The Impacts of Print Media Portrayal of Female Politicians in Nigeria

This study is an analysis of the impacts of print media portrayal of female politicians in their performances in the 2007 and 2011 general elections in Nigeria. The study uses the framing and spiral of silence theories to analyse the content of The Guardian, The Punch, and The Tribune newspapers which are all national dailies in Nigeria. The study finds among other things that media portrayals of female politicians are not entirely to their disadvantage. However, the largely held opinion of female political candidates also tend to use or depend on how the media frame their respective political positions – there are fewer differences in the portrayals of female candidates in aspects that show female candidates as having strong partisan party positions or standing like their male counterparts, as well as the possible weak spots of female political candidates. The study, therefore, recommends that female candidates should be positioned prominently on the front newspaper pages to connote a basic sense and respect for gender sensitivity and balance.

Keywords: media portrayal, women and electioneering.

Introduction

Newspapers’ portrayal of female political candidates is still drawing scholarly attention. This is because in some societies, as it is the case with Nigeria, men are still dominating the political landscape. Okpilike and Abamba (2013, p. 155) affirm that "in Nigeria, both in politics and government, rarely do women hold offices because they are considered too weak and emotional to exercise leadership. Thus, they are continuously excluded from decision-making situations." Okpilike and Abamba (2013) proceed to lament the relegation of women as follows:

The Nigerian society, like many other societies of the world, is a patriarchal society but its resilience is still very high in Nigeria. Right from the formation of the different political parties, men take the lead. Hence there is no political party which has a woman as its chairperson, secretary or even holding any sensitive office in the party. This is a reflection of the cultures of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Due to this attitude, men are expected to be pacesetters for the women to follow; not the other way round (p. 158).

The position here is that the media is most likely to reflect the nature of the Nigerian society. Besides, citing Siebert (1957), McQuail (2005, p. 242) opines that "The press always takes on the form and colorations of the social and political structure within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control where the relationships of individuals and institutions are adjusted." Therefore, the general expectation is that the newspapers in Nigeria are also most likely to portray female candidates in ways that tend to show them as inferior to men.
It is therefore reasonable to try to understand the type of dominant portrayal that female candidates have had in various national newspapers in Nigeria, and how such portrayals might have influenced public opinion and necessitated on the success or failure of female candidates during electoral campaigns, and elections across Nigeria. Also, it is important to understand what journalists themselves think about female participation in Nigerian politics (Women’s Media Centre, 2012, p. 1).

The portrayal of female candidates in conventional media like newspapers has attracted scholarly attention. On this note, this study examines newspaper portrayals of female politicians during the 2007, and 2011 general elections in Nigeria. On this issue, Ucheanya (2003) submits that the media have taken it as a responsibility to mobilize the citizenry to participate in elections apart from keeping close tabs on political activities to ensure that the people participate adequately in the electoral and political processes and form their judgments on happenings on the political terrain.

Many seem to have given up on female emancipation via agitations from the media. The prevailing portrayal of women in mainstream daily newspapers however has the following characteristics: positive images of women have a narrow scope and are based on negative portrayal of women’s success: a pop star, a beauty queen and a sports woman with an outstanding result; there is an absence of the image of an active, assertive working woman, or a successful businesswoman, or a positive image of a female politician; averagely, women are nearly always portrayed as victims of poverty, social injustice, domestic violence, and organized crime (Ucheanya, 2003).

Media influence is one of the most powerful economic, cultural and political forces in the world today. Thus, Women’s Media Centre (2012, p.1) notes that "deciding who gets to talk, what shapes debates, who writes, and what is important enough to report, media shape our understanding of who we are, and what we can be." This influence is most critical during electioneering when the media rarely display half the talents of the women seeking elective positions, and most often tell half of their stories. This explains why IDEA (2007, p. 7) blames media representation as one of the important impediments for achieving parity between male and female politicians. The media spend less time describing policy priorities of female candidates, and more time discussing viability, character traits and appearance than for male candidates during electioneering. Oyesomi (2011, p. 3) explains that:

Women attempting to enter into politics in Nigeria face numerous obstacles. Those who have aspired to office must often deal with a lack of funds to run an effective campaign, a discriminating use of party zoning, low education and a slew of cultural and religious barriers. The marginalization of women in politics is certainly not new to Nigeria, having dated back to colonial times. In fact, women did not gain the right to vote until 1976.

According to Umechukwu, (2004, as cited in Oyesomi, 2011, p. 3), one may claim that there are improvements towards women participation in politics
since 2007 general elections. Nevertheless, the Nigerian political environment still contains elements of gender discrimination which have made women political participation difficult if not impossible in some areas. There is a palpable male dominance in Nigerian government and politics, and it is obviously related to most Nigerian cultures and religions which are not only patriarchal in outlook but equally promote male chauvinism.

It is however very important to continue to discuss the role of the media, and particularly newspapers because of the symbolic role they play in news gathering and dissemination. Allan (2010, p. 145) citing Lynn Barber, a Journalist in the United Kingdom, says "the hierarchy of newspapers was set in stone in the 19th century and remains the same, despite all the evidence that newspapers have got to change or die. News is still considered the most important..." Even with this view, women continue to "suffer" certain descriptions. Either way, men are said to have something to say about women. This may be the reason Cokie Roberts of ABC News quoted by Allan (2010, p. 145) notes that "for the women of my age, it is interesting to us that we now have an accusation that we are only where we are because we are women. For a long time we were told we couldn’t be anywhere because we were women.” Allan (2010, p. 147) insists, "Today the day-to-day news culture of most newspapers and broadcast organizations is still being defined in predominantly male terms."

There has been an increasing interest in female participation in politics. Due to the importance of politics, with particular reference to elections, Allan (2010, p. 145) notes that the participation of women has become crucial. The professionalism of media is crucial during election periods, and this is expected to include the manner in which women are portrayed. It is a truisum that the media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy.

However, the media can also play a more specific part in enabling full public participation in elections, not only by reporting on the performance of government, but also in a number of other ways: by educating the voters on how to exercise their civic rights; by reporting on the development of the election campaign; by providing a platform for the political parties to communicate their messages to the electorate; by allowing the parties to debate with each other; by reporting results and monitoring vote counting; by scrutinizing the electoral process itself in order to evaluate its fairness, efficiency, and probity –this is arguably where fair media portrayal of women, vis-à-vis men plays out. Nevertheless, Petterson and Wilkins (1994, p. 149), state that:

Studies of media coverage of political campaigns have uncovered some disturbing trends; journalists function as a pack; there is seldom any really distinctive political reporting during elections. Further, journalists treat fore-runners differently than they do the remainder of the candidate pack. Fore-runners are the objects of closer scrutiny, but those examinations are seldom about issues, even though it is issue oriented reporting that tends to provoke political interest and public participation. Instead electoral reporting focuses on
personality, a key component of political leadership, but certainly not the only one.

This further confirms that there is a bewildering variety of possible systems for regulating media coverage or reportage of politics. This refers to that portion of election reporting that is under the editorial control of the parties or candidates themselves. There may be obligations on some sections of the newspapers to carry out such material, and there will almost certainly be conditions that they must abide by if they do.

Allan (2010, p. 149) points out that there is evidence from different offerings that the relationship between discourses of "objectivity" and gender relations is politically charged. In most media coverage of politics, what counts as reality is in alignment with patriarchal rendering of the social world. Eitokpah (2009, p. 19) submits that "day after day Nigerians read and imbibe skewed images of womanhood in print and these images are incorporated in our experience of living." Since politics is the staple of our newspapers, it follows then, to ask why women are being relegated to the background in the dailies. Etiokpoh (2009) further laments that in most media houses surveyed, men make decisions about staff hiring and the ration of male – female workers in the media is heavily imbalanced in favour of men. This bias affects images of women in media, and in turn has negative effects on national development.

Eitokpah (2009, p. 7) explains that gender construction in the media is directly connected with various issues, which include sexism and under representation of women in news reportage especially when critical issues such as general elections are involved. The media, place obstacles on the path of women to national development.

The cumulative and unconscious impact of these media messages, or lack thereof, can very often exacerbate gender discrimination. I think, in general the lesson girls learn from this is that they are not encouraged to speak out or take up leadership roles. The mass media could exercise significant influence in helping to remove such prejudice and promote processes as equal partners. Clearly, the media do not provide a balanced picture of women’s diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. Much remains to be done with regard to the participation, portrayal and access of women to the media and its impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women. What our country needs in the present context is more enablement.

This means the "greatest" of all biases against women in politics is their portrayal during electioneering. Such slants in portrayal seem to be the most singular critical factor barring women from making any headway in their quest for political office in Nigeria. In the same vein, Women’s Media Centre (2012, p. 1) enumerates the themes mostly considered in the portrayal of female candidates during elections to include: appearance, character traits, personality, novelty label and stereotypes, political background, horseracing, and manifestos. The decimation of women’s image to three of these seven themes,
(Petterson & Wilkins, 1994; Umekukwu, 2004 as cited in Oyesomi, 2011; Ayode, 2007; Eitokpah, 2009; Rahborni, 2010; Allan, 2010; Ryan, 2013; Oyinade et al., 2013) forms the basis for this study towards understanding not just the Nigerian newspapers’ portrayals of female politicians, but also if and how such portrayals may have influenced the performance of female candidates in past elections in Nigeria.

### Literature Review

#### The Exclusionist Politics against Women in Nigeria

Male dominated political systems are largely seen to under represent the experiences of women, but otherwise perpetuate male dominance and interest (Phillips, 1994, p. 13). Eitokpa finds that women from the six geo-political zones in Nigeria are financially disadvantaged and are less prestigious; such that their issues are seen as marginal or are even absent from the policy agenda because of male stereotyping. Eitokpa (2015, p. 23) argues that three stereotypes summarize popular representation of women in the Nigerian media space- "housewives, fashion exponents and hanger-ons."

Media researches have shown that the more attention the media pay to a particular aspect of political life, the more citizens will rely on that consideration in their political evaluations. Kinder, (2003 as cited in Tesler, 2012). Several studies have shown that during electioneering, there is a manifestation of racial, economic and gender prejudices by the electorate. And it is these prejudices that constitute the basis of the public’s candidate evaluation and their vote choice (Valentino et al., 2002; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Hetherington, 1996; Johnson et al., 2004). Nevertheless, in the Nigerian political context, there is racial discrimination, but economic and gender discriminations.

Efforts to draw attention to women issues had a more global stride in 1995. This was when the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was unanimously adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (4th to 15th September, 1995). Khan (2009, p. 11) is of the view that among many other critical areas of concern, the declaration recognized the potential of the media to make a greater contribution to the advancement of women and called on governments and international development organizations to take action to address "stereotyping of women and inequality in women’s access to and participation in all communication systems." Besides, the United Nations has designated gender equality as one of its global priorities under the Medium Term Strategy for 2008-2013 (UNESCO, 2009, p. 22), and placed the pursuance of the objective on the forefront of UNESCO’s strategic focus.

There are already a number of studies on media portrayal of women. Examples of some of such studies are: "Political Handbags. The Representation
of Women Politicians: A Case Study of the Websites and Newspapers Coverage of the Women Candidates in the Labour Party Deputy Leadership Elections," by Markstedt (2007) where the researcher sought to know the differences and similarities that are in self-representation of female candidates in the Labour Party Deputy Leadership elections on their websites, and the UK national newspapers’ representation of the same candidates. Another of such studies is "An Appraisal of Nigerian Newspapers Coverage of Women’s Participation in 2007 General Elections," by Oyesomi (2011) where the researcher submits that the prominence given to reports on women’s participation in 2007 Nigerian general elections influenced the popularity of such candidates among the electorate. Nevertheless, most of the studies stated in the preceding paragraphs are largely quantitative in approach; they do not seek to display the textual construction of media portrayals, and do not necessarily seek to establish the link between such media portrayals of female politicians during electioneering and how they might have influenced them during political campaigns and the actual elections.

This study is therefore concerned with the understanding of power relations in the coverage of female candidates during electioneering in the select Nigerian newspapers; the possible similarities and differences in the portrayal of women among some newspapers, as well as find out from selected Nigeria female political candidates if they felt in any way that Nigeria’s media—particularly newspapers coverage of female politicians is majorly influential towards the outcome of such campaigns and elections. The foregoing therefore illuminates the inherent problem this work seeks to find answers to, and as such leads light unto the direction of the study.

The Dominant Themes in Newspapers Portrayals of Female Candidates

The nature of the print media, especially newspapers has changed a lot over the last decade. According to Garrison, (2001) as cited in Ali et al. (2011), the advent and constant changes in the use and application of the internet has significantly influenced the way newspapers get and circulate news. "Since 1999, almost 90 percent of daily newspapers in the United States have been actively using online technologies to search for articles and most of them also create their own news websites to reach new markets" (Ali et al., 2011, p. 2).

The long-term picture of new media or mass media information flows is not easy to predict. Mass media news outlets are struggling with changing gatekeeping standards due to demands for interactive content produced by audiences themselves. Ordinary citizens are empowered to report on their political experiences while being held to high standards of information quality and community values. In the long run, these tendencies may be the most revolutionary aspects of the new media environment (Bennett, 1982).

In Malaysia, an Asian country, like it is in the United States, Ali (2011, p. 6), points out that people read newspapers online almost for free—a situation that has drawn away some of the readers who used to buy print newspaper. The
situation therefore means that irrespective of contemporary realities about the print media, newspapers still operate, and people still depend on newspapers and will continue to read them as well. However, Ali et al. (2011, p. 7) argues that newspapers have to battle with credibility issues towards rising circulation, and must avoid being too pro-government or conventional tool for propaganda in the hands of rulers.

The term media portrayal is used in a number of ways. However, one variable irrespective of usage of the term is the connotation that media present some contents the way they want them to be interpreted. In other words, the term refers to the manner and coordinated coverage or reportage by the media towards attaining an expected and predetermined interpretation or understanding from readers. Farida (2006, p. 13) notes:

Current findings do not demonstrate that women running for either senatorial or gubernatorial office receive less media attention than men. If anything, women generally receive more coverage, which is in line with the expectation that women’s coverage has improved [...] even if women candidates do not receive less coverage than men, quality of coverage may differ.

The coverage of politicians is referred to as portrayal to mean the differences thereof mentioned by Farida (2006). What accounts for difference of coverage of any sort is indeed media portrayal of the candidates.

Since the days of (Klapper 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Patterson & McClure, 1976), Farida (2006, pp. 2-3) avers that the role of the media on political behaviour has been proven, nevertheless, "studies examining the relationship between gender and media coverage are relatively recent and sparse." Studies that have been conducted so far show that women are not portrayed the same way as men, but are rather often in disadvantaged positions. Miller (1996) cited by Farida (2006) notes that women are rarely reported in the front pages of newspapers as news worthy. Braden (1996) also quoted by Farida (2006, p. 3) insists that the media cover women differently. This pattern of coverage translates into portrayals of female candidates being discussed herein. The foregoing are the standard views of Braden (1996, p. 3) also quoted by Farida (2006, p. 2), thus:

First, women receive less substantive coverage than men, with greater importance placed on their appearances. Second, news stories of women politicians often emphasize traditional gender roles. For example, journalists are more likely to ask women personal questions regarding their marital status and child-care arrangements than men. If women are married with children, they are frequently asked how they expect to balance marriage, motherhood, and politics. Lastly, language used to describe women politicians often trivializes them. The case of Kentucky governor Martha Layne Collins illustrates this point …reporters who tagged Kentucky governor Martha Layne Collins as a former beauty queen and referred to her male opponent as a physician were not inaccurate—Collins had won a minor pageant twenty-five years earlier. But in
labelling her a beauty queen, they chose to devalue her more substantive experience as a teacher and elected official.

Stories about women, according to Braden (1996, p. 3) in Farida (2006, p. 2), are often framed around the home and hearth as well as style. Such framing hurts women’s credibility as candidates and officeholders. Media portrayal is therefore an important part of the way voters may consider a candidate. While media portrayal alone is not enough to point to the failure of a candidate, some of the studies have indeed pointed to the damage or influences of media portrayal. (Weaver & Drew, 1995; Drew & Weaver, 2006).

The duo did a study on how voters learn from "non-traditional" media like television network shows and "talk shows," in relation to "traditional" media like newspaper, radio, and television news among selected audience demographics. Weaver & Drew (1995, pp. 12-13) observed that "...exposure and attention to newspapers and television news about the election, as well as exposure to the presidential debates were significantly correlated with greater intention to vote..." The scholars also found that "there was a tendency for exposure and attention to the television network morning show to be positively correlated with intention to vote, although not as strongly as newspapers and television news..." The non-traditional media were found not to be a significant predictor of interest in the campaign. Also, while television viewership of samples averaged 5.1 days a week, newspapers readership followed by 4.4 days a week. The findings suggest that the media attention and exposure contributes to electoral action among voters, but the role varied in relation to the type of media; and content. Newspapers were however found to be very important when other demographic factors were not included in the regression analysis done by Weaver & Drew (1995).

Similarly, Drew & Weaver (2006, p. 32) report: that "the traditional media bloc was the strongest predictor of interest in the campaign... with radio, newspaper, and television news campaign attention producing significant relationships. Attention to campaign news in newspapers was a statistically significant predictor of campaign interest until debate viewing was entered into the multiple regressions at which point it became non-significant." However, the findings show that newspapers had influence none the less. However, there was no mention of any form of gender portrayal in any of the media. The most important aspect that found relevance herein is the fact of media influence, no matter little. It is therefore important to note that newspapers were consistent among the top-most influence medium in the studies by Weaver and Drew (1995) as well as Drew and Weaver (2006).

Irrespective of the findings in support of the impact of the media in elections, Okpilike and Abamba (2013, pp. 158-161) did not mention the media as one of the factors militating against female political emancipation in Nigeria. While noting the effects of culture, religion, poverty levels among women in Nigeria, corruption, high illiteracy levels among women in Nigeria, politics of physical power and intimidation, political apathy among Nigerian women, and
a general problem of poor educational and civic orientation, Okpilike and Abamba (2013, p. 159) however acknowledged that "the print media in Nigeria have drawn attention to the high level of corruption in the country." This in turn is a reflection that the role of the print media like newspapers cannot be wished away.

While studies on media portrayal of female candidates continue to generate interest and various results in relation to how such portrayals may have affected election outcomes continues to remain inconsistent. According to Farida (2006, p. 3), some studies have noted "subtle differences in gendered media coverage of candidates, particularly in terms of framing." As Farida (2006, p. 3) affirms, one of such researches is by Mohammad and Ross (1996, p. 112) whose argument is that the portrayal of women as compared to men is often a case of framing that is far from neutral. The so called objective media portray women in an image and "language of mediated politics" that is heavily gendered; a language that supports male politicians as the norm but regards female candidates as "novelties."

It is because the media frames politics as a male endeavour that the behaviour of women candidates and their speech have become an issue of subjective interpretation and scrutiny by men. According to Gidengil and Everitt (2003, p. 211) in Farida (2006, p. 3), Conflicting behaviour on the part of women is doubly newsworthy because it is unexpected. When female candidates for high office behave combatively, they are contravening deeply held notions of appropriate female behaviour... Words and actions that would be perceived as merely assertive on the part of a male candidate may seem—and thus reported as—downright aggressive on the part of a female candidate.

The above view underscores the manner and understandings of the role of the media in female political prospects and the way framing – a typical aspect of media portrayal is conducted. To interpret this further, media like newspapers may not often so conspicuously negate women during electioneering but what matters is the frames embedded in such newspaper reports that are capable of overtures already persisting among a Nigeria society dominated by men or male superiority context.

In examining how female candidates are portrayed in the media, particularly in the Nigerian media, it is important to analyze the participation and position of women in the media and the impact of those positions, on women’s development. This implies the need for women’s right to participate in public debates and politics as well as to have their views heard, and the right to see themselves portrayed in the media in ways that accurately represent the complexities of their lives. It is not in doubt that the poor performance of women in Nigerian elections, whether successfully or not, cannot be far from the mode that the media portray them during electioneering campaigns. No wonder, only very few women have made it to the top ladder in Nigeria. Increasing the participation and access of women to expression and decision
making in and through the media and new technologies of communication; and the promotion of a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media are therefore seen as vital, otherwise the trend of accusations trailing the media in the aftermath of poor political outcomes for women may be continuously tilted towards blames on the media. Every election in Nigeria, irrespective of the period, may therefore account for some information in relation to various themes in female candidature portrayals.

Over the years various studies on female portrayals have adopted different approaches and considered a spread of themes. While it may be difficult to say certain themes are more pragmatic or empirical than others, it is observable that some themes have over time, been submerged or combined. Among the aggregate of dominant themes in media portrayal of female candidates during electioneering, sexism, personality trait and stereotypes tend to become more recurrent. These themes are discussed below, and in turn form the bases for which newspapers portrayals of female candidates during the 2007 and 2011 general elections in Nigeria are based. It is important to note that scholars have referred, at times to similar themes using different names. Worthy of note is the view that some of the themes may subtly overlap, either in perception or description.

**Sexism.** The character traits of female candidates tend to be more in focus. (Ryan, 2013, pp. 16-23) reiterates that as opposed to female candidates, the media tend to portray female candidates as being less decisive, less confident and having fewer leadership skills. There is an insistence that sexist inclinations or terms like "seduction," sex object, mother, pet or "iron maiden," "caring, emotional, homemaker, dependent, weak, passive" are far more aligned to female candidates than male. While media portrayals of certain character traits may be harmful, it is vital to acknowledge that some of such media coverage may be due to ignorance about the power readers and audiences to make more sense of outside what may be the original media intention. Also, there is a tendency for some character description of women as mother and wives who are caring and tender-hearted to be positively interpreted in societies where electorates would have already become used to female leadership "uniqueness." Ordinarily, the media see qualities like: "independent, strong, leader, dominant, assertive, competitive, insensitive, strong, brave" as male character traits.

**Personality traits.** Allan (2010, p. 145) citing Lynn Barber, insist that women are still suffering certain descriptions. Allan (2010, p. 145) sustains that the professionalism of media is crucial during election periods, and should include the manner in which women are portrayed. (Peterson & Wilkins 1994, p. 149) on the other hand say the personality of political candidates is vital but it certainly not the only aspect to taken seriously. When a female candidates is however involved, the personality of the female candidate tend to come more under scrutiny than that of the male. This is due to the impression that it is the
female candidate that has a higher burden of proof about a show of personality. Allan (2010, p. 149) affirms in most cases of media portrayals, there are more alignments with patriarchal renderings than otherwise. Personality, however, is not just about charisma; it is also about qualification of candidates for the post contented. This can be seen in the perspective of experiences in professional or business like, community services done in the past, family background and antecedents, respect among the electorate, reputations, dignity and integrity, among others. It is in support for this assertion that Eitokpah (2009, p. 7) submits that the mass media could exercise significant influence in helping to remove prejudice and promote females as equal partners, clearly providing a balanced picture of women’s diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world.

**Stereotypes.** Some of the scholars of media portrayal of female candidates that have been vehement on the aspect of stereotypes. Tremblay (1999, p. 31) says "women in parliament regularly complain of stereotypical media terms." Johnson (1999, p. 11) agrees that "portrayals that are not balanced are dangerous because the media have been identified as a powerful institution capable of moderating the values, and behaviours of the society." Ryan (2013, p. 19) posits thus:

The literature suggests that the media is improving by leaps and bounds in regards to the gendered, sexist nature of coverage for female candidates but there is still room for improvement. The media continues to use sexist frames as a lens to portray female candidates and, as a result, these women continue to suffer at the polls. Women like Elizabeth Dole and Hillary Clinton, who have advanced on the political ladder have proven that the glass ceiling still exists. The heightened masculinity of offices on the national level do not allow much room for interpretation of feminine qualities, consequently forcing female politicians to be subjected to a double standard of maintaining their femininity while giving off just enough masculinity to seem viable for the office.

Humphrey (1979, p. 25) notes that Article 16 (1) of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provides inter alia against all form of stereotypes against women. Ikem (1996, p. 184) also adds that because journalism has been the preserve of men, such a phrase as "Gentlemen of the press" is stereotype already.

Though there are several stereotypes against female candidates which Ryan (2013, p. 13) refers to as frames of reference against women, novelty label is considered unique because of the peculiarity of labelling female candidates at every election. Female candidates are seen as diving into what is hitherto considered a preserve of men, therefore, each electoral contest, and the female candidate is seen as "making history," either as incumbent who is contesting again as a "woman," moving into a "higher" political office/position, or legislative to executive and vice-versa. Generally stereotypes, like "women candidates" "iron-maiden" among others are seen as negative portrayals, they
are also double edged because the context of use may define the intention. However, the media may be challenged to be more careful with gendered terms that are insinuative or become innuendos of double applications for or against women towards electoral outcomes.

**Framing Theory and Spiral of Silence Theory**

The study and theorization of media frames is prominently associated with Entman who in 1993 postulated a more concrete description of the real or imagined nature of media frames. Entman (1993, p. 52) states that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." The implication thereof is that framing is not about what is not true, but is about what is true in a manner that it hinds other shades of the entire information. The framing theory is about to be read or heard in the way that is socially acceptable.

Karen (2011, p. 56) articulates further that the efforts of Entman have been studied, explained and expanded by some scholars. Karen (2011, p. 56) points out the efforts of one of such scholars – Reese (2001, p. 11), who notes that "media frames are palpable means that tilt into organized social principles that are symbolically sustained over time towards a structured social world."

According to Entman (1993, p. 53), there are four aspects of framing that construct expected meaning: one: through mental organisations that are schematically created, frames guide the message creator towards making judgment about what to include in a message. Two: Frames are located in the way the entire text and references are constructed, even as the entire message would have been decided – this is most exemplified in the syntax and imagery. Three: frames that are subjective according to the mind-set of the receiver of the message, which may or may not be according to the constructs of the sender; and four: frames according to cultural construct where the sender and the receiver of the message are situated.

Karen (2011, p. 56) points out that "these four framing locations function similarly to highlight certain message elements and construct a given argument about the subject of the message." Despite these efforts by Entman (1993), there have been fears about the application of the framing theory as viewed by various scholars from different perspectives. Scheufele (1999) in Karen (2011, p. 57) argues that "…frames need to be considered as structures for both presenting news and understanding the information presented."

McQuail (1994, p. 327) has it that framing is based on the premise that the media have significant effects. One of these effects is as a result of framing of issues by the media. The media on one hand, have a strong impact by constructing social reality, that is according to McQuail (1994, p. 331), "by framing images of reality… in a predictable and patterned way". On the other
hand, media effects are limited by an interaction between mass media and recipients.

Framing as reasoned by Chong and Druckman (2007, p. 120) can "be constructed in both positive and negative terms." This is because some scholars believe that framing can be deployed as a potent strategy to manipulate and deceive individuals. Again, it can be used as a learning process in which people acquire common beliefs and it has the power to coordinate people around social norm (Kinder & Herzof, 1993).

Framing theory is apt in this study because through it, the direction, degree and types of frames used by the newspapers in the portrayal of women during elections in Nigeria can be isolated or highlighted and further endures some thematic interpretations. Several studies have adopted the framing theory. One of such is Busher (2006). The framing theory according to Busher (2006, pp. 19-21) is used very often in studies on media and politics, and many of such studies indicate dominant frames which are often present in media coverage of political elections.

Graber (2000) as cited in Busher (2006), with regard to presidential elections in the United States found the following media framed themes: trivia information: pets etc.; horserace information: which is ahead; issue information: candidate’s issue positions; and candidate information: personal facts about the candidate. Rhee (1997) in Busher (2006) on the other hand found main media frames, thus: horserace and issue frame. Busher (2006) citing Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn (2004), states that the horserace issue has become the dominant media frame in most advance democracies.

Nevertheless, Busher (2006, pp. 19-21) opines that several studies in political elections have also noted differences in news coverage between male and female candidates, much of which follows gender stereotypes and the traditional roles of women and appearances and personality (Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2001; Carroll & Schreiber, 1996; Devitt, 1999; Kahn, 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Kahn & Gordon, 1997; Norris, 1997) as cited in Busher (2006, pp. 19-21). The "spiral of silence" theory developed, and tested by Noelle-Neumann (1974 and 1984) assumes as follows:

- Society threatens deviant individuals with isolation
- Individuals experience fear of isolation continuously
- The fear causes individuals to try to assess the climate of opinions at all times
- The result of this estimate affects their behaviour in public, especially their willingness or not to express opinions openly (McQuail, 2010, p. 519)

In brief, the theory proposes that, in order to avoid isolation on important public issues many people are guided by what they think to be dominant or declining opinions. People tend to conceal perceived "minority" views and are more willing to express "perceived" dominant views. The result is that those views that are perceived to be dominant gain even more ground and
alternatives retreat still further, and this is the spiraling effect (McQuail, 2010, p. 519).

The spiral of silence theory of the media and public opinion, like several other theories of communication or otherwise, has not been spared of criticisms. One of such is that, there is a feeling that not all societies are conforming in public opinion, deviant voices are sometimes aggregated into popular opinion –hence the absence of the so called spiral of silence. Littlejohn (1992, p. 372) points to a study by Hernando Gonzalez on public opinion about the revolution in the Philippines, ”indeed, alternative media were heard, and no spiral of silence appeared to be in favour of a dominant opinion in this society.”

Marxist and cultural scholars also point to some factors; one- the difficulties of understanding public opinion through surveys; citing that social science, methods are not trust worthy beyond the meaning attributed to issues and events by the observers. Two- a failure to note that public opinion is an ideological product. Three- as pointed out mostly by cultural scholars that spiral of silence likely a factor that constitutes general hegemony, in which the interest of the dominant groups in society are perpetuated; and four- indeed, that the spiral of silence is not a universal phenomenon. The relevance of spiral of silence theory to this work is that, the mass media are the most readily available and accessible sources of information for assessing the prevailing political climate, and if the media continue to harp on the "frailties" of women, they will unwittingly affect the subconscious public opinion formation and expression. This is because the society threatens deviant individuals with isolation.

Nevertheless, the extent to which there would be a spiral of silence in relations to the influence of Nigerian newspapers coverage and reportage of female candidates in the 2007 and 2011 general elections remains to be studied and understood (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 372). Neill, (2009, p. 8) in his "The Alternate Channel: How Social Media is Challenging the Spiral of Silence Theory in GLBT Communities of Colour." Cites the origin and postulations of the spiral of silence theory and acknowledges the role of the mass media in the formation of public opinion. Nevertheless, Neill, (2009, pp. 22-24) further notes that the contents of the spiral of silence over the past 36 years have held sway but is currently being challenged by scholars in varying degrees and according to trends and uses of the social media. Neill, (2009, p. 23) acknowledges the standing role of the traditional media, but notes the complementing usage of social media towards the formation of individual and collective opinion. This means the adoption of the spiral of silence theory to frame newspapers portrayal of female candidates in Nigeria’s elections is not wrong. However, the efforts of Neill, (2009) points that the current trends in media usage provide female candidates with choices even among perceived challenges in the way they may be portrayed. Therefore, there are three major themes considered for the analyses of newspaper portrayals of female candidates in Nigeria. The themes are categorized, interpreted, and analysed as follows:
Methodology

Research Design

Textual analysis research design was used.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for the newspapers was made up of January, February, and March 2007 and 2011 editions of three national dailies –The Guardian, The Punch and The Tribune. All news reports, editorials, features, illustrations and opinions on female politicians portrayal were considered.

Findings/Results

Theme One: Sexist Portrayal of Female Candidates

In this analysis, we are assessing the dependence on sexism as a fulcrum by the Nigerian press to analyse female politicians seeking elective positions in the past two national elections in Nigeria, using the character traits and associated sexist portrayals. The publications portrayed sexism as a female candidate’s character trait. For instance, The Punch Newspaper reported the then Presidential aspirant, under the Peoples’ Democratic Party, Mrs. Sarah Jubril as a serial contestant. In an interview she granted the media at the premises of the Abuja High Court, she queried the insinuation but blamed the political class for the outburst:

Why are the male politicians trying to use the media to sarcastically call me a serial contestant? The political class should stop hijacking the conscience of the Nigerian women who constitute the engine of the nation. I still strongly disagree with what was once reported in the media by a male politician saying ‘women should go back to the kitchen and forget about politics’ I will never remain in the kitchen, I have a role to play in the Nigeria politics (The Punch, February 4, 2011, p. 20).

In another instance, a contestant in Katsina State, Hajiya Meriya Adulahid of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) was described as relying on the achievements of her father in politics as the spring board for her dream to become a politician.

When we say women are not meant to participate in politics it seems we the men are hijacking politics no, that is not the case but we are only saying women should carry out their God given role as a good help mate to her husband in the home and not in politics, politics is not a woman’s game. If a woman wants to be involved in politics, she should not rely on her father’s antecedents as it is the
case of Hajiya Meriya Adulahi. We from her constituency would prefer a male from that family to reward our brother (The Tribune, February 5, 2007, p. 23).

Enugu CCP female gubernatorial candidate alleged denial of Political protection. Citizens Peoples Party(CCP) Governorship candidate in Enugu State, Mrs. Ada Ozongwu yesterday accused the state police of trying to frustrate her out of the way by refusing to give her protection, even after she had applied.

Ozongwu stated that of the 17 governorship candidates in the state, among which she is the lone female contestant, she is the only one yet to be given police protection, adding that she has been running her campaigns with security men. She, however, vowed to resist any attempt by anybody to intimidate her in the cause of the race, saying that despite the deluge of male contenders for the number one position in the state, her chances are bright as she has the support of the women (The Guardian, Thursday, March 15th 2007, p. 5).

The Action Congress of Nigeria senatorial candidate for Kaduna central, Hajia Nalima Tijjani, in a chat with Kemi Ashefon narrated her ordeal, how on Monday when hoodlums beat and seized her nomination forms on her way to the Independent National Election Commission headquarters. It is important to note that though the media were not responsible for the torture Hajia Nalima underwent as a female contestant, her sex necessitated the agony and she claimed the media to have under played her ordeal. She speaks.

I was attacked by hoodlums in Abuja on my way to INEC office to submit my nomination forms. The men assaulted me and seized my nomination forms. When my nomination form was snatched from me, one of them now said, 'sebi, you want to be a senator? Let me see how you will do that'. I called two reporters immediately after the incident and no media house reported it. It is a pity that women suffer injustice because they are women. (The Punch, Friday, February 4, 2011 p. 20).

Theme Two: Personality Traits Portrayal of Women

Unlike in the portrayal of the male folk, women are special targets for personality trait capturing especially during electioneering in Nigeria. In most of the reports by the publications employed in this study, personality trait of the female politician was well emphasized. Significant among these personality traits is the positive media portrayal of women in politics, the media have presented politics as a game for all. The Guardian newspaper in one of its write ups on a female contestant for the senatorial election in 2011, came up with the following summation:

Women cannot run effective campaign because of lack of fund, says, Mr Okolo… I don’t think the electorate accepting Dr. Kema Chikwe of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) Imo state senatorial candidate, because of the money
she can bring; rather they have confidence that she will perform and not abandon
them.

…She has left footprints in the sands of time. The senate is where the ship of the
nation is stirred, one must have experience to be there and Dr. Chikwe has the
experience nationally and internationally. (The Guardian, Friday March 16,
2011, p. 21).

While the quotation seems to be about the personality of the female
candidate, and at the same time inclines to be a novelty label, it actually
captures the character trait of the Peoples’ Democratic Party candidate. This
confirms the statement of Sogbosen (2015, pp. 1-2) that: "Nigerian women face
challenges as they continue to seek public offices." One of such challenges is
even the term "female candidates" itself. The concept therefore simply implies
that women, unlike men have a high task when they aspire in politics. Another
portrayal by the Punch newspaper is a caption, thus:

INEC cancels Anambra Senatorial Result: Dora Akunyili through her party
spokesman, Mr Nweke Alex, held a briefing at her campaign office in Awka.
Before the election, Anene was arrested with fake poll monitors and later release
on bail. Instead of going to report to the police, Anene called journalists and
raised allegations against Akunyili’s party. This has shown how she was fought
by men in that election. Indirectly, as a woman, was seen by some as not
qualified to head men and that was why she was frustrated in an election she was
contesting with men. (The Punch, January 11, 2011, p. 15)

One of the character traits pushed up in media reportage of female
contestants is the dare devilry of the female contestants. These contestants are
seen as desperados willing to do anything to win. In one of the reports under
analysis, one of the contestants, Mrs. Folake Marcus-Bello of Ogun State was
quoted as defending this political prejudice against women:

Women can’t afford not to be high-handed because you see; it is only now that
people are beginning to recognize the potentials of women. The media too are
doing us good, it is no longer all negative news about women as used to be the
case in the past. Positive media comments are said about female politicians by
the men. So we cannot afford to misuse this opportunity (Punch, Sunday,

The newspaper opined that the politician was not afraid of violence in
politics when she was quoted as saying that people regard politics as being
violent will not in any way make her shy away from politics. However, one
issue they considered to pique this lady is the fact that men hardly accord
women in authority the respect due to them. She was quoted thus:

If a woman is the head in an office, she deserves her due respect. The problem is
that usually, some men put into their heads that women ought to be under them
because they feel they are the heads of their family…but if a woman is your boss
in the office, she is the head of that household and you should respect her but a
lot of men frown at this. But I'm glad that very painfully, very slowly, we are
moving. (The Punch, February 25, 2007, p. 22)

Theme Three: Stereotyping of Women

The third consideration under this thematic analysis is stereotyping of
women based on gender and other pseudo considerations. Most men, and
unfortunately in the male dominated media, think of women as home makers,
kitchen managers and people whose voices should ring solely in the kitchen
and their bedrooms. This stereotyping is not limited to street talks but it is
extended to female contesting public offices during electioneering. In the
analysis of the research subjects for this study, it was found that elements of
stereotypes were vivid in the presentations no matter how they tried to hide
such commentaries. Commenting on Mrs. Pauline Tallen gubernatorial
challenge to David Jang in the 2011 election, The Punch wrote:

She is not just seen as over ambitious woman who desire to make history... she
has become the most singular impediment... Before her romance with the LP
(Labour Party), Tallen planned together with eight other aspirants to contest. She
along with former governor of Plateau, Fidelis Tapgun, former Sports Minister,
Damishi Sango, Pam Dung Gyam, Jimmy Cheto, John Alkali, Danladi Atu, and
Chris Giwa square up with Jang. (The Punch, January 30, 2011, p. 15)

Students of politics of language know quite well that with this description,
Tallen has already been described as an over ambitious woman and impediment
to men who she contested against in the Plateau gubernatorial election. Even in
the write up, 'before her romance' was repeated several times, indicating that
what women are known for is romance. To buttress the point that Tallen could
not stand in an election, she was attached to several men who could bail her out
in the quagmire called "politics."

Media stereotyping is easily found in the type of questions presented to
female contestants when journalists interview them. A common refrain in such
interviews is, "How do you handle the home front as a mother with your
activities as a politician?" When the Nigerian Tribune interviewed Alhaja
Salmat Badru to further intimidate the women contestants, journalists ask
questions relating to how their family members, children and so on feel about
their decisions to contest elections as if it were a crime to do so. It was not all
bad portrayal for all times. The female candidate could be portrayed in good
light in some cases.
Discussion

The aspects that were given considerably higher portrayal were the personality traits. Other aspects hugely portrayed were the sexist portrayals of the female candidates, and stereotypes against women in the Nigerian society, and the political background of the female candidates. This corroborates the view of Busher (2006) who citing Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn (2004), says that dominant media frames in most advanced democracies, are qualifications, and female political candidate’s political background.

The portrayal of Nigerian female political candidates can therefore be seen as being less directly favourable towards the female political candidates’ political ambitions than otherwise. The newspapers portrayals of the female candidates were sympathetic or suggestive of gender weaknesses or dependencies. As such, the portrayal in the Nigerian newspapers affirm the views of several authors like: Ayode (2007) who says men control the apparatus of news reportage, and as such report their own gender during electioneering and left women to the mercy of the electorate.

Oyesomi (2011) also corroborate these foregoing lines of thought that women politicians apart from dealing with lack of campaign funds, face discriminative use of party zoning, low education and a slew of cultural and religious barriers. This study confirms this to be true since some important coverage of female candidates hinted on lack of funds. The selected newspapers to a great extent portrayed female candidates as victims of some partisan party insensitivity. The three newspapers (The Guardian, The Punch, and Tribune Newspapers) have given considerable attention to perceived negative treatments that the female candidates had experienced.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this work submits among other things that women received less substantive coverage than the men, with greater emphases on their traditional gender roles and trivialized language was also used to describe the female politicians in print media portrayal during the 2007 and 2011 general elections in Nigeria.

The above media portrayal, is to a large extend responsible for the poor performance of women in the said general elections in Nigeria and therefore affirms why the Framing and Spiral of Silence Theories are relevant in this study.
Bennett, T. (1982), ‘Theories of the Media, Theories of Society’ in, Gurevitch et al. (Eds.), op. cit.
Neill, S. (2009), The Alternate Channel: How Social Media is Challenging the Spiral of Silence Theory in GLBT Communities of Color. Unpublished Master of Arts Research Project Submitted to the Faculty of the Public Communication Graduate Program, School of Communication, American University, Washington, D.C.