

Analysis of News Reports by Vanguard and the Punch Newspapers on Vote-Buying in the 2024 Gubernatorial Election in Edo State

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Abstract

The researcher seeks to analyse the news reports by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers on vote-buying in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State. Specific objectives were to examine the frequency of coverage, slant, prominence and the dominant themes uncovered on the issue of vote buying in the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. The theories found suitable to anchor on this research was the agenda setting and social responsibility theories. The research design employed in this study was content analysis. The sample size as recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was 169. Systematic and purposive sampling techniques were used to access the population. Data collection was done using the coding sheet as instrument while content categories were determined beforehand. The Inter-coder reliability was 90%. The findings of the study show that the frequency of coverage of vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers was very low, with weekly and monthly coverage having the same frequency, while daily coverage was non-existent. The findings further revealed that the educative, informative, and advocacy slants featured in the coverage of the Edo State gubernatorial election. However, these were in different degrees as reflected in data obtained. The dominant theme uncovered in the coverage of vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers was prevention and deterrence. The study recommends that newspapers should increase the frequency of coverage given to vote buying, as there is a need to improve vote buying reports for citizens to understand its effect on the electoral system and society as a whole and also the Nigerian newspapers must ensure they play an advocacy role by reporting news on vote buying in an advocacy slant.

Keywords: advocacy slant, electoral system, frequency of coverage, gubernatorial election, vote-buying

1. Introduction

The mass media has become an important part of the daily lives of citizens, playing a vital role in shaping perspectives, informing the public about current events, and influencing societal norms. From traditional platforms such as the television, radio, and newspapers to modern digital media outlets, the media significantly impact individuals and society (Hema, 2023). The earliest form of mass media was the newspaper, followed by radio and television, and today, the Internet. Because of their emerging function as a watchdog that monitors national governance by exposing excesses and corruption and as well holding those in power accountable, because the media are regarded as the Fourth Estate, supplementing the three branches of government by providing checks and balances.

As pointed out by Martin and Copeland (2003), the media, of which the newspaper is part of, help to shape opinion, provide a forum for public discussion and debate, and expose wrongdoing through their information gathering, analysis and dissemination. Newspapers have been the basis of modern society, playing a vital role in shaping public opinion, facilitating discourse, and holding those in power accountable.

Despite the advent of digital media, newspapers remain a crucial source of information, analysis, and commentary, providing a unique perspective on current events. This is worthy of note as an informed citizenry is essential for a well-functioned democracy. By providing accurate and timely information, newspapers enable citizens to engage in meaningful debates and make informed decisions during elections.

Newspapers play a crucial role in providing people with the information they need to make informed decisions. As posited by Olayinka and Ridwan (2024), the functions of media in building a nation are diverse and essential for the development of a cohesive and informed society. One of the primary functions is to inform the public by providing accurate and timely information about current events, policies, and social issues. One of the social issues which has bedeviled the Nigerian electoral system is vote buying. As is well-known, elections are very critical when it comes to democracy, especially in third world countries, therefore, anti-democratic practices such as vote buying must discourage. This function of the media is especially important during elections, which are a key part of democratic process.

Elections allow citizens to choose their leaders and have a say in how their country is run. However, elections alone don't guarantee a healthy democracy. They provide a framework for peaceful transitions of power and help ensure that leaders have the legitimacy and authority they need to govern effectively.

According to Aghator and Moussa (2023), Nigeria's elections are often characterized by irregularities, which have resulted in a weak political system without well-defined philosophies and ideologies. Being a significant part of the election process, the media plays a crucial role in democratization. There can be no successful election without the media. The media are a powerful instrument for influencing public opinion through the reports they provide and the strategies for delivering this information. This prompted Oboh (2016) to describe the media as the Fourth

Estate of the Realm, holding the government accountable for the conduct of the elections. McQuail (2005) explains that the "Fourth Estate" is the political power possessed by the media, which is synonymous with the other three estates of power in Britain: Lords, Church, and Commons and in Nigeria: Executive, Legislature and Judiciary.

In Nigeria, electoral processes have recorded cases of crudeness, often characterized by rigging, and other vices, predominantly vote-buying; any action that violates the electoral process is classified as electoral fraud or malpractice and is considered an impediment to free and fair elections. A government produced through such a marred electoral process is inherently undemocratic. In Nigeria, elections are often perceived as a winner-takes-all scenario, requiring a "fight-to-the-death" attitude. With such high stakes, politicians spare no effort, fair or foul, to secure votes (Fafchamps & Vicente, 2013). This is why many Nigerian elections are marred by diverse electoral malpractices, including vote buying, rigging, and violence (Adamu et al., 2016).

Vote-buying involves the direct exchange of material goods or benefits by political elites to secure electoral support (Carreras & Irepoglu, 2013). It includes purchasing voting shares or making payments to influence voters to favour a specific candidate (Nichter, 2014). Electoral outcomes influenced by vote-buying are becoming the norm in emerging democracies like Nigeria. Since transitioning from military to civilian rule, Nigerian politicians have manipulated electoral rules by inducing material benefits to secure mass support (Bratton, 2008). Since the return of democracy in May 1999, vote-buying has grown in scale and with perpetrators becoming more emboldened. Numerous videos and images have surfaced, showing the open distribution of cash, food, and valuable items to voters by politicians during elections. This has led to Nigeria's electoral politics being aptly described as "cash-and-carry democracy." If not urgently addressed, this trend poses a grave danger to Nigeria's democracy.

Additionally, it has been suggested that the prevalence of vote-buying since the return of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999 far surpasses what was experienced in previous republics. Videos and images have emerged showing politicians and party stalwarts distributing money, food, or gift items to eligible voters in exchange for votes in different parts of the country (Onuoha and Ojo, 2018). This has led to Nigeria's electoral politics being described as "cash-and-carry democracy" especially as witnessed in the recently concluded Edo State gubernatorial election.

The Edo State general election on September 21, 2024, was overshadowed by allegations of voter manipulation, vote-buying, and irregularities. Election observers, including civil society organizations, condemned the process, with some rejecting results in certain local government areas (Habib, 2024). Samson Itodo, the Executive Director of Yiaga Africa, was quoted in *The Punch* Newspaper as reportedly saying that political parties bribed voters with amounts ranging from ₦5,000 to ₦10,000 to secure votes. (*Punch Newspapers*, 2024). According to a report from *The Punch Newspaper*, the PDP candidate, Asue Ighodalo, accused the APC of offering ₦10,000 to ₦20,000 to voters (*Punch Newspapers*, 2024). The 2024 Gubernatorial election in Edo State was

particularly affected by this menace. This makes it imperative to proffer solutions for improving elections in Nigeria and making the electoral process more credible.

The 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State, like many Nigerian elections, was said to be ruined by allegations and reports of vote-buying. Be that as it may, the responsibility of the news media (in this case, the newspaper) has not changed. Newspaper organizations such as *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers play a crucial role in highlighting these electoral malpractices. Through investigative reports, analyses, and editorials, these newspapers provide critical insights into the dynamics, methods, and impacts of vote-buying on electoral outcomes and democratic development.

Given the media's influence in shaping public perception and holding political actors accountable, analyzing the reportage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers has become imperative as it will provide valuable insight into how the issue was presented, understood, and addressed in the public sphere. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the content, themes, and perspectives presented by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in their reports on vote-buying in the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the media's role in exposing the electoral malpractice, shaping public discourse, and promoting electoral integrity in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The mass media, often referred to as the fourth estate of the realm, plays a crucial role in democratic governance. As a watchdog, the press frames issues, oversees the three arms of government, and advocates for public interest. In the context of vote-buying, the media has a responsibility to educate the electorate and promote transparency and accountability. Despite efforts by electoral bodies to curb vote buying, the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election was allegedly marred by widespread reports of this malpractice, undermining the credibility and integrity of democratic processes (Dania, 2024). This persistence raises questions about the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks in addressing vote buying. While newspapers may have reported on vote buying before the election, there is a gap in understanding the frequency, prominence, themes and slant of these reports, particularly in *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Therefore, this study is preoccupied with filling this gap by analyzing the frequency, prominence, themes and slant of news reports on vote buying in the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election and examining how these reports presented the issue within the lenses of the democratic ideals of transparency and accountability.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to analyze the news reports by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers on vote-buying in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State.

Specific objectives include, To:

1. examine the frequency of coverage on the issue of vote buying in the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers,

2. identify the slant used by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in the coverage of vote-buying in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State,
3. find out the prominence accorded to news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspaper in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State,
4. identify the dominant themes uncovered in the coverage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were addressed by the study.

1. What is frequency of coverage on the issue of vote-buying in the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers?
2. What is the slant used by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in the coverage of vote-buying in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State?
3. What is the prominence according to news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspaper in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State,
4. What dominant themes were uncovered in the coverage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is significant in theory and in practice. In theory, the study will contribute to expanding the applications of the agenda setting theory and the social responsibility theory. The study will add to the growing body of knowledge and for especially in the areas of handling the menace of vote-buying on electoral malpractices, particularly vote-buying, in Nigerian elections.

In practice, the study by analyzing the narratives and themes presented in the media, will study shed light on how newspapers shape public awareness and perceptions of vote-buying. The findings of this study can serve as a guide to electoral bodies (such as INEC), and advocacy groups in designing interventions to combat vote-buying. By examining the role of media in addressing vote-buying, the study contributes to broader efforts aimed at strengthening Nigeria's democracy.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

The study adopted content analysis as research design. This approach is seen as a data reduction and sense making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings. It can also be seen as an objective and systematic analysis or study of the contents of any document or record that are manifest. It is used to analyze and interpret the meaning of texts and images, which involves an objective examination of the content of communication of any given medium. Content analysis involves using the techniques of behavioral observation to measure the occurrence of specific events in literature, movies, television programmes or similar media that present replicas of behaviours (Gravetter and Forzano 2012).

As a research design, content analysis is helpful to analyze and interpret the meaning of texts, images, and other media; to answer research questions, test hypotheses, and gain insights into various phenomena, such as public opinion, media representation, cultural trends, and social attitudes.

In the context of this study, content analysis is a fitting design as the study is concerned with examining the content of *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers with view of making valid insight and points from news reports regarding their coverage of vote-buying.

2.2 Population of the study

The population of the study is made up of editions of the *Vanguard* and *The Punch* Newspaper published between April 24th to September 20th, 2024. Since the newspapers under study are published daily, there is a breakdown of the population, as shown in Table 1. The table's population represents all the newspapers' editions for the period covered by the study, as shown below. The population was 300.

Table 1: Population of the study

Month	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>The Punch</i>	Total
April 24 th -30 th	7	7	14
May 1 st – 31 st	31	31	62
June 1 st – 30 th	30	30	60
July 1 st -31 st	31	31	62
August 1 st – 31 st	31	31	62
September 1 st -20 th	20	20	40
TOTAL	150	150	300

2.3 Sample size

The sample size for the study was determined using an existing template put together by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). For a population of 300, the template recommends a sample size of 169. The sample size for the study was, therefore, 169.

2.4 Sampling technique

The sampling technique used for this study was Systematic sampling technique and Purposive sample technique. According to Thomas (2020), Systematic sampling is a probability sampling method in which researchers select members of the population at a regular interval (or k) determined in advance. The number k can be any number for instance two, using systematic sampling will be selecting every 2nd number in the population. In this study, the systematic sampling process involved selecting 2nd unit of the newspaper from the population until the desired sample size was achieved

2.5 Content categories

Content categories refer to the classification or grouping of content into specific themes, topics, or types. In research, content categories help organize and analyze data, such as themes, topics, tone and format. The content category for this study includes:

Category A: Frequency of coverage

This category examines how often news reports about vote buying are published or broadcast.

1. **Daily:** This was for news reports on vote buying that occurred on an everyday basis.
2. **Weekly:** This was captured if news reports on vote buying featured within a seven-day period.
3. **Monthly:** For this, news reports on vote buying are featured within a month (30 or 31 days) period.

Category B: Slant of news story

This category looked at how news stories about vote buying are presented. It checks if the story is:

1. **Educative:** This was captured when the news story was written with a view to educating readers on vote-buying as a vice that must be avoided.
2. **Informative:** In this category, consideration was given to news stories that only sought to provide information on a case (s) of vote-buying
- A. **Advocacy:** When the newspaper report focuses on condemning, kicking against, and reporting news on vote buying in a way that seeks to eradicate it in society, it is coded as advocacy. Advocacy entails reporting what should happen not what is happening.

Category C: Prominence of news stories

1. **Front page:** These are news reports that are found in the front pages of newspapers. In the context of this study, any story reported on the front page of any of the selected newspapers will be regarded as a very important or very prominent story. Therefore, news reports on vote buying found on the Front Page are considered very important and thus classified as very prominent story.
2. **Back page:** This category was designed to capture news stories on vote buying placed on the back page of the newspaper. This establishes that news reports placed on the back page are considered important
3. **Inside page:** This category captures news reports on corrupt practices that are tucked in the inside pages of the newspapers, that is, page 2 to the penultimate page before the back page. In the context of this study, any news report on corrupt vote buying placed in the inside pages of the selected newspapers will be regarded as least in the order of prominence or importance. In essence, any story placed in the Inside Page of any of the newspapers is not important and therefore not prominent.

Category D: Dominant themes on vote buying

Dominant themes refer to the patterns, ideas, and perspectives that emerge in the treatment of vote buying in news reports that border on the following;

1. **Condemnation of vote-buying:** In this category, consideration was given to news reports on vote buying that took a stand in strongly disapproving of the act of vote buying and emphasizing its negative impact on democracy.
2. **Investigation and prosecution:** In this category, consideration was given to news reports on vote buying Reports on investigating, arrest and prosecuting of individuals and groups suspected of vote buying, highlighting efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.

3. **Impact on election credibility:** In this category, consideration was given to news report vote buying that lays emphasis on the impact of election credibility to government and nation, emphasizing how vote buying undermines the legitimacy and credibility of elections, governments, and nations.
4. **Prevention and deterrence:** In this category, consideration was given to news reports on vote buying that write on strategies to prevent and deter vote buying, including electoral reforms, voter education, and law enforcement.
5. **Politician or party involvement:** In this category, consideration was given to news reports highlight on coverage of politicians or parties implicated in vote buying, examining their roles and responsibilities.
6. **Public reaction:** This is when news stories on public responses, protests, outrage, and demands for action against vote buying.
7. **Other Categories:** In this category, consideration will be focused on news reports that do not fall under the categorized dominant themes.

2.6 Methods of data analysis

This study employed a quantitative method of data analysis. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. In other words, quantitative data were presented in tables which show frequencies and percentages.

3. Results And Discussions

3.1 Data Presentation

Table 2: News reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspaper

	Months	News Reports on Votebuying	Other Political Reports on the Election	Total
<i>Vanguard</i>	April 24 th -30 th	0(0%)	3(100%)	3(1.7%)
	May 1 st – 31 st	0(0%)	20(100%)	20(11.3%)
	June 1 st – 30 th	0(0%)	24(100%)	24(13.6%)
	July 1 st -31 st	0(0%)	30(100%)	30(16.9%)
	August 1 st – 31 st	0(0%)	43(100%)	43(24.3%)
	September 1 st - 20 th	1(1.8%)	56(98.2%)	57(32.2%)
	Total	1(0.6%)	176(99.4%)	177(100%)
<i>The Punch</i>	Months	News Reports on Votebuying	Other Political Reports on the Election	Total
	April 24 th -30 th	0(0%)	4(100%)	4(2.5%)
	May 1 st – 31 st	0(0%)	16(100%)	16(10%)
	June 1 st – 30 th	0(0%)	22(100%)	22(13.8%)
	July 1 st -31 st	0(0%)	25(100%)	25(15.6%)
	August 1 st – 31 st	2(5.1%)	37(94.9%)	39(24.4%)
	September 1 st - 20 th	3(5.6%)	51(94.4%)	54(33.7)
	Total	5(3.1%)	155(96.9%)	160(100%)

Table 2 shows the coverage of news reports on vote buying and other political reports on the election in *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Data obtained and presented indicates that both newspapers had relatively low coverage of vote buying stories, with *Vanguard* reporting a very insignificant number and *The Punch* a bit higher, out of the total number of political reports analyzed. This suggests that vote buying was not given much coverage in the Edo State gubernatorial election by these newspapers.

Table 3: Frequency of coverage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers

Frequency	Vanguard	The Punch	Total
Daily	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Weekly	0(0%)	5(100%)	5(83.3)
Monthly	1(100%)	0(0%)	1(16.7%)
Total	1(16.7%)	5(83.3)	6(100%)

Data obtained in Table 3 indicates a notable difference in the frequency of vote-buying stories between *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Data shows that *The Punch* newspaper had a higher frequency of reports on vote buying, exclusively in their weekly editions. In contrast, *Vanguard's* coverage was very low, limited to a single monthly report. This gap highlights that *The Punch* newspapers have more coverage of vote buying compared to *Vanguard*.

Table 4: Slant of news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers.

Slant	Vanguard	The Punch	Total
Educative	0(0%)	3(100%)	3(50%)
Informative	0(0%)	2(100%)	2(33.3%)
Advocacy	1(100%)	0(0%)	1(16.7%)
Total	1(16.7%)	5(83.3%)	6(100%)

The data in Table 4 reveals the slant of news reports on vote buying in *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. *The Punch* newspaper dominated the coverage, with a significantly higher number of reports in the educative slant and a notable presence in the informative slant. In contrast, *Vanguard* newspaper's coverage was comparably very low, with a single report in the advocacy slant, while its presence in the educative and informative slants was non-existent. This suggests that *The Punch* focused on educating and informing readers about vote buying, while *Vanguard* newspaper's limited coverage took an advocacy slant.

Table 5: Prominence accorded news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard*, *The Punch* newspapers.

Prominence	Vanguard	The Punch	Total
Front page	1(33.3%)	2(66.7)	3(50%)
Back page	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Inside page	0(0%)	3(100%)	3(50%)
TOTAL	5(83.3%)	1(16.7%)	6(100%)

In Table 5, data presented indicates the prominence accorded to news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Notably, both newspapers did not

feature any stories on the back page. *The Punch* dominated the coverage, with a higher number of stories on the front page and all other stories on the inside pages, accounting for the total coverage. In contrast, *Vanguard* newspaper's coverage was comparably very low, with only one story on the front page. Overall, the prominence of vote buying stories was relatively low, with front pages and inside pages sharing the same prominence almost evenly.

Table 6: Dominant themes uncovered in the coverage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers.

Dominant Themes	Vanguard	The Punch	Total
Condemnation Of Vote-Buying	0(0%)	1(100%)	1(16.7%)
Investigation And Prosecution	1(100%)	0(0%)	1(16.7%)
Impact On Election Credibility	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Prevention And Deterrence	0(0%)	3(100%)	3(50%)
Politician Or Party Involvement	0(0%)	1(100%)	1(16.7%)
Public Reaction	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Other Categories	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total	1(16.7%)	5(83.3%)	6(100%)

The data obtained and presented in Table 6 shows the dominant themes in the coverage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Data indicates that "Prevention and deterrence" was the most prominent theme. This theme dominated the coverage, with *The Punch* newspaper's reports on this theme being significantly higher than other themes. Notably, some themes, such as "Impact on election credibility" and "Public reaction", received no coverage at all. Conversely, the table shows that prevention and deterrence constituted the overriding theme in the coverage of vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers.

3.2 Discussion of findings

Research question one: What is the frequency of coverage on the issue of vote-buying in the 2024 Edo State gubernatorial election by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers?

In addressing this research question, the content categories assessed three classifications of what constitutes the frequency of coverage on the issue of vote buying in the election by the newspaper, daily, weekly and monthly.

Data obtained and presented indicates a notable difference in the frequency of vote-buying stories between *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. *The Punch* newspaper had a higher frequency of reports on vote buying, exclusively in their weekly editions. In contrast, *Vanguard* newspaper's coverage was very insignificant, limited to a single monthly report. This gap highlights *The Punch* newspaper's more coverage of vote buying compared to *Vanguard*.

Therefore, the answer to the research question is evident. The coverage of vote buying during the Edo State

Governorship election by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers was abysmally infrequent.

Reference must be made to the theoretical framework of this study. The agenda-setting theory provides a framework for understanding the significance of this finding. According to this theory, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse by prioritizing certain issues over others. By selectively highlighting specific topics or events, the media can influence what people think about and perceive as important. As Chenkhinwee (2014) notes, the media can have a strong effect on public opinion by repeatedly emphasizing certain issues, thereby creating a sense of urgency and importance around those issues.

In the context of vote-buying, as posited by Schaeffer (2002), Vote buying is a widespread phenomenon. It is usually viewed as a purely economic exchange in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder. It is a practice widely regarded as a threat to the integrity of electoral processes, the media's role in shaping public discourse is particularly significant. Vote-buying undermines the principles of democracy by compromising the freedom and fairness of elections. By providing adequate coverage of this issue, the media can help to raise awareness about its implications and promote a more informed and engaged citizenry. Furthermore, by examining the practice of vote-buying and its consequences, the media can contribute to a more transparent and accountable democratic process. It is also imperative to refer to one the reviewed work in this study. A study carried out by Ofei et al. (2024) entitled: An Assessment of the Mass Media as a Medium for Campaign Against Vote Buying During Elections in Nigeria 2023 Presidential Election. The findings of this study show a generally positive perception of the effectiveness of mass media campaigns in countering vote buying during the 2023 presidential election. Responses from the study underscore the diverse and influential role of various mass media platforms in disseminating information about the dangers of vote buying.

However, the findings of this present study which uses content analysis design suggest that both *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers did not provide sufficient coverage of vote-buying issues, with only six stories reported over a six-month period. This limited coverage raises concerns about the media's role in shaping public discourse and promoting electoral integrity. The disparity in coverage between the two newspapers also highlights the need for a more consistent and comprehensive approach to reporting on vote-buying and other electoral issues.

The implications of these findings are significant. By not providing adequate coverage of vote-buying, the media may be failing to fulfill its watchdog role and hold those in power accountable. This limited coverage may also contribute to a lack of awareness and understanding among citizens about the importance of electoral integrity and the need to prevent vote-buying. Ultimately, this may undermine the democratic process and the legitimacy of elected officials.

In all of this, the findings of this study highlight the need for a more comprehensive and consistent approach to reporting on vote-buying and other electoral issues. By providing adequate coverage and analysis of these issues,

the media (newspapers) can play a crucial role in promoting electoral integrity and contributing to a more transparent and accountable democratic process.

Research question two: What is the slant used by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in the coverage of vote-buying in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State?

The slant (also referred to as direction) of a news report has to do with the perspective from which the press decides to present a report. Traditionally, slant is examined using positive, negative, and neutral as parameters; however, the context of this study necessitated the use of educative, informative, and advocacy as slants. Data obtained showed that the least used slant was the advocacy slant. In other words, news reports on vote buying in *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers paid little attention to advocating against vote buying. A closer examination of the data obtained revealed that *The Punch* newspaper dominated the coverage, with a higher number of reports in the educative slant and a notable presence in the informative slant. In contrast, *Vanguard* newspaper's coverage was comparably very low, with a single report in the advocacy slant, while its presence in the educative and informative slants was nonexistent. This suggests that *The Punch* focused on educating and informing readers about vote buying, while *Vanguard's* limited coverage took an advocacy slant.

The research question is therefore answered by stating that the educative, informative, and advocacy slants featured in the coverage of the Edo State Governorship election. However, these were in different degrees as reflected in data obtained.

However, it is also important to link this finding to the literature reviewed in this study. As posited by Lee and Borrero (2023), advocacy is a social structure that enables people to have their voices heard by helping such people understand their rights and express their views. It is based on fundamental pillars, which involve supporting and allowing the people to express their opinions, accessing valid information, and explore various possible options for service provision. According to Fresina and Pickles (2013), Media advocacy is a way to influence decision-makers through media outlets. Given the importance of media advocacy in promoting social change, the findings indicate a notable gap in the media's role in advocating against vote buying.

The absence of reports on the educative and informative slants in *Vanguard's* coverage is particularly striking. Overall, the study highlights the need for more comprehensive and driven reporting on vote buying issues.

Research question three: What is the prominence accorded to news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspaper in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State?

Prominence is significant in the coverage of specific issues in the print media. In measuring prominence, the placement of the news report is the major factor taken into consideration. When news reports are found on the front

page of a newspaper, such reports are deemed to be very prominent. The same is applicable when a news report is found on the back pages of a newspaper. News reports tucked in the inside pages are deemed not to have been accorded prominence. Following from this, data presented show that the prominence accorded to news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Notably, both newspapers did not feature any stories on the back page. *The Punch* dominated the coverage, with a higher number of stories on the front page and all other stories on inside pages, accounting for the total coverage. In contrast, *Vanguard's* coverage was comparably very low, with only one story on the front page. Overall, the findings of this research show that the prominence accorded to vote buying stories was relatively low, with front pages and inside pages sharing the coverage almost evenly. As the finding has suggested, prominence was not accorded to news reports on vote buying.

Conversely, it is accurate to address the research question by emphatically stating that there was no significant accordance of prominence to news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. It is imperative to attempt a link between this finding and the theories that anchored this research work. The social responsibility theory is fitting, as its tenets can be projected from this finding. According to Fiveable (2024), Social responsibility theory is a media ethics concept that emphasizes the obligation of the press to serve the public interest and provide accurate, fair, and balanced information. They further stated that the theory argues that while freedom of the press is essential, it must be accompanied by accountability to society, ensuring that journalists act ethically and responsibly in their reporting. The media should be pluralist and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and rights of reply. Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society, as well as to employees and the market. The most important way the press does this is through the placement of news reports. When according to prominence to news reports, the press shows that it is fulfilling its obligation to society. As the finding has suggested, prominence was not accorded to news reports on vote buying, which means that the press is not fulfilling its duties and responsibilities to society.

Research question four: What dominant themes were uncovered in the coverage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State?

The research question was addressed with content categories that reflected dominant themes obtainable in reporting on vote buying.

The data obtained and presented in Table 4.5 shows the dominant themes in the coverage of vote-buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers. Data indicates that Prevention and Deterrence was the most prominent theme, with all reports coming from *The Punch*. This theme dominated the coverage, with *The Punch's* reports on this theme being significantly higher than other themes. *The Punch* dominated overall coverage, with a higher number of reports compared to *Vanguard*, whose coverage was

comparably very low. Notably, some themes, such as Impact on election credibility and public reaction, received no coverage at all.

In a direct answer to this research question, the dominant theme as reported revolves around Prevention and Deterrence. The finding here is uncommendable as it suggests themes are not taken into consideration when writing on vote buying in these newspapers.

It is imperative to link this work with existing empirical study in on vote buying a study carried out by Toyin et al. (2024) entitled Election campaigns and vote-buying in Nigeria: Media study perspectives. The study examined the dynamics of vote-buying and election campaigns in Nigeria within the media study perspectives. It focused on the multifaceted dimensions of election campaigns, political campaign strategies and the phenomenon of vote buying. The findings from the study show that there is need to deepen understanding of the elements of electoral communication strategies and voters' behaviour as related to media studies.

Also, the findings of the present study consistent with existing literature on vote buying. According to Zaka (2021) also notes that vote buying is neither system-specific nor space-bound, as it is common to all political systems, whether advanced or developing, medieval or contemporary. For Joseph and Vashchanka (2022), vote buying is an electoral campaign violation that occurs in many countries, undermining the integrity of elections and detrimental to democratic governance. This all points to the fact that the impact of vote buying is severe, and media organisations must strive to report on it to bring out the themes that will in turn help to educate the public. In conclusion, vote buying exists in all contexts, differing only in magnitude and manifestation from one policy to another.

5. Summary, Conclusion, And Recommendations

5.1 Summary of findings

The aim of this study was to analyse news reports by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers on vote buying in the 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State.

The study was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory and the Social Responsibility Theory. Content analysis was adopted as the research design. The findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. The frequency of coverage of vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers was very low, with weekly and monthly coverage having the same frequency, while daily coverage was non-existent.
2. The educative, informative, and advocacy slants featured in the coverage of the Edo State gubernatorial election. However, these were in different degrees as reflected in data obtained. *The Punch* newspaper's coverage of news reports on vote buying was mostly informative and educative in slant, with little or no advocacy. *Vanguard* newspaper's use of slant was relatively low, and its coverage of vote buying was less significant.
3. There was no significant prominence according to news reports on vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers.
4. The dominant theme uncovered in the coverage of vote buying by *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers revolved around prevention and deterrence. Other themes included

condemnation of vote buying, investigation and prosecution, and political/party involvement with others getting none.

5.2 Conclusion

The media, including traditional and new media, play a crucial role in exposing vote buying, highlighting it as a public issue, and suggesting solutions. They empower citizens to fight against vote buying. The media are known as watchdogs, agenda setters, and gatekeepers who monitor governance, frame issues, and provide various perspectives. By doing so, media coverage shapes norms and cultures, influencing policymaking and reforms.

The media are a vital part of our culture and play a significant role in politics. They shape our understanding of right and wrong, inform us about voting buying, and offer solutions. By covering these issues widely, they make politicians take notice. The media also give citizens a platform to express their opinions and demand accountability from leaders.

Although the media are not traditional tools against voting, they are essential for achieving cultural change that supports new laws and reforms. The media's power to change people's perceptions, norms, and behaviour is crucial in fighting vote buying.

Media coverage plays a big role in shaping our understanding of what is normal and what is not. Newspapers can focus on cases of vote buying and give a voice to people who speak out against it. This helps create awareness that vote buying is a problem and that people are concerned about it.

The study has concluded that *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers do not provide adequate coverage on vote buying. The newspapers made six reports, with *The Punch* having five and *Vanguard* having one for the period of six months for this study. The findings show that few reports were weekly and monthly, with none in the daily aspect of the newspapers under study.

The study has also concluded that besides the nature of vote buying reported, the prominence accorded news reports on vote buying was not commendable. Reports on vote buying were found on the front page of *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers and few in the inside pages with none on the back page, which signifies the little or no importance accorded to vote buying. Besides the prominence, the study concludes that among the dominant themes in the coverage of vote-buying, prevention and deterrence was the most prominent theme, with almost all reports coming from *The Punch*. Notably, it is seen that some themes, such as impact on election credibility and public reaction, received no coverage at all.

The study concludes that in general terms, newspapers are not making an impressive effort in the coverage of vote buying, as it looks as though vote buying is not even considered an electoral crime, as little or no attention was paid to it. It may look like the Nigerian press has lost its main focus and its title as the watchdog of society. It is also notable that while attention was not paid to reports of vote buying, reports on the political campaigns for the Edo state gubernatorial election were evident.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the study has advanced the following recommendations:

1. Newspapers should increase the frequency of coverage given to vote buying, as there is a need to improve vote buying reports for citizens to understand its effect on the electoral system and society. The print media must continually maintain and sustain coverage of reports on vote buying.
2. Nigerian newspapers must ensure they play an advocacy role by reporting news on vote buying in an advocacy slant. This will go a long way in showing determination to fight against vote buying. This can be achieved by increasing the level of news reports on the issue while also focusing on other relevant slants.
3. Nigerian newspapers should improve the level of prominence accorded to news reports on vote buying. News reports on vote buying deserve more prominence than ever for an informed citizenry.
4. The print media in Nigeria must go beyond reporting vote buying and highlight the various dominant themes to further explicate on the menace of vote buying.

5.4 Limitations of the study

Content analysis can be a time-consuming process, especially when dealing with large datasets. Given the limited timeframe for this research, the data coding was done manually, which proved to be challenging and time consuming. Despite this limitation, the researcher put in great effort and co-opted research assistants to lend support to the data collection process.

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