

## **Newspaper Coverage of the Polemics of Deregulation of the Downstream Sector in Nigeria**

**Dr. Church S. Akpan**

Department of Mass Communication  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

**Anorue, Luke Ifeanyi**

Department of Mass Communication  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

**Obayi, Paul Martins**

Department of Mass Communication  
Imo State University  
Owerri, Nigeria

**Onyebuchi, Chima Alexander**

Department of Mass Communication  
Kogi State University Anyigba  
Nigeria

**Odoemelam, Chinedu Christian**

Department of Mass Communication  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

**Anorue, Uchenna**

Department of Mass Communication  
Igbenidion University  
Benin, Nigeria

**Ekwe, Okwudiri C.**

Department of Mass Communication  
Enugu State University of Science and Technology  
Nigeria

### **Abstract**

*This study espoused the role of the media on the disagreement between the government and its citizens on the issue of deregulating the downstream sector. Using the agenda-setting theory and the explanatory mixed method design, the analysis of data were approached from two dimensions. In determining the sample size for quantitative analysis, the multistage sampling technique was employed, which provided for 16 editions of the newspapers selected. The study revealed that media coverage of the deregulation of the downstream sector was certainly high and very impressive. It was concluded that the media of communication can serve as a potent tool in direction the cause of an event. It was recommended, however, that media organisations should collaborate with the government in power to work out modalities on how the coverage of the deregulation process would go in other to foster the greater good of society and democracy at large.*

**Key terms:** Polemics, Deregulation and Downstream Sector

## **Introduction**

Since the return to democracy in the year 1999, various administrations have sought to deregulate the downstream sector, all to no avail. The most recent in the attempt to deregulate the sector was the removal of oil subsidy from fuel on the first of January 2012 by the Goodluck Jonathan administration, so as to create the enabling environment for deregulation, which led to a nationwide strike that cost many their lives. The issue now is: if deregulating the downstream sector is the answer to the economic milieu of the country, what then is the question? This study examined the role of the media in the polemics of deregulating the downstream sector.

In the course of the polemics, government argued that the subsidy in the oil sector would not allow for the deregulation of the sector because it would create an unfair business environment for the private owners who would come into the sector as a result of the deregulation. Government had to remove subsidy in order to fully deregulate the sector. This led to a great protest by the organized labour union in the country. But government argued that the removal of subsidy on Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) otherwise known as petrol would free up resources that were hitherto channelled to fund fuel subsidy for investment in infrastructure, facilities and amenities that will guarantee the good life, not for few, but for all Nigerians. According to Neighbour to Neighbour for Transformation Initiative (N2N) (2012: 56), some of the benefits of the removal of subsidy include:

Rehabilitation and construction of roads across the country, improvement in power generation and supply, improvement in health care delivery, creation of conducive learning environment in our educational institutions through upgrade of facilities, boost in agricultural productivity and job creation from the value chain derivable from the huge investment in infrastructure, amongst others.

However, most people do not believe that government will keep to its words following what has been seen as the attitude of most governments in the past. Ekwuruke (2012: para. 2) notes that:

It is the situation that our leaders (past and present) have very often heightened through their usually unforeseen hike of oil through the deceptive cloak of deregulatory procedures. Suffice it to say that, the deregulation could be a mischievous clever way by which our leaders have increased the weight of their purses without our realizing it. Hence, today it is asked: What is the reaction of the Nigerian Labour Congress over this anomaly? It is nation-wide strike actions? Every wise Tom, Dick and Harry can now notice that our country's rule of life and new motto is fast becoming, "Oil marketers, to live more, Nigerian leaders to live most, and the innocent citizens to face the consequences of the evils being committed by their leaders. What an unjust society! The oil price saga is coming down memory lane; This has always been coupled with hiking of the prices of petroleum products often tagged "deregulation strategy" by the past junta and the present incumbent democratic government. Our present government sticks vehemently to the notion that it is impossible for a nation to grow without a deregulation exercise or policy.

With this form of disagreement between the government and the citizens over the issue of deregulating the downstream sector, one would wonder what the function of the journalists would be in a situation like this. Are the journalists expected to report the issues the way they appear and are piloted by either the government or the organised labour union in the country which represent the voice of the masses, or are they supposed to bring in some mediating function in order to help resolve this problem once and for all? As the watchdog of the society, the role of the media becomes paramount at this point in time.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to look at the polemics of the deregulation issue of the downstream sector from a journalistic perspective with the aim of finding a common ground that will put the issue of deregulating the downstream sector or not deregulating it to rest once and for all.

## **Statement of Problem**

As the issue of deregulating or not deregulating the downstream sector rages on between the government and the organised labour, most Nigerian citizens are lost in the middle and really needs a sense of direction. The issue is from who will this direction come, since the media is expected to be neutral in its report of events. As this situation continues, many Nigerians will suffer the brunt.

Now that the issue of subsidy has been pegged at a particular price, what will be the fate of the citizens if in the near future it is increased again with the same argument of deregulating the oil sector? The media, no doubt, need to redefine its role in this matter if anything justifiable it's to be achieved in the quest to better the economy once and for all.

The major objectives of this study are to find out how the media covered the issue of deregulating the downstream sector: to find out the direction of such coverage: to know the level of prominence accorded the deregulation of the downstream sector: to find out the extent to which the media covered the issue of deregulation in the downstream sector: and to examine whether there is anything the media can do to resolve the issue of deregulating the downstream sector. The study is therefore forced to ask the following questions: How did the media cover the issue of deregulating the downstream sector? What direction did the coverage of the downstream sector take? What level of prominence was accorded the deregulation of the downstream sector? And to what extent did the media cover the issue of deregulation in the downstream sector?

### **Literature Review**

The issue of deregulation has gone down memory lane. It has cut across military and democratic dispensations. Ekwuruke (2012: para. 10) notes that:

The effect of deregulation began in Nigeria in 1987 during Gen.Ibrahim Babangida's regime as the Military president. Records have it that the pump price of petrol particularly was hiked from 20k per litre to 39.5k per litre. In the following year, 1988, there was also a sudden increase which brought the price to 45k per litre. However, in March 1991, the price was hiked to 70k per litre. During this period, the masses posed certain questions on whether deregulation only meant an incessant hike in oil prices without any amelioration of the standard of living of the population. Despite, that the price was raised from 70k per litre to N3.25k representing more than a 300% increase. In October, 1994, the petrol price was again hiked from N3.25k to N11.00 per litre.

With this hike in price, the world seems to have come to an end for the poor masses, protest and counter protest could not solve the problem, then the people calmed down and were trying to get use to the hardship brought by the hike in price. Four years later the government under the guess of deregulation came up with another shocker for the citizens. "And so, on December, 21st 1998, the price of petrol rose from the N11.00 per litre to N25.00 per litre. At this period, the whole sector of the country was brought to stagnation. However, after a widespread strike action by the NLC, the pump price was brought down to N20.00 on 6th January, 1999. In the year 2000, the price was revisited and raised to N25.00 per litre, after the NLC had embarked on their usual corrective industrial action which really threatened to bring the whole of the country's economic, social, educational and political activities to a halt" (Ekwuruke, 2012: para 12). This hike in price was done during President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime, the then civilian president that came to power in 1999. He argued that deregulating the downstream sector was part of the proposal he received from the immediate past military government that handed power over to him. At a point, it was as if the hope for the country's downstream sector has come but the realities that later unfold showed that the journey was far.

Successive governments have invested more than \$70 billion in the power and gas utilities and the oil refineries. But attempts to privatise some of the big-spending companies have been stalled for years, because of opposition from the Muslim north. The northerners remain powerful under the current regime. State ownership has played an important role in the political dominance of the Muslim north. While many influential northerners now appear to have accepted the principle of privatisation, fears remain that the sale of public enterprises - from which their patronage power has derived - will benefit southern rivals who control most other aspects of the Nigerian economy ([www.thefreelibrary.com](http://www.thefreelibrary.com)).

Recently, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, the government of President Goodluck Jonathan revisited the deregulation issue on the oil sector; the consequence was a 100% increase in the price of fuel in the country. The price was increased from N 65 per litre to N 141 per litre, this lead to another industrial action which treated the lives of many well-meaning Nigerians. "The back page article in the PILOT newspaper of October 15, 2011 should interest a lot of readers because it contained a summary of per litre fuel pump price in both OPEC and non-OPEC economies.

The survey says per litre pump price of petrol in Iran is N58.40k; Kuwait N30.66k; Qatar N32.12k; Saudi Arabia N17.52k; UAE N54.02k; Venezuela N5.84k; Libya N15.95k; Egypt N46.72k; Malaysia N73; Mexico N81.76k; Bahrain N39.42k; Russia N90.52k; USA N108.04 and Indonesia N81.14. As at August 15, 2011, based on its pricing template, Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) said the landing cost of a litre of petrol in Nigeria is N129.21; the margin for transporters and marketers is N15.49; the expected pump price ought to be N144.70 per litre instead of the N65 per litre that is charged. This means a so-called subsidy of N79.70 assumed by government on every litre of petrol sold in Nigeria” (Omokhodion, 2011: para. 2 & 3).

The issue of deregulating the downstream sector has been tied down to the state of the economy of the nation. This is the reason government and organized labour has had series of disagreement on the way forward. Akintunde (2009: para. 1) notes that “in many economic sectors in developing countries, deregulation has been implemented with mixed outcomes. Whether in transportation, telecommunication, mining or the downstream sector of the oil industry, practical benefits of deregulation to the economy are limited by evidence. In many cases, the downside risks of the policy easily overshadow the stated policy benefits. This has meant that the debate about the desirability of deregulation in any industry remains alive. The oil and gas industry provides the most polarised debate about deregulation in Nigeria, pitching policy makers against labour and civil society bodies”.

The reason for this argument could be linked to the fact that the past regimes had promised that the revenue generated from subsidy removal would be used to develop the economy, yet with all the hike nothing has dramatically changed in most of the areas the revenue were said would be channelled. Again, Akintunde (2009: para. 7) notes that:

The Nigerian government like its counterparts in some developing countries has always communicated the potential benefits of deregulation in absolute terms. In the case of Nigeria, a gradual approach to withdrawal of subsidy which has seen petrol price rise by more than 490% between 1999 and 2007 had failed to deliver promised infrastructure or improved funding of the social sector. Yet the same argument comes to the table even in the present episode. This has tended to introduce the negative adjective of insincerity in the view of government's failure to deliver on past promises. Simply put, the current effort at deregulation of the downstream sector of the oil industry is seen as treading the beaten track.

Based on the aforementioned quotation, one would understand the reason for loggerhead between the government and the people. While the organised labour believes that government cannot remedy the situation of the country by removing subsidy from fuel, government on the other hand, believes that subsidy removal is the major means to move the nation forward. The core arguments of both parties are that:

Very often, government officials, including those at the state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), say the amount the government spends yearly on liquid fuels importation subsidy is unsustainable. Under the immediate past regime especially, the authorities said government wanted to channel its social spend to areas that will provide widespread benefits to the economy, like provision of infrastructure. The regime of Fmr President Olusegun Obasanjo also promised that savings from the yearly subsidy would free up fund for healthcare financing and improve access to quality education. To the organised labour, subsidy on petroleum products is a penalty the Federal Government should pay for its inefficiency in managing the country's oil industry. Any attempt to make the people pay for this 'inefficiency' is to be resisted, as Nigeria already ranks very low on human development indicators, including high rates of poverty, maternal mortality, adolescent deaths and very limited access to modern healthcare, etc. Furthermore, a percentile increase in petrol price would translate to higher increases in food prices and cost of transportation, whereas wages will largely remain static (Akintunde, 2009: para. 5).

As to whether deregulation would bring succour or not, it is the practical implementation of the policy that would tell the future. How best to know the future if we do not look at the happenings in countries that have tried it in the past. If it is working well for them, it then means that it might likely work for the country. However, countries that should be examined should be countries that share the same or similar socio-economic environment. For instance, “in the Philippines, deregulation and its operational framework were codified in legislation.

Even at that, spiralling petroleum price increases have been the biggest harvest of the policy. In the country, the Downstream Oil Industry Deregulation Act of 1998 has been criticized and "perceived to have legalised the domination of the big three oil companies in the Philippine market and has allowed the increase of oil prices nine times in just one year." Oppositions groups flawed the circumstance under which the deregulation act was enacted. They said the law came into existence without prior dismantling of monopolistic structure in the market" (Akintunde, 2009: para. 9 & 10).

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on a theory of mass communication called the agenda-setting theory. Walter Lippmann, an American columnist for the *New York Times* and a strong supporter of Harold Lasswell, writing about agenda-setting function of the media in his famous article *Public Opinion* (1992) argued that "the people do not deal directly with their environments as well as they respond to 'pictures' in their heads (Baran and Davis, 2006: 316). Lippmann (1922: 16) as cited in Baran and Davis (2006: 316) notes that:

For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. But average people just can't be trusted to make important political decisions based on these simplified pictures. Average people have to be protected, and the important decisions have to be made by technocrats who use better models to guide their actions.

"Although he did not specifically use the term, Bernard Cohen is generally credited with refining Lippmann's ideas into the theory of agenda-setting" (Baran and Davis, 2006: 316). "The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the paper they read" (Cohen, 1963: 13 and cited in Baran and Davis, 2006: 316). Had Cohen's ideas not been further researched, it would have lingered in total abandon. But thanks to McCombs and Shaw, whose further studies in this area reveal that "in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn only not about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position... The mass media may well determine the important issue-that is, the media may set the agenda for the campaign" (McCombs and Shaw, 1972: 176 as cited in Baran and Davis, 2006: 317).

McCombs and Shaw supported the work of Cohen because the findings of their work reveals that "a strong relationship exist between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media... and the judgments of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics" (McCombs and Shaw, 1972: 180-181). The study, however, amplified the limitation of this theory. For instance, critics have argued that apart from the theory been said to be good on issues of political communication, what other issue of media contents can it address? What is the nature of relationship between the media and the audience? Could it be that the society sets the agenda, while the media reinforce it? In this case, is it likely that the media must have influence the media output? If this last question is true, then it is a total deviation from the findings of McCombs and Shaw which suggest that the relationship is that of the influence of the media on the people. Whatever be the arguments of these critics or the questions raised, it is not enough to water the place of the agenda-setting theory in explaining media's effect on the people especially during the political communications.

The relevance of this theory to the work under review is that the media can focus on the issue of deregulating the downstream sector with the aim of raising it to public discourse so as to attract a cross-sectional view of how to wriggle out of the problem it has caused the nation. Based on this, the media can then take a stand in its reports in form of feature stories, articles and editorial writing with the aim of tailoring the attention of the people towards a particular direction. Media reports can equally be in form of documentaries, magazine news production on electronic media or the publication of worded write ups on their online web pages. This step will go a long way to direct the attention of the people on what exactly is expected to lay the issue of deregulation to rest.

## Methodology

Given the nature of this study, the explanatory mixed method design was adopted. According to Creswell (2002: 566), the explanatory mixed method design “consist of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results. The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and result provide a general picture of the research problem; more analysis, specifically through qualitative data collection is needed to refine, extend or explain the general picture”. In gathering quantitative data which is the first approach in explanatory mixed method, media contents was content analysed. As for the qualitative method of data approach, media practitioners and media content were interviewed and examined.

Ohaja (2003: 14) writes that “content analysis refers to the examination of the manifest content of communication to discover the patterns existing therein. Such manifest content could be advertisements, news stories, features, opinion articles, editorials, letter-to-the-editor, cartoons, photographs and other illustrations in a newspaper or magazine”. This informed the use of content analysis in determining the nature of media coverage of the deregulation issue of the downstream sector.

The population of this study is in two phases. The first phase is that of quantitative analysis while the second is that of qualitative analysis. The population for quantitative analysis here has to do with all the issues on deregulation of the downstream sector in newspapers in Nigeria. By newspapers in Nigeria, the study looks at the national dailies that are in the business of informing, educating, entertaining etc. of the people. Therefore, the population for a work of this nature is all the registered newspapers in Nigeria. However, for the purpose of this study, the population was limited to the two selected national dailies namely: *The Vanguard and Daily Sun*. These newspapers were studied for a period of one months (1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2012), which was the major periods when the subsidy removal on fuel for the purpose of deregulation was at its peak. The population for the qualitative approach of this work consists of all media practitioners in the country.

Ohaja (2003: 74) agrees that “selecting a sample size is very important considering the impracticability of studying the entire population...” In line with this, two formulas were used to determine the sample size of the study. In determining the sample size for quantitative analysis, the multistage sampling technique was employed. The procedure for arriving at a sample size is stipulated in the sampling techniques below. The sample size for this study, therefore, is 16 editions of the newspapers selected. In generating qualitative data for this study, 12 persons were interviewed. Wimmer and Dominick (2011: 162) note that “most content analysis in mass media involves multistage sampling”. Therefore, the sampling here was done in three stages.

**Stage 1:** Considering the fact that the population of this study deals with all registered newspaper in Nigeria, in determining the sample, two national newspapers were chosen for this purpose. They are *The Vanguard and Daily Sun newspapers*. These newspapers were selected because they have national coverage and deeper circulation. *The Vanguard* is rated as an elite newspaper and as such has wider patronage by the elites. *The Daily Sun newspaper*, on the other hand, is seen as one of the most circulated newspaper patronised mainly by those who are not the elites in the society but that is not to say that it is not usually read by the elites. Most national issues are carried by these newspapers.

**Stage 2:** These newspapers were studied for a period of one months (1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2012), which was the major periods when the deregulation issue was at its peak. In the newspapers studied within the period under investigation, January has 31 days editions.

In determining the sampling frame, therefore, the composite week procedure was adopted. Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) as cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2011: 163) demonstrated that “a composite week sampling technique was superior to both a random sample and a consecutive day sample when dealing with newspaper contents”. Therefore, the editions of newspapers for the month under investigation were grouped according to the days of the week and each of the editions within the days of the week was selected at random.

In all, 16 editions were studied, resulting to 8 editions for each of the newspapers sampled. The composite sample was designed in such a way that the editions randomly selected for *The Vanguard* was applied to the of *Daily Sun* newspapers. The study included weekend newspapers because it is a matter of national interest; issues of national importance do not leave the pages of newspapers even though it is weekend.

**Stage 3:** For each edition of the newspapers sampled, the researcher looked at the following unit of analysis: news stories, editorials, adverts, cartoons, party communiqués and advertorials and letter-to-the-editor, etc.

In sampling the procedure for the qualitative data collection, the cluster sampling procedure was used. Again, Wimmer and Dominick (2011: 99) opine that “with cluster sampling, the state can be divided into districts, counties, or zip code areas and groups of people can be selected from each area”.

In line with this, Nigeria as a country was sub-divided into the six existing geopolitical zones of the country. From each of the political zones, one state each was selected to represent the zones. In all, this gave a total of six states. The choice of these states was as a result of their strategic positions in the zones, their commercial inclinations, media concentration and social dispositions. In these states, the states capitals were purposefully selected because it is the seat of state government and high information concentration. The interview was administered to media practitioner selected from the state media houses; one from the television media outfit and the other from radio media outfit. The study made provision for 12 persons that would be interviewed in line with the study under investigation. This study used three instruments namely; code sheet, interview and observation of documents. The instrument for the content analysis aspect of this study is code sheet. The code sheet as well as coding guide was designed to aid the ascribing of numerical figures to manifest contents. The services of two trained coders were employed in the coding process. These coders are mass communication students, who are already at home with the rudiments of content coding. They were only instructed on the main gist of the study and what the researcher intend to code. The validity of the instruments was done using face validity technique. The instruments were given to two communication scholars who are senior lecturers in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

### Data Analysis and Presentation

Considering the research method adopted, data analysis is expected to be presented in both quantitative and qualitative format, but with large emphasis placed on quantitative data. To this effect, quantitative approach would be used to address research question one (1) to four (4) which is content coding.

### Research Question 1: How did the media cover the issue of deregulating the downstream sector?

**Table 1: Analysing the frequency of coverage of issues on oil sector deregulation**

Content cat.	News		Editorials		Feature/Art.		Interviews/let.		Total	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Frequency	480	4,512	5	11	288	224	13	64	786	4,811
Percentages	10%	90%	31.3%	68.8%	56.3%	43.8%	16.9%	83.1%	14%	86%
Total	4,992		16		512		77		5597	

In order to analyse how the media covered issues of deregulation of the oil sector, the frequency of media coverage was seen as the best way to ascertain that. From the table above, it became obvious 14% of media content was committed to the coverage of issues on deregulation of the downstream sector, while the remaining 86% was given to the coverage of other issues. In order to determine the highness or lowness of coverage in content analysis, Wimmer and Dominick (2011: 170) opined that “the investigator needs some benchmark for comparison”. To do this, the researcher decided to produce a content analysis of the Boko haram crisis which happened to be the second most covered issue in the newspapers, at the end, the total coverage amounted to 5.2%. Based on this result, it was discovered that the amount of coverage given to the deregulation of the downstream sector was certainly high and very impressive.

### Research Question 2: What direction did the coverage of the downstream sector take?

**Table 2: Analysing the direction of coverage of issues on oil sector deregulation**

Content cat.	News			Editorials			Feature/Art.			Interviews/Let.			Total		
	6	7	8	6	7	8	6	7	8	6	7	8	6	7	8
Frequency	160	320	-	1	4	-	72	198	18	4	9	-	237	531	18
Percentages	33.3	66.7	-	20	80	-	25%	68.8%	6.3%	30.8%	69.2%	-	30.2%	67.6%	2.3%
Total	480			5			288			13			786		

The table above provides an analysis of the direction of media coverage on the issues of deregulation of the downstream sector. The analyses were presented in bits according to the content categories. However, the basic explanation here would focus on the grand total results coded. From the analysis, it is obvious that 237 content amounting to 30.2% of the general contents were in favour of the deregulation policy of the government (vis a vis, subsidy reports in favour of the federal government), while 531 contents amounting to 67.6% were in favour of the labour union, which means they were against the policy of the federal government. Whereas, 18 contents amounting to 2.3% of the general coverage on deregulation were neutral (reporting both sides of the events without necessarily taking side).

From the explanations above, it is evident that media coverage of the deregulation policy of the federal government was really against deregulating the downstream sector. This is anchored on the fact that 67.6% of all the coverage on deregulating the downstream sector were against the deregulation policy by condemning the subsidy removal on the oil sector.

### Research Question 3: What level of prominence was accorded the deregulation of the downstream sector?

**Table 3: Analysing the placement of issues on oil sector deregulation**

Content cat.	News				Editorials				Feature/Art.				Interviews/let.				Total			
	9	10	11	12	9	10	11	12	9	10	11	12	9	10	11	12	9	10	11	12
Frequency	64	-	-	416	-	-	-	5	-	32	-	256	-	-	4	9	64	32	4	686
Percentages	13.3	-	-	86.7	-	-	-	100	-	11.1	-	88.9	-	-	30.8	69.2	8.1	4.1	0.5	87.3
Total	480				5				288				13				786			

In this aspect of data analysis, the prominence accorded to media contents on deregulation of the downstream sector was examined. From the table above, 64 contents amounting to 8.1% of all issues covered by the media were placed on the front page of the newspapers sampled, while 32 and 4 contents amounting to 4.1% and 0.5% were placed on the back page and centre-spread respectively; whereas, 686 contents amounting to 87.3% were randomly distributed on the inside pages of the newspapers.

From the table above, it is evident that 87.3% which constitute more than half of the total coverage on issues of deregulation were randomly distributed in the pages of the newspapers sampled. This is not to say that the level of prominence given to the issue of deregulation by the media is low, because to determine this, a benchmark would have to be established with other media content covered within the same period. Therefore, the researcher decided to analyse media placement of Boko Haram issues against front and back page placement, in order to determine prominence. In all, 5.3% and 3.1% were found for the placement of Boko Haram issues on front and back page respectively. When 8.1% and 4.1% of the placement of deregulation issues are compared against 5.3% and 3.1% placement for Boko Haram on front and back page respectively, it becomes evident that the level of prominence placed on deregulation of the downstream sector by the media is on the high side.

### Research Question 4: To what extent did the media cover the issue of deregulation in the downstream sector?

**Table 4: Analysing the length of coverage (in-depth) of issues on oil sector deregulation**

Content cat.	News				Editorials				Feature/Art.				Interviews/let.				Total				
	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16	
Frequency	401	46	33	-	-	3	2	-	-	132	107	-	-	3	2	8	-	401	184	144	8
Percentages	83.5	9.6	6.9	-	-	60	40	-	-	45.8	37.2	-	-	23.1	15.4	61.5	-	51.0	23.4	18.3	1.0
Total	480				5				288				13				786				

This table analysed the depth of coverage given to the issue of deregulating the downstream sector. According to the table, 401 and 184 contents amounting to 51.0% and 23.4% of the issues on deregulating the oil sector were given an in-depth of 1-5 inches and 6-10 inches respectively, while 144 and 8 contents amounting to 18.3% and 1.0% were given an in-depth of 11-15 inches and 16 inches and above respectively. From the table above, it would be difficult to say that the level of media coverage of the issues of deregulation do not have enough depth in reportage.



This is because when 23.4% of the issues on deregulating the oil sector amounting to 6-10 inches is added to 18.3% which is 11-15 inches, a 41.7% would be arrived at which is closely at a percentage range with 51.0% amounting to 1-5 inches.

Therefore, the coverage of the deregulation of the downstream sector had lots of in-depth reports which are close to 50% of the overall depth in media report.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The analysis of data presented in this study revealed that the frequency of coverage of the deregulation of the downstream sector was certainly high and very impressive. To arrive at this result, the researcher produced a content analysis of the Boko Haram crisis which happened to be the second most covered issue in the newspapers, at the end, the total coverage amounted to 5.2% as against the 14% coverage given to the deregulation of the downstream sector.

Similarly, the interview conducted in respect to the frequency of coverage of the downstream sector, all the respondents were of the opinion that the media tried in their effort to give adequate coverage on behalf of the government and the people. They opined that the media coverage were part of the informing parameter that helped mobilise support in favour of the labour union which stood against the federal government. They opined that if the media would help the projecting of issues of injustice, corruption and fraud in the country, things would change for the better.

The study further revealed that media coverage of the deregulation policy of the federal government was really against deregulating the downstream sector. This is anchored on the fact that 67.6% of all the coverage on deregulating the downstream sector were against the deregulation policy by condemning the subsidy removal on the oil sector. The interview aspect of the study revealed that majority of the respondents opined that the media reports favoured the fight against deregulation as the media was on ground interviewing protesters and members of the National Assembly who were really not in support of the timing of the deregulation policy.

The study also revealed that the level of prominence placed on deregulation of the downstream sector by the media was high. This finding was arrived at by coding prominent issues that occupied media coverage within the period sampled. Therefore, media placement of Boko Haram issues against front and back page placement were analysed, in order to determine prominence. In all, 5.3% and 3.1% were found for the placement of Boko Haram issues on front and back page respectively. When 8.1% and 4.1% of the placement of deregulation issues were compared against the 5.3% and 3.1% placement for Boko Haram on front and back page respectively, the level of prominence placed on deregulation of the downstream sector by the media was higher.

All the respondents interviewed, opined that the media gave prominence to the issue of deregulating the downstream sector. Some of the respondents rant that apart from the fact that bad news is good news for the media; the media saw their role in the crisis as paramount for the sustenance of democracy.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the level of media coverage of the issue of deregulation do have enough depth in reportage. This is because when 23.4% of the issues on deregulating the oil sector amounting to 6-10 inches is added to 18.3% which is 11-15 inches, a 41.7% would be arrived at which is closely at a percentage range with 51.0% amounting to 1-5 inches that should have shown low depth in report. Therefore, the coverage of the deregulation of the downstream sector was measured by the 49% high in-depth report as against the 51% low in-depth report, only to conclude that the depth of coverage is closely high and impressive compared to the fact that 50% of the low in-depth coverage is from news reported which ordinarily do not require much depth.

From observation, the interview with General Don Idada Ikponmwen by *The Vanguard* on January 12, titled "Subsidy: Jonathan should listen to Nigerians – Gen Ikponmwen (centre spread)" has two pages of coverage. In another coverage by *The Daily Sun* on January 9, titled "Reason for Oil Subsidy Removal, Baseless – Opadokun (centre spread)", the interview with Lawyer Ayo Opadokun has a full page to its credit. These are just little compared to the numerous cases of in-depth reports given to the issues of deregulation of the downstream sector.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the media of communication can serve as a potent tool in tailoring the direction of an event. It is therefore, important for the media to go beyond reporting issues of deregulation of the downstream sector to piloting and directing the opinion, perception and orientation of the people towards a particular direction, in this case, towards the deregulation of the downstream sector with the aim of bringing the polemics therein to an end. The ultimate aim in this case would be to better the economy and foster a viable democracy.

## Recommendations

This study is therefore, compelled to recommend as follows:

- Media houses should collaborate with the government in power to work out modalities on how the coverage of the deregulation process would go in order to foster the greater good of society and democracy at large.
- Media should carry out a documentary programme on the gains of deregulating the downstream sector in order to encourage the people to accept the policy.
- Media should monitor government activities over time to see whether the palliative that the government said it would put in place have been provided and such palliatives should be made known to the people.
- Media should equally carryout opinion polls on issues of deregulating the downstream sector so as to alert the government on the appropriate timing for the deregulation policy.
- Media should carryout panel interview programmes where experts and icon of industries would espouse the gains of deregulation in developed and underdeveloped countries and what these countries did to get it right as a way of creating a pathway towards the deregulation of the downstream sector Nigeria.
- The populace and labour union should give government the benefit of doubt by allowing the deregulation policy to flourish in order to see to whether government would be able to leave up to its promises.
- Government on their own part should be sincere in its dealings with the people in order to win their trust and confidence in governance.

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