

Nigerian Press Coverage of the 2015 Elections: What has Ownership Got to Do with It?

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Abstract

If ownership can make a critical difference in media coverage of issues, then the interesting spectacle in Nigeria where new wave of politicians now establish media houses should result in distinctive journalistic patterns in salient areas especially in the coverage of political events. This study was therefore aimed at examining how four Nigerian newspapers with two ownership structures covered the 2015 elections in Nigeria. *The Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers (owned by businessmen) and *The Sun* and *The Nation* newspapers (owned by politicians) were analysed. The scope of the study was between December 2014 to April 2015, and 6398 stories were got from 92 copies of the four dailies. Findings indicated that newspapers owned by politicians were guided by the political interest of their financiers while newspapers owned by businessmen were neutral in the coverage of the 2015 elections. This study confirms Altschull's (1984) theory of media ownership and therefore concludes that media products reflect the preferences of the dominant power structures.

Keywords: Nigerian press, Coverage, 2015 elections, Ownership structure, Media ownership.

1. Introduction

A nation's mass media coverage of issues reflects the views of those who hold and control economic and political power. And if media contents are to be perceived as the products of unspoken cultural values and beliefs by which people's lives are controlled, then it makes sense to assert that media contents such as news, features, editorials, opinions, etc, reflect the preferences of the dominant power structure (Anim, 2007). The media in their day to day operations seem to be imposing this dominant ideology on their audiences. This is done as the media perform the agenda-setting function. The question then becomes: whose agenda are the media setting? Is it the agenda of the powers that be? The media not only set the agenda for issues or persons that they want to portray as important, but they also transfer the salience of specific attributes belonging to those potential objects of interest (Griffin, 2000).

Galadima and Enighe (2001, p. 62) state that the media area often in liberal theory referred to as the "Fourth Estate", and the "Watchdog of the society", meaning that the media exist as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, education, promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilisation. Ndolo (2005, p. 21) further avers that Lasswell (1948), Wright (1960), and McQuail (1987) are among the many scholars that have studied the functions of mass media and they identified surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission, entertainment, mobilisation, personal identity, integration and social interaction as the major functions of mass media. These functions set the media apart as an important factor in the relationship between the government and the governed.

In performing the functions of agenda setting as well as the other core functions, the press sometimes deviates from the concept of objectivity for which it is known. In this regard, the common saying that "He who pays the piper dictates the tune" comes to play. Media ownership is an important factor that determines the contents of the mass media. Olusola (2010, p. 243) shares this view and maintains that "The interest of the media owner is a factor that is always taken into consideration in the presentation of any media content." Media organisations owned by the government are often accused of serving as government mouthpiece or megaphone instead of serving the public interest. In the same way, media organisations owned by private individuals and politicians are, also said to be biased of their owners, and most of the time profit-driven in their coverage. These assertions are in tandem with the views of Umechukwu (2001, p. 85) that "The Nigerian press has often been accused of aggravating the ugly situation through sinister prevarication in their reportage of events (politics, riots, religious conflicts, etc.).

2. Theoretical Underpinning

Theories are important in research exercise in that they lend themselves to various texts and analyses such that the phenomenon of interest to the researcher is "explained, clarified and even predicted as the case may be" (Edegoh, Ezech and Samson, 2015, p. 64). This study is anchored on the Theory of Media Ownership. McQuail (2005, p. 226-7) informs that Altschull (1984) developed the Theory of Media Ownership, adding that Altschull contends that "the content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press" (Altschull, 1984, p. 254).

Fundamental to an understanding of media structure is the question of ownership and how the powers of ownership are exercised. The belief that ownership ultimately determines the nature of media content is not just a Marxist's theory but virtually a common-sense axiom. As implied by Altschull, it is not just ownership that counts; it is the wide questions of who actually pays for the media products. McQuail (2005) argues that the central issue which arises under the theory is the extent to which media organisations can claim to exercise autonomy in relation to their owners, and to other direct economic agencies in their environments, especially those who provide operating funds: investors, advertisers, sponsors. According to Altschull's (1984) dictum that "The content of the news media always conforms to the interests of those who finance the press", the answer is fairly clear and also consistent with the principle of the free press theory in its "market" version.

The crux of the matter is that the autonomy of media outlets is given within the boundaries of owner's profit – where the media outlets is commercially owned, the content will reflect the point of view of the news organisation's owners and advertisers. Where the outfit fits into what Altschull calls an "interest pattern", the content mirrors the concerns and objectives of whoever is providing the financing.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have attempted to refine and extend Altschull's work. Their theory of media ownership and news content points out that the owners of media organisations have the ultimate power over the news content of the newspaper. They contend that the primary focus of a news organisation owned by a publicly held corporation is to make a profit and objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by company. Though in some rare cases, the owner may choose to make the readers interest his or her priority. The content of the news is built into the economic objectives of the owner secondary to an ideology such as promoting a particular agenda. The organisation cannot indefinitely ignore the economic goal. Especially when media firms are owned by stockholders, public service is usually sacrificed for the sake of profitability.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have found that news organisations funded primarily by commercial sources are far more likely to use objectivity and newsworthiness as their principal standards in making news judgments. The reason, Shoemaker and Reese (1991) said, is that a commercial media outlet is more responsive to its audience and advertisers, both of who, desire these qualities. They further found that news organisations that are financed primarily by "interest" sources are far less likely to place emphasis on objectivity and newsworthiness. Instead, their content is more likely to reflect the thinking of the special interest group or groups that control them. Thus, Shoemaker and Mayfield (1987) explain: "Media content" is "the product of the complex set of ideological forces held by those who fund the mass media" (Shoemaker & Mayfield, 1987, p. 30).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) also point out the important role that ownership plays in news media organisation. They argue that, "although news departments may be organisationally differed from the larger firm, content is still controlled indirectly through hiring and promotion practices" (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, p. 144). For example, newspapers usually endorse political candidates who echo the owner's or publishers' political attitude. In fact, ownership has become such a powerful force behind the media organisation that not only editorials and columns but also the coverage of news and features reflects the political beliefs or interest of the owners.

This present study aims to build on the work of Altschull, Shoemaker and Reese by applying the Theory of Media Ownership to newspapers owned by politicians and businessmen in the coverage of electoral issues in Nigeria.

2.1 Review of Literature

In 1993, Kenney and Simpson first conducted a study to examine the relationship between newspapers' ownership and coverage of the Presidential campaign. Shoemaker and Reese's (1991) Theory of Media Ownership as it concerns news content was used in the study. Kenney and Simpson analysed the news coverage of the publicly owned *Washington Post* and privately owned *Washington Times*. The analysis of these two dailies provided good evidence to test the theory of Shoemaker and Reese because they are of different types of ownership and financing. The study found that the *Washington Times* was more biased in its coverage of the 1988 Presidential campaign than the *Washington Post*. As a privately owned newspaper, the *Washington Times* supported conservative values and anti-communist views. It endorsed George Bush in the 1988 campaign for Presidency, which was reflected in the bias of its coverage (Kenney & Simpson, 1993). On the other hand, the publicly owned *Washington Post* presented balanced and neutral coverage of the Presidential campaign.

Kenney and Simpson's study was the first attempt to test the ownership theory of Shoemaker and Reese, and it found great evidence to support the theory, but it was limited in examining only two newspapers. The study did not compare the political views of the *Washington Times* with that of New World Communications, the owner of the newspaper. Thus, the study ignored an important perspective of the media ownership theory of Shoemaker and Reese (1991), "that newspaper content will reflect the political views of the owner". As stated before, ownership has become an influential force behind media organisations. Not only editorials and columns but also the coverage of news and features would reflect the political beliefs or interest of the owners. Newspapers usually endorse political candidates who echo the owner's or Publisher's political attitude

(Shoemaker & Reese, 1991).

Similarly, Akhavan-Majid and Bouderau (1995) examined the editorial role perception of chain-owned and independent newspapers. With control for the size of newspapers, there was no difference in editorial role perceptions. Perception changed due to size of newspapers, not due to ownership. Some studies addressed questions about effects of ownership and the size of newspapers on space and allocation of different kinds of content. Lacy (1991) found that ownership did-not have an effect on how news space was allocated: yet group-owned newspapers, when “compared to independently-owned ones, had shorter stories and devoted more space and stories to editorial and op-ed material.

Olusola (2010) carried out a study on ownership and the coverage of Child’s Rights in the Nigeria Newspaper. The investigated how media ownership affects the issue of the child against the backdrop of the challenge the media have in this respect. The study, through content-analysis examined two national newspapers of different ownership structures, government owned and privately-owned. The findings show some differences in the pattern of coverage adopted by the two newspapers. While coverage of child rights by the newspapers was generally low, government-owned newspaper did a little better in handling some areas of the reportage than the privately-owned newspaper.

2.2 Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the extent to which ownership structure affect coverage of electoral issues by Nigerian newspapers. Specifically, the study critically analysed how ownership structure influenced coverage of the 2015 elections in Nigeria. Since Udoakah (1998) and Anim (2004) have affirmed that regional groupings of newspapers play decisive roles in their coverage of political affairs in Nigeria, this present study takes a different dimension in looking at whether ownership has any role to play in the coverage of all issues and specifically, politics. The scope covers December 2014, February 2015, March 2015 and April 2015 which were the months for the party primaries, gubernatorial and Presidential elections in Nigeria.

In selecting the newspapers, the following assumptions were made.

- The four newspapers represent two distinct ownership structures;
- *The Vanguard* and *The Guardian* are owned by businessmen;
- *The Sun* and *The Nation* are owned by politicians; and
- The four newspapers are dailies.

The Vanguard was established in 1983 by Sam Amuka Pemu, a businessman. It is independent of political control and a national daily.

The Guardian was established in 1983 by Alex Ibru as a business entity. It is independent of political control and a national daily.

The Sun was established in 2001 by Orji Uzor Kalu, a politician and the former Governor of Abia State-Nigeria. It is politically controlled and a daily.

The Nation was established in 2006 by Ahmed Bola Tinubu, a politician and the former Governor of Lagos State. It is politically controlled and a daily.

The two politicians- Orji Uzor Kalu and Ahmed Bola Tinubu belong to PDP – Peoples’ Democratic Party and APC – All Peoples’ Congress respectively.

2.3 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of coverage given to issues by the four dailies under the study?
2. Did ownership structure of the four dailies influence the level of coverage given to national issues especially 2015 elections?
3. Did the owner’s affiliation to a political party influence the amount of coverage given to 2015 elections.
4. Did the owner’s affiliation to a political party influence the prominence given to 2015 elections.
5. Did ownership structure influence the direction of coverage given to the 2015 elections?
6. Did owner’s affiliation to a political party influence the purpose of coverage given to 2015 elections?

3. Method

Content analysis was employed as the research method. All newspapers published in Nigeria from December 2014 to April 2015, served as the universe of the study. To study all issues of these papers was not possible. So careful selection of these dates was made thus:

Table 1: Sample of Selected Newspapers and Dates

S/N	FOCUS	EDITIONS REQUIRED
1	PDP Gubernatorial Primaries of 8 th Dec. 2014	Dec. 8,9,&10, 2014
2	PDP Presidential Primaries of 10 th -11 th Dec. 2014	Dec. 19, 11 & 12 2014
3	APC Presidential Primaries of 4 th Dec. 2014	Dec. 4, 5, & 6, 2014
4	APC Presidential Primaries of 10 th Dec. 2014	Dec. 10, 11 & 12, 2014
5	Election Postponement by INEC on 7 th Feb. 2015	Feb. 7, 8, & 9 2015
6	Presidential Election and Declaration of Winner on 28 – 31 st March 2015	March 28, 29, 30 & 31 st 2015
7	Governorship Elections and Declaration of Winners on April 11 th – 13 th 2015.	April 11, 12, 13 & 14 2015
	Total	19 x 4 = 76

In all, 76 copies of Vanguard, Guardian, Sun and Nation were analysed in this study. So it was a census study of all the selected dates.

3.1 Types of Coverage/Coding Category

This study analysed only the news stories published in the months of December 2014, February 2015, March 2015 and April 2015 by all the four dailies used in this study.

The researchers constructed a coding category that met the specific needs of the study. The following categories were designed to measure the coverage inclination of the newspapers in terms of direction of coverage, prominence/ placement of political stories and purpose of the story. The units of analysis used in measuring direction of coverage include negative and neutral. The prominence given to the story was measured by looking at whether the story appeared in either front page, back page or inside page. In measuring the purpose of the story, the researchers looked at whether the story was to educate, influence, or castigate any political candidate or party.

To ensure that the agreement between coders was objective, the coded entries were subjected to intercoder reliability test using Scott's pi index. The intercoder reliability coefficients ranged from 75 to 89. The data generated from the study were quantitatively analysed.

4 Analysis of Findings

The data directly related to the research questions were analysed as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the nature of coverage given to issues by the four dailies under study? Table 2 below shows the generated data that guided the analysis of this question:

Table 2: Coverage of Issues by the four dailies

Story Genre	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Sun</i>	<i>Nation</i>	Total
Politics	719	557	732	822	2830
Economics	359	397	70	155	981
Sports	195	205	167	157	724
Arts/Entertainment	135	256	108	153	652
Education	55	74	61	36	226
Law	69	30	18	25	142
Religion	56	38	31	28	153
Health	75	85	37	31	228
Crime	87	36	82	66	271
Terrorism	54	47	37	53	191
Total	1804	1725	1343	1526	6398

Results of the analysis produced a total of six thousand, three hundred and ninety-eight news stories. *The vanguard* newspaper published a total of 1804 (28%) of the stories while *The Guardian* had a total of 1725 (27%) of the stories. *The sun* newspaper published 1343 (21%) of the stories while its counterpart, *The Nation* had a total of 1526 (24%) of the entire stories. This shows that newspapers owned by businessmen published higher stories of 3529 (55%) while newspapers owned by politicians published fewer stories of 2869 (45%).

Research Question 2: Does ownership structure influence coverage of 2015 elections.

Another interesting aspect of the result is on the amount of coverage given to each subject by the two structures of ownership represented by the newspapers. Politics had a total of 2830 (44%) of the entire stories published by the four dailies. This makes political stories the highest of the entire stories published. Out of this 2830 (44%), politically owned papers (Sun and Nation) had a total of 1554 (55%) while business-owned papers (Vanguard and Guardian) published fewer political stories of 1276 (45%). This shows that papers owned by politicians are more politically inclined in their coverage while papers owned by businessmen are more interested in the

coverage of economic stories. This could also be deduced from the fact that papers owned by businessmen published a total of 756 (77%) out of the 981 economic stories published by all the dailies while those owned by politicians published only 225 (23%) of economic stories. The same goes for other story genres as shown by table 3 below.

Table 3: Distribution of Story Genres According to Ownership Structures

Story Genre	Papers owned Businessmen	Papers owned by Politicians	Total
Politics	1270 (45%)	1554 (55%)	2830
Economics	756 (77%)	225 (23%)	981
Sports	400 (55%)	324 (45%)	724
Entertainment	391 (60%)	261 (40%)	652
Education	129 (57%)	97 (43%)	226
Law	99 (70%)	43 (30%)	142
Religion	94 (61%)	59 (39%)	153
Health	160 (70%)	68 (30%)	228
Crime	173 (64%)	98 (36%)	271
Terrorism	123 (64%)	68 (36%)	191
Total	3601	2797	6398

The data in table 3 clearly show that newspapers owned by politicians publish more of political stories while paying lesser attention to other story genres. This shows that ownership structure influenced the coverage of issues during the period of the study.

Research Question 3: Did owner's affiliation to a political party influence the amount of coverage given to 2015 elections? Findings indicated results shown in table 4 below:

Table 4: Coverage given to political parties, by the four dailies

Newspapers	PDP	APC	Both	Others	Total
<i>The Vanguard</i>	60 (8%)	45 (6%)	36 (5%)	578 (81%)	719
<i>The Guardian</i>	24 (4%)	19 (3%)	26 (5%)	488 (88%)	557
<i>The Sun</i>	275 (38%)	177 (24%)	122 (17%)	158 (21%)	732
<i>The Nation</i>	169 (21%)	260 (32%)	138 (17%)	255 (30%)	822
Total	528	501	322	1479	2830

The table above shows that *The Vanguard* and *The Guardian* published other political issues that had nothing to do with one party alone. This is shown in the high percentage of "others" with 578 (81%) and 488 (88%) respectively. It could therefore be said that the two newspapers owned by businessmen balanced their reports by being neutral in the coverage of 2015 elections. *The Sun* and *The Nation* (papers owned by politicians) based their coverage on the political interests of their owners. *The Sun* covered PDP more than APC with the score of 275 (38% to 177 (24%), while *The Nation* covered APC more than PDP with the score of 260 (32%) to 169 (21%) of the entire political stories. This shows that owner's affiliation influenced the newspapers' coverage of 2015 elections.

Research Question 4: Did owner's affiliation to a political party influence the prominence given to 2015 elections?

Table 5: Prominence given to stories by the four dailies

Newspapers	Front page	Inside	Back page	Total
<i>The Vanguard</i>	30 (4%)	648 (95%)	5 (1%)	719
<i>The Guardian</i>	27 (5%)	523 (94%)	7 (1%)	557
<i>The Sun</i>	43 (6%)	668 (92%)	21 (3%)	732
<i>The Nation</i>	35 (5%)	775 (94%)	12 (1%)	822
Total	135	2650	45	2830

Findings revealed that *The Sun* and *The Nation* (newspapers owned by politicians) gave more prominence to political stories by placing them in front pages with 43 (6%) and 35 (5%) respectively while *The Vanguard* and *The Guardian* had lesser stories on front page with 30 (4%) and 27 (5%) respectively. Table 6 shows the summary of ownership structure and placement of political stories.

Table 6: Ownership structure and Placement of Stories

Ownership Structure	Front Page	Inside	Back page	Total
Papers owned by Politicians	78 (5%)	1443 (93%)	33 (2%)	1554
Papers owned by Businessmen	57 (4%)	1207 (95%)	12 (1%)	1276
Total	135	2650	45	2830

Table 6 reveals that a total of 78 (50%) of political stories were published on the front pages of papers owned by politicians while 33 (2%) were published on the back pages. The rest of the stories 1443 (93%) were published on the inside pages. Newspapers owned by businessmen had a total of 5 (4%) front page stories, 12

(1%) back page stories while others 1207 (95%) were published on the inside pages. Ownership therefore influenced the prominence given to the coverage of 2015 elections.

Research Question 5: Did owner's affiliation to a political party influence the direction of coverage of 2015 elections? The data generated revealed the following as shown in table 7:

Table 8: Direction of coverage of the four dailies

Newspapers	Direction of stories			Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	
<i>The Vanguard</i>	25 (3%)	10 (1%)	684 (96%)	719
<i>The Guardian</i>	36 (6)	3 (1%)	518 (93%)	557
<i>The Sun</i>	378 (52%)	267 (36%)	87 (12%)	732
<i>The Nation</i>	452 (55%)	250 (30%)	120 (15%)	822
Total	891	530	140	2830

Table 8 shows how individual newspapers gave direction to their political reports. *The Vanguard* and *The Guardian* were more neutral in their political reports with 6489 (96%) and 518 (93%) respectively while *The Sun* and *The Nation* slanted their stories according to the political affiliations of their owners. Table 9 below shows how ownership structure influenced the direction of coverage:

Table 9: Ownership structure and direction stories

Ownership structure	Direction of stories			Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	
Papers owned by Politicians	830 (53%)	517 (33%)	207 (13%)	1554
Papers owned by Businessmen	61 (5%)	13 (1%)	1202 (94%)	1276
Total	891	530	1409	2830

Table 9 shows that newspapers owned by politicians had a total of 830 (53%) positive political stories while 517 (33%) were negative. Only 207 (13%) of their political reports were neutral. This means that the papers used their reports in favouring or disfavouring political interests of their owners. Papers owned by businessmen on the other hand were more neutral in their political reports. Out of 1276 of their stories, 61 (5%) were positive, 13 (1%) negative while greater 1202 (94%) of the stories were neutral.

Research Question 6: Did ownership structure influence the purpose of coverage of 2015 elections? The data in table 10 shows how ownership structure influenced the purpose of stories on 2015 elections.

Table 10: Ownership structure and Purpose of Story

Ownership Structure	Purpose of Story			Total
	Educate	Influence	Castigate	
Papers owned Politicians	322 (21%)	715 (46%)	517 (33%)	1554
Papers owned by Businessmen	919 (72%)	344 (30%)	13 (1%)	1276
Total	1241	1059	530	2830

Table 10 above reveals that out of 1554 stories published by politically owned papers, 322 (21%) were educative in nature, 715 (46%) were aimed at influencing readers' votes while the remaining 517 (33%) were aimed at castigating the political candidates. For the business-owned papers, 99(72%) of the stories were educative in nature, 344 (30%) were aimed at influencing the voting decisions of readers while 13 (1%) of the stories were aimed at castigating political candidates.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

This study basically aimed at content analyzing four Nigerian dailies, (*The Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The Sun*) with two different ownership structures. *The Vanguard* and *The Guardian* are owned by businessmen while *The Sun* and *The Nation* are owned by politicians. The goal was to find out whether their ownership structures influenced coverage of issues especially the coverage of 2015 elections. The election period was purposively chosen because elections are topical and are serious national issues which are given utmost coverage. Six research questions guided the study with regards to ownership structure and amount of coverage, prominence, direction of stories and purpose of stories.

The first research question which sought to ascertain the amount of coverage given by the four dailies revealed that coverage was given to local issues in all ramifications. This finding supports Coulson's (1994) finding that group and independent newspapers provide an appropriate amount of local coverage of issues. It is also in agreement with Druckman (2005) position that newspapers are less confined in the amount of coverage of issues when compared to the broadcast media.

The second research question which sought to find out whether ownership structure influenced the amount of coverage given to 2015 elections revealed that newspapers owned by politicians devoted more space to the coverage of political stories than papers owned by businessmen who were more interested in the coverage of economic stories. This is in conformity with Altschull's theory of media ownership which maintains that the

“content of the news media always conforms to the interests of those who finance the press” (McQuail, 2005 p. 291). Newspapers owned by politicians paid attention to the coverage of political events in order to protect the interests of their financiers while those owned by businessmen covered more of economic related stories because their financiers are more interested in business-related stories and profit-making. The third research question was to find out whether owner’s affiliation to a political party influenced the amount of coverage given to the elections. The findings that *The Sun* newspaper covered more stories on PDP – Peoples Democratic Party – which is the party of Orji Uzor Kalu –its financier, answered this research question in the affirmative. *The Nation* newspaper similarly gave higher coverage to APC – All Progressive Party – which is the party of Ahmed Bola Tinubu –its financier.

This finding supports the outcome of the study of Shoemaker and Reese (1991) that media content reflects the interests of those who fund the media. This finding differs from the position of Lacy (1991) who reported that ownership have no effect on how news space is allocated.

The fourth research question which sought to ascertain whether owner’s affiliation to a political party influenced the prominence given to the coverage of 2015 elections revealed that papers owned by politicians placed 78 (50%) of their stories on the front page while those owned by businessmen placed 57 (4%) of their stories in the front page. The four dailies, however, had greater percentage of their stories in inside pages, with 1443 (93%) and 1207 (95%) for newspapers owned by politicians and businessmen respectively. This finding shows that all the papers devoted more spaces in the inside pages for detailed analytical political reports. However, the study shows that most of the topical reports on politics had their headlines on front pages while detailed reports were contained inside pages. This is in conformity with Umueri (2006) submission that the front page draws readers’ attention to topical issues contained in inside pages.

Research Question five helped the researchers to ascertain whether owner’s affiliation to a political party influenced the direction of coverage given to political reports of 2015 elections. The study found that papers owned by politicians slanted their stories according to political affiliations of their owners. *The Sun* was more positive in the coverage of PDP while *The Nation* was more positive in the coverage of APC. *The Vanguard* and *The Guardian* as papers owned by were more neutral in their coverage. This position supports Griffin’s (2000) view that media products reflect the preferences of the dominant power structures. This finding also confirms Anim (2007) study which reported that Nigerian newspapers are influenced by the interests of their owners rather than by the national interest.

The last research question which sought to find out whether ownership structure influenced the purpose of the story revealed that papers owned by the political class mainly published stories that were intended to influence the voting decision of their readers. On the other hand newspapers with strict business inclination mainly published stories that aimed at educating their readers on the political events. This finding is in consonance with the view of Olusola (2010) that the interest of the media owner is always taken into consideration in the presentation of any media content. Again, this last finding consolidates Altschull (1984) theory of media ownership which maintains that the content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press. After all, “He that pays the piper, dictates the tune”. It is therefore correct to state that the press has ventured into the “production of consent” rather than “a reflection of consensus” (Griffin, 2000 p. 340).

5 Conclusion

The data from this study revealed conclusively that in the coverage of issues, specifically 2015 elections, the newspapers owned by politicians reflected the dominant interests and views of their financiers in their political reports. Evidence from the data revealed that *The Sun* newspaper favoured the Peoples 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 Progressive Congress (APC) which is the political party of its financier - Ahmed Bola 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. Newspapers owned by businessmen, on the other hand, protected the economic interests of their owners. They were more neutral in the coverage of the 2015 elections. This, no doubt, was done in order not to favour any political party or candidate so as to continue to attract advertisements from all the parties and candidates. So the financial interests of their owners were considered in the amount of coverage, direction of coverage, purpose of story and prominence given to political parties and political candidates.

This study therefore concludes that media content just like Altschull (1984) propounded in his theory of media ownership, is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended that:

1. Nigerian journalists be encouraged to uphold objectivity no matter the pressure from their financiers;

2. There is need for journalists in Nigeria and Africa in general, to be socially responsible in the coverage of politics and election;
3. African journalists in general should embrace the cherished and universal ethics of the journalism profession by providing fair and balanced political reports.

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