FUEL SUBSIDY PALAVER: ANALYSIS OF THE NIGERIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF JANUARY 2012 NATION-WIDE STRIKE

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Abstract

Attempts by the Government of Nigeria to remove subsidy on petrol in recent years have led to public agitations. The research reported in this paper examined the press coverage of the crisis consequent upon the last time such attempt was made. Four Nigerian newspapers were content analyzed. It was discovered that most of the stories published in the newspapers were against the removal of petrol-subsidy. Advantages of deregulation in petroleum industry notwithstanding, government needs to consider people's interest in its policy formulation and implementation.

Key words: Fuel subsidy removal, anti-subsidy removal, pro-subsidy removal, corruption, oil industry, deregulation of petroleum sector, nation-wide strike.

Introduction

Subsidy is a household word in Nigeria as indeed in so many other nations around the world. The Oxford dictionary defines it as “a sum of money granted by the state or a public body to help an industry or business keep the price of a commodity or service low”. It could also be described as “a sum of money granted to support an undertaking held to be in the public interest”. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for its part, describes subsidies as “a measure that keeps prices for consumers below market levels, or keeps prices for producers above market levels or that reduces costs for both producers and consumers by giving direct or indirect support”. (OECD, 2006:7).

Subsidies can be found in all economic sectors (OECD, 2006). The belief in many quarters is that there is no economic sense in subsidies of goods and services. This is simply because every cent spent on subsidies is usually taken from money meant for the development of other crucial areas of the economy. Based on this belief, the European Community for instance, adopted a policy against subsidies termed “anti-subsidy regulations”. The policy is basically against subsidies of European Union-bound goods. (see European Union Trade Policy. nd.)

Subsidies could come in the form of grants and other direct payments. Based on this fact, tax concessions, in-kind subsidies, cross subsidies, credit subsidies and government guarantees, hybrid subsidies, subsidies through government procurement, derivates subsidies and market price support are all identified forms of subsidies. (see Ronald Steenblik nd. Pp. 18-26).

Fuel subsidy comes under government grants or direct payments. Based on this fact, tax concessions, in-kind subsidies, cross subsidies, credit subsidies and government guarantees, hybrid subsidies, subsidies through government procurement, derivates subsidies and market price support are all identified forms of subsidies. (see Ronald Steenblik nd. Pp. 18-26).

Fuel subsidy comes under government grants or direct payments. Some experts are of the opinion that fuel subsidy is unsustainable because subsidy bills are ever growing and could have adverse effects on other sectors of the economy. Ascher (1999:406-407) draws attention to “...the absurd mismanagement of Nigerian oil..., the underpricing of petroleum in Nigeria ... does not always benefit consumers.” He notes:

Petroleum underpricing, coupled with deliberate neglect of refineries, created shortages and smuggling opportunities that brought scarcity rents to those in the military that controlled oil flows. (Ascher, 1999: 406-407)

But any attempt to remove subsidy on petrol in Nigeria can cause prices of other goods and services to increase thereby leading to rise in the cost of living of the people, majority of whom live in abject poverty. Odusola (1997:121) has noted that:

Sub-Saharan African countries are noted for prevalence of absolute poverty in all its characteristic features. Poverty in these countries is massive, pervasive and chronic, engulfing a large proportion of the society.

Seventy percent of Nigerian people live below poverty level. Poverty is indeed a serious problem in Nigeria (Onyeizugbe and Onwuka 2012, Onwuka 2012). In an article titled “Bridging the wealth gap”, published in the Punch newspaper, Muhammad Balogun wrote, that with “a gross domestic
product (purchasing power parity) of $369.8bn (2010 estimate) 70 percent of Nigerians are living below poverty line [...] and the wealthiest 10 percent Nigerians ... account for 32.4 percent of the total household income while the poorest 90 percent account for just 2 percent.”

It is therefore difficult to convince average Nigerians to support any government policy that calls for more sacrifice from the people. This is particularly so when people are aware that the government officials that are calling on them to sacrifice more are all living extravagant lives. The cost of governance in the country is ranked among the highest in the world and there is wide-spread official corruption so much so that corruption and government inefficiency have been identified as some of the major reasons why Nigeria is in the present economic predicament.

Attempts at Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria

Fuel Subsidy removal is a recurring dilemma in Nigerian social, political and economic development. Subsidy on petrol became government policy in Nigeria in 1973 during the administration of the military head of state General Yakubu Gowon, when government made the first attempt at regulating fuel price. General Olusegun Obasanjo, as the head of state, was the first to increase the price in 1978, he reviewed the price from 8.4 kobo to 15.37 kobo. His successor, President Shehu Shagari, raised the price to 20K, while General Ibrahim Babangida moved it to 39.5kobo on 31st March, 1986 (the currency exchange market was also liberalized during the same period and the Naira was allowed to float freely against major world currencies) and on 10th April, 1988, the Babangida administration increased the price again to 42K per litre. The price was to be further increased by the same regime to 60K for private cars on 1st January, 1989. This latest increase was the first in the nation's history to spark off a nation-wide protest. General Babangida increased the price again on 6th March, 1991 to 70K. He had the intention of further price hike but he exercised restraint because of the political situation in the country. According to Okogu (nd: 388):

In 1993, many attempts were made to raise the price, but the government's timing was clumsy at best and mischievous at worst. The price was supposed to be raised in May 1993 — just weeks before the Presidential elections — when it was clear that such action at that time would almost certainly lead to social unrest. In August, just days before leaving office, the former military government announced new prices for petroleum products.

On 8th November 1993, the newly appointed Interim National Government headed by Ernest Sonekan raised the price to N5, a move that caused national outcry against the interim (illegitimate) government and eventually led to its collapse. Administration of General Abacha calmed down the agitating masses by reducing the price to N3.25 kobo on 22nd November 1993, only to increase it to N15.00 on 10th October, 1994 and reduce it to N11.00 two days later. After the demise of General Abacha, the new administration of General Abdusalam Abubakar increased the price on 2nd December, 1998 to N25.00 before reducing it to N20.00 on 6th January, 1999 (The Punch of 2nd of January 2012 page 9).

Since 1973, petrol prices have either been increased or decreased 21 times by successive governments. Prices were increased 14 times but each time the people responded violently, the government usually back pedaled by reducing prices. This happened 7 times. The latest increase came from President Jonathan who announced a change in pump price of petrol on 1st January, 2012 to N141.00 per litre but the nation-wide strike that ensued and the fear that it may lead to total breakdown of law and order in the country forced the President to back-pedal to N97.00 per litre with a promise to move it up again in the nearest future. The fall of crude oil in international market during the last quarter of 2014 necessitated the reduction of pump price to the current level i.e. N87.00 per litre.

Nigeria is not alone in this situation. So many countries around the world are having difficulties in tackling energy subsidy mostly because of political considerations (Widodo et al, 2012, A Guidebook to Fossil-fuel Subsidy Reform, 2013).

Arguments in Support of Fuel Subsidy Removal

Nigeria is a poor nation though with great potential. Nwachukwu (2012) wrote “according to the recent global finance ranking of the richest or poorest countries of the world, Nigeria is placed 43rd poorest nation in the world with a GDP purchasing power parity per head of $2.358. Considering the country's situation, Nwachukwu believed that Nigeria needs all the money it can get to fund the key sectors of the economy, such as health, education, power and agriculture.
Other vices attributed to fuel subsidy are corruption and total collapse of local refineries. Nwachukwu (2012) argued that fuel subsidy makes local refineries unprofitable for private investors wishing to invest in them and that fuel subsidy is the reason for acute fuel shortages at fuel stations as corrupt petrol-marketers, after receiving subsidy grants, have then proceeded to sell the subsidized fuel to neighbouring countries at higher prices. Okogu (1995:385) supported this claim. He wrote:

“the neighbouring countries of Chad and Cameroon have much higher fuel prices than Nigeria, and the brisk smuggling activities across the borders with these countries testify to this. In fact, the Cameroonian refinery at Cap Limboh is closed down from time to time because of cheap, surplus supplies of smuggled Nigerian products”

Based on these arguments, Ben Nanaghan, in an article published in the Punch newspaper, pleaded with Nigerians to ignore the hardship subsidy removal would cause them initially, he believed that most countries of the world are undergoing economic hardship today just like Singapore did before and when that country’s foremost leader, Late Lee Khuan Yew, who ruled Singapore from 1959 to 1990 as Prime Minister, took over the leadership mantle of Singapore, his transformation agenda transformed the country to what it is today. According to him, Singapore used to be a settlement of 120 fishermen in 1819, she does not possess any natural resources but has as “her greatest strength and natural resources the people themselves who stood by their leaders during a difficult time”. The country is now a pride of the world.

Arguments Against Subsidy Removal

So many analysts hung the problem facing Nigeria on corruption and made a clarion call on the government to tackle it headlong (James et al, 1999). Kill corruption and not Nigeria. This was one of the most popular inscriptions of protesters’ placards during the nation-wide strike. Opposition politicians, civil liberty organizations, the academia, students, artistes etc all joined the protesters. An opposition politician during President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, Bola Tinubu, like most of other anti-fuel subsidy removal campaigners, argued in an article he titled “The President breaks social contract with the people” that “the very first thing this government needs to do is to clean up and throw away the salad of corruption in Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)” (The Punch, 12th of January, 2012 pg 18).

So many people believed that the operation of NNPC is shrouded in secrecy and that the organization is corrupt. Apart from various corruption allegations, the organization is accused of non-remittance of huge revenue to the federation account. The figure of such non-remittance was initially put at ₦450billion but Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), an agency of the government set up to monitor the activities of the extractive industry, claimed that the figure was ₦842 billion but the NNPC debunked the allegation (see the Guardian Editorial of 5th January, 2012 pg 16).

However, the investigation embarked upon by the Federal legislators during President Goodluck Jonathan’s regime revealed that there is indeed rot in the NNPC and quite a number of companies and people were implicated. But Nigerians waited in vain to see justice done against corrupt people that cornered petrol subsidy money into their private bank accounts. More revelations have since been made by the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari contrary to the NNPC claim. Emeka Uguwanyi, in an article he titled “What next for NNPC after board dissolution?”, listed some of the corruption allegations against the corporation as “sharp practices such as oil swap, offshore processing agreement, violation of regulations, illegal deductions and non-remittance of funds...by withholding ₦3.8trillion from the ₦8.1trillion it generated in the past three years” (see The Nation, 1st July, 2015 pg 2-3).

Late Chinua Achebe, a world-renowned novelist, believed that the government needs to factor what he called the “scale of corruption in Nigeria” into the argument. The writer put the amount of money lost to corruption to at least $10 billion a year ($400 billion in 40 years). He was of the opinion that how to tackle corruption should be the focus of the present government. (The Punch, 12th January, 2012 pg 3).

Agbon Izielan, a former head of department of Petroleum Engineering, University of Ibadan in an article he titled “The Real Cost of Nigeria Petrol” argued that there is no petrol subsidy in Nigeria. He claimed that the reverse was the case. According to him, there was high sales tax of 91.2 percent at
the prevailing price of \( \text{₦}65 \) per litre before the January, 2012 hike in price because he believed that the nation wouldn’t have been in need of imported petrol if only the nation’s refineries were performing optimally. The expert wrote:

> We have about 170,000 bbls of throughput refined for about 13.26 million litres of petrol, 6.8 million litres of diesel and 2.72 million litres of kerosene / jet fuel: This is not enough to meet internal national demand. So we send the remaining of our non-export crude oil volume (270,000 barrels per day) to be refined abroad and import the petroleum product back into the country. We will just pay for shipping and refining.

Agbon compared the price of petrol in the USA with that of Nigeria against the background that one barrel of crude oil is 42 gallons or 168 litres of crude oil, which when it is refined will give 45 gallons of petroleum products consisting of 4 gallons of LPG, 19.5 gallons of gasoline, 10 gallons of diesel, 4 gallons of jet fuel/Kerosene, 2.5 gallons of fuel oil and 5 gallons of bottoms. The researcher put the cost of 1 litre anywhere in Nigeria at \( \text{₦}33.36 \) per litre as against \( \text{₦}65 \) in 2011 or \( \text{₦}87 \) in 2015. This calculation is based on the fact that, the government earmarked 445,000 barrel per day for meeting domestic refinery needs. But Agbon believed that government ought to have based its calculation on the price of swapped oil and not on the price of petrol in the international market. He concluded, just like the former petroleum minister in General Ibrahim Babangida’s administration, Prof. Tam David West, that there was no petrol subsidy in Nigeria because the price of a litre of swapped petrol is \( \text{₦}34.45 \). The price of a litre of petrol at \( \text{₦}65 \) before the 1st of January, 2012 price hike was already too high.

The manufacturers have been lamenting on the cost of generating electricity at their respective factories for production processes. They claimed that the sector spends over \( \text{₦}2bn \) a week on the purchase of petroleum products before the 1st January, 2012 fuel subsidy removal. Roseline Okere, a public affairs analyst, argued that petrol, has all along been an important component of production processes and product distribution they asserted that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) would be generally affected (see *The Guardian*, 4th January, 2012, pg 44).

**Objectives of the Study**

The researcher put forward the following objectives:

1. To examine the most important issues covered by the press during the period of fuel subsidy removal crisis.
2. To find out the prominence given to fuel subsidy removal by the Nigerian press.
3. To find out the most important story theme that attracted the attention of the Nigerian press.

The following research questions were therefore examined:

1. What were the most important issues covered by Nigerian press during the period of fuel subsidy removal crisis?
2. What was the level of prominence accorded fuel subsidy removal by the Nigerian press?
3. What was the most important story theme covered by the Nigerian press?

**Operational Definitions**

**Prominence:** The placement of stories/illustrations on different pages of the newspapers tells much about the prominence of such items. Front-page as well as back-page materials of the selected newspapers were considered to be more prominent than those that were buried in the belly of the newspapers.

**Pro-subsidy removal:** Newspaper materials (stories) in support of subsidy removal.
Anti-subsidy removal: Newspaper materials not in favour of subsidy removal.

Corruption in the oil industry: Newspaper publications on corruption in the oil industry.

Inefficiency of the refineries: Newspaper stories on inefficiency in Nigerian refineries.

Call for strike: Newspaper materials in support of strike action.

Slant: This is all about the tone of stories toward the government. The slant could either be positive, negative and neutral.

Violence/Causality: Newspaper stories about violent incidents/fatality.

Theoretical Framework

Social Responsibility Theory

Social Responsibility Theory is considered relevant to this study because of the underlying principles of the theory as has been pointed out by McQuail (1993:117). According to the scholar, the media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society. These obligations can only be met by setting high standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance. In accepting and carrying out these obligations, the media should be self-regulating within the framework of the law and established institutions.

Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to the society as well as to their employers and the market. An accountable media practitioner would be truthful, accurate and objective as well as balanced (Adeyemi 2013:125-126).

Method

Four national newspapers were randomly selected through blind balloting to be content analyzed. Names of all well-known newspapers that enjoy national spread were written on small pieces of paper that were then squeezed and thrown into a basket. After thorough shuffling, four strangers were invited to pick one each. The following newspapers were picked: The Guardian, The Punch, This Day and Compass newspapers.

Study Period

The study covered 1st to 15th January 2012, the period of the crisis. The crisis began when on 1st January, 2012, President Jonathan announced the removal of fuel subsidy and ended immediately the strike action was called off on 15 January, 2012.

Study Universe

A total of 60 copies of the four selected newspapers were thoroughly examined and 1243 stories were found to be relevant to the study. Out of this number, 437 stories, or 35.15 percent of all the stories, appeared in the Punch, while the Guardian accounted for 322 stories, or 25.91 percent. This Day’s share of the stories was 290, or 23.33 percent, while the Compass accounted for 194 or 15.61 percent of all the stories published by the four newspapers.

Unit of Analysis

Units of analysis of this study include story headline, entire story, picture, cartoon and any other illustration.
Result

Table 1: Story type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News-paper</th>
<th>News story</th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Editorial</th>
<th>News analysis</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Pictorial illustration</th>
<th>Advertorial</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Punch</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>21.72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Day</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>13.92</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>10.23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>55.15</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>18.34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Prominence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPER</th>
<th>Front Page Freq</th>
<th>Front Page %</th>
<th>Back Page Freq</th>
<th>Back Page %</th>
<th>Inside Page Freq</th>
<th>Inside Page %</th>
<th>Total Freq</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE PUNCH</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>35.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE GUARDIAN</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>23.41</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>25.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS DAY</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>21.07</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>23.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>13.92</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>15.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>87.92</td>
<td>N=1243</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the 15 days covered by the study, the crisis dominated the four selected newspapers as fuel subsidy issue was given better coverage more than any other matter during the period under consideration. 95, or 7.64 percent, of the total number of stories made it to the front page, while as much as 1133, or 87.92 percent, were buried in the inside pages. On the other hand, because back pages are usually mostly dedicated to sports, only 15, or 1.2 percent, of the articles appeared on the back page.

Table 3: Slant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPER</th>
<th>Positive Freq</th>
<th>Positive %</th>
<th>Negative Freq</th>
<th>Negative %</th>
<th>Neutral Freq</th>
<th>Neutral %</th>
<th>Total Freq</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE PUNCH</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>29.85</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>35.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE GUARDIAN</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>19.15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>25.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS DAY</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>15.12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>23.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>15.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>16.25</td>
<td>946</td>
<td>76.12</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>N=1243</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows that 76.12 percent of stories published in the four papers were negative toward the government, 16.25 percent were positive, while just 7.56 percent were neutral.

### Table 4: Story themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPER</th>
<th>Pro-subsidy Removal</th>
<th>Anti-Subsidy Removal</th>
<th>Corruption in the Oil Industry</th>
<th>Inefficiency of the Refineries</th>
<th>Call for Strike/Protest</th>
<th>Violence/Fatality</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PUNCH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td></td>
<td>315</td>
<td>25.34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE GUARDIAN</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS DAY</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>12.39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 reveals that 63.4 percent of all the stories published in newspapers selected for this study were against subsidy removal, 15.85 percent were for subsidy removal, 5.56 percent of all the stories were in support of the strike/protest, 2.97 were on violence/fatality, 2.01 percent were on inefficiency of the country’s refineries and 1.89 percent of all the materials were on corruption in the oil industry.

### Table 5: Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPER</th>
<th>Government Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-Government Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Foreign Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Individual Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>News Agency Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE PUNCH</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>35.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE GUARDIAN</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>25.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS DAY</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>23.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>15.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>45.53</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>43.04</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>N = 1243 or 100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows that 45.33 percent of the information came from the government sources, following closely was information from non-governmental organizations with 43.04 percent, then materials from individuals accounted for 9.82 percent of the total information, news stories from foreign sources 1.37 percent while news agencies contributed a meagre 0.24 percent.
Discussion

Fuel subsidy removal is perhaps one of the most sensitive issues in Nigeria and the findings of this study support this assertion. A total number of 1243 stories/picture illustrations were published by the four newspapers selected for the study. The Punch newspaper with 437 articles, or 35.15 percent, had the largest share of the stories, followed by the Guardian newspaper with 322, or 25.91 percent. This Day newspaper had 290, or 23.33 percent, and the Compass with 194 articles, or 15.61 percent. It was discovered that an average of 82.87 stories/illustrations a day were published by the four newspapers.

The three research questions were examined:

**Research question 1.** What were the most important issues covered by the Nigerian press during the January 2012 fuel subsidy removal crisis?

**Answer**

Table 4 gives the breakdown of various fuel subsidy-related stories that adorned the pages of Nigerian newspapers. Stories that were totally against the removal of government subsidy on petrol, (that is, anti-subsidy removal) completely dominated the pages of the Nigerian press. A total number of 788 stories, or 63.4 percent of all the stories published in the four newspapers, were against fuel subsidy removal. Pro-subsidy removal stories amounted to 197 stories, or 15.85 percent, while 88 stories, or 7.09 percent, were neutral, and 87 stories, or 5.66 percent, were in support of the protest/strike action. 37 stories, or 2.97 percent, were on violence/fatality, 25 stories, or 2.01 percent, were on the inefficiency of Nigerian refineries and 18 stories, or 1.89 percent, were on corruption in oil industry.

**Research questions 2.** What was the level of prominence accorded fuel subsidy removal crisis by the Nigerian press?

**Answer**

Table 2 provide answers to this question. A total of 95 stories/picture illustrations, or 7.64 percent of all the stories published by the four newspapers examined in this study, made it to the front page. 15 stories, or 1.2 percent, were published on the back page of the selected newspapers while 1133 stories, or 87.92 percent of all the stories, were buried in the belly of the newspapers. Fuel subsidy removal was the major issue discussed in the press throughout the period of the crisis.

**Research question 3.** What was the most important story theme covered by the Nigerian press?

Table 4 shows that stories that were totally against subsidy removal, (that is, anti-subsidy removal stories) completely dominated pages of the Nigerian press. A total of 788 stories, or 63.4 percent of all the stories published in the four newspapers, were against fuel subsidy removal.

**Conclusion**

Findings revealed that Nigerian media were not in support of increase in pump price of petrol, 63.4 percent of newspapers content examined in this research were classified as anti-subsidy removal, and only 15.85 percent of the content supported the idea. In the same vein, 76.12 percent of the newspapers content was negative towards the government.

Media practitioners indeed demonstrated that they are socially responsible by identifying with the yarning and aspiration of the Nigerian masses. Analysis of the selected newspapers revealed that 76.12% of the newspapers’ content was not in favour of the government policy of subsidy removal. No doubt, removal of oil subsidy will remain a contentious issue in Nigerian socio-political and economic life for some time to come. President Muhammadu Buhari that took over from President Goodluck Jonathan has promised not to remove oil subsidy soon so as not to aggravate the suffering of Nigerian masses. But he, however, promised to look into subsidy arrangement in order to make it corruption free.

Surprisingly, corruption in the oil industry which is believed to be the bane of economic development in Nigeria was not really considered a major problem going by the findings of this study.
as only 18 stories, or 1.89 percent of all the stories used, were on corruption. Overwhelming majority of newsmakers came out against the government’s policy direction and demonstrated their anger by turning the strike action into a carnival of sort.

Limitations of the study

Even though the newspapers used for this study were randomly selected, there exist the possibilities that not all the newspapers with national outlook in Nigeria made the sampling frame. Also, the study is on manifest content of the newspapers.

References


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