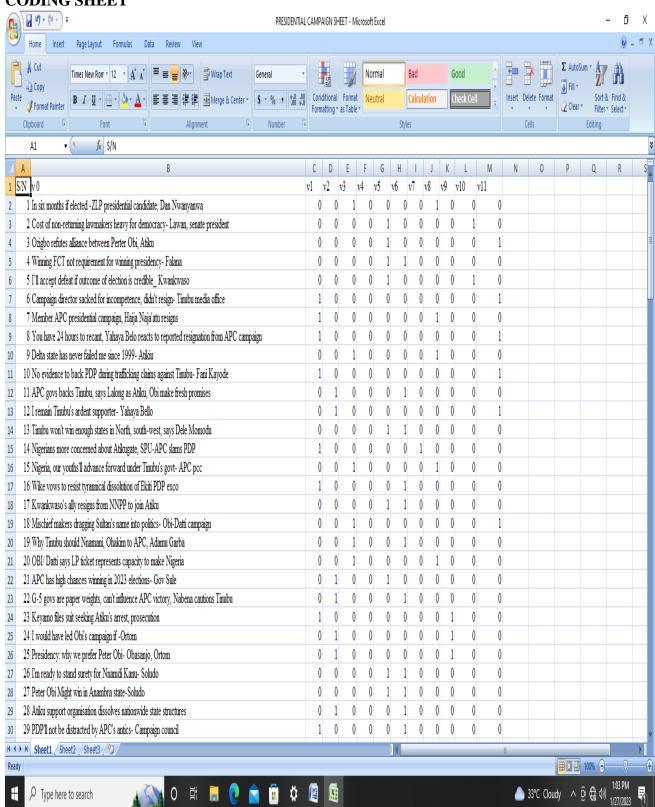
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CODING SHEET

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