

COVERAGE OF PASSAGE OF NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE ACT IN NIGERIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF GUARDIAN AND VANGUARD NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

This research effort was undertaken to examine newspapers coverage of passage of the 2019 National Minimum Wage Act in Nigeria and evaluate the level of prominence, direction, and frequency of coverage given to the stories by the selected newspapers. The study was anchored on two theories- Agenda Setting Theory and Public Interest Theory. The study adopted the content analysis method as its research design. The editions of the Guardian and Vanguard newspapers published between 1st July, 2019 to 31st December, 2019 were used for generalization. Code sheet was the instrument for data collection. The study used purposive sampling technique and the composite week sampling technique to draw a sample size of 84 editions. Among other findings, the study revealed that news stories on the 2019 national minimum wage act were not given adequate coverage by the selected dailies. Given the findings, it is recommended that the Nigerian media should be more aggressive in covering and reporting issues that affects the public such as the national minimum wage act which impacts the wellbeing of Nigerian workers by going beyond straight news and incorporating other formats of news reporting such as: features, editorials, columns, cartoon stories etc in order to give it more weight and relevance. Subsequent future stories on National Minimum wage should be given more prominence so that Nigerians will be better informed.

Keywords: Newspaper, Coverage, Passage, Minimum wage, Nigeria.

Introduction

Across the world, workers welfare is the responsibility of governments through fixing and regulation of the national minimum wage. This is because the fundamental objective of governments is to cater for the wellbeing of its citizens. This perhaps, is the reason why any responsible government takes seriously issues that pertain to the welfare of their workers. In fact, the welfare of citizens constitutes the cornerstone for measuring the legitimacy of any political leader (Kuka. M, 2022).

Hence, governments in more than 90 percent of all countries have some kinds of minimum wage legislation aimed at protecting their workforce (Onyeche and Edet, 2017). Minimum Wage is the rate of pay fixed either by a collective bargaining agreement or by governmental enactment as the lowest wage payable to specified categories of employees (Onuegbu, 2010). Marxist argue that anyone who must sell their ability to work for a wage and can't produce their life necessities for themselves is part of the working class and they make up the vast majority of the society. (Hadas T, 2020).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its meeting of experts on Minimum Wage fixing and industrial related issues had explained that the concept of Minimum Wage contains three basic ideas:

- The first idea is that, Minimum Wage is a wage considered sufficient to satisfy the vital necessities of food, clothing, housing, education and recreation of the workers, taking into account the present economic and cultural development of each country.
- The second idea is that, Minimum Wage represents the lowest level of remuneration permitted in law or fact, notwithstanding the method of remuneration or the qualification of the worker.
- Thirdly, Minimum Wage is the wage which each country has the force of law to uphold and which is enforceable under threat of penal or other appropriate sanctions.

Though, the practice of National Minimum Wage is not new, the duration, details and nature vary from country to country. Fapohunda, Atiku and Olanrewaji (2012) argue that developing countries too, have regularly increased their minimum wage to provide social protection to vulnerable and non-organized categories of workers. In China for example, it was introduced in 1995 to address wage inequality, while it was also introduced in South Africa in 2002. Countries like Brazil, Argentina and China have been among the main drivers of these upward review trends. However, in Nigeria, before the present organised labour structure was put in place in the name of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), there was no known notable structured minimum wage as we have today.

Despite the fact that there was the popular Udoji pay package of 1975, there was no really negotiated process (as we had in the last few years) to arrive at a particular figure. The Udoji package came as a result of the oil boom (Nigerian Tribune, Nov 7, 2018). Consequently, the history of national minimum wage in Nigeria is replete with crisis, workers protest and agitations. According to the president of Nigerian labour Congress, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, Nigerian workers have never in history get any increase in wage on a platter of gold. Rather, it has all been gotten through confrontations with the powers that be and government of the day (Nigerian tribune, Nov 7, 2018). While the political office holders have always enjoyed fat

salaries and allowances, the (Nigerian) workers in history have always being at the very lower ebb of poor salary arrangement or structure.

Nevertheless, on April 2019, after series of collective bargaining, meetings and negotiations, accusations and counter accusations, President Muhammadu Buhari signed a new minimum wage bill into law. The law ushered in a new pay structure for Nigerian workers with the federal government commencing implementation almost immediately. Though some individuals, NGO's and even studies conducted by independent organisations (like Picodi researchers) in and outside Nigeria has argued that; "Nigeria's minimum wage is grossly inadequate, and can hardly meet the basic nutritional needs of an adult". Yet, over three years after the president assented to the bill many states across the federation are yet to implement it citing paucity of funds as an excuse (The Cable, May 3, 2022).

Given that people in power (government) could be susceptible to corruption, engaging in various forms of illegalities, the need for the watchdog function of the press to hold the government accountable to the people becomes imperative.

Therefore, as a social institution, in addition to its core mandate of information dissemination, education and entertainment the press also serve as society's watchdog. This implies gathering and disseminating information about the misconduct of people in power to the public with the purpose of checkmating such excesses and stopping wrongdoings. Also, the press serves as the link between the government, other institutions and the people. It is the platform through which mutual understanding is created between the government and the governed. As a result, the manner in which an event or issue is presented in the news media contributes a lot to the knowledge and understanding of such an event or issue. No wonder the agenda setting approach by the press in the issue of the National Minimum Wage Act 2019 opened the floodgate of interest, ideas, criticism from the public against the lawmakers until the bill was passed into law. The importance and role of the press have been stated in Article 22 of 1999 constitution as follows:

The Press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

Consequently, this study seeks to investigate newspaper coverage of passage of the 2019 National Minimum Wage Act and issues surrounding the passage. Also, the contributions of the press to its passage and if the press exerted pressure on the authority, the labour union, and other interest groups in the process of the passage of the 2019 National Minimum Wage Act.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of minimum wage is to protect workers against unduly low pay. They help ensure a just and equitable share of the fruit of progress to all who are employed in a company or organisation and in need of protection. It can serve as an instrument for reducing inequality and overcoming abject poverty in society through policy enactment and enforcement. It was in light of the above that Adesina (2002) notes that one of the means through which government improves living conditions of its citizens is through introduction of national

minimum wage legislation, and the mechanism for reviewing it when necessary. This is to prevent the exploitation of workers by their employers: Nigeria cannot be an exception. Thus, over the years, successive Nigerian governments have made effort to address the perennial problem of national minimum wage.

In 2019, a great move was made by President Muhammadu Buhari's administration to increase National Minimum Wage. Following three days of negotiations by Government and the organised labour on the consequential adjustments of the implementation of the new Minimum Wage of N30, 000, both parties finally reached agreement on October 18, 2019 (Daily Post, 2019). However, in spite of the enormous powers of the press and the apparent newspaper reportage of the deliberations and passage of the minimum wage Act, the frequency of coverage, level of prominence, and direction given to the 2019 national minimum wage act are not certain. The problem of this study is therefore, expressed in the foregoing.

Research Objectives

The goal of the study, among others, revolves around the need to:

- Examine the level of frequency of coverage of 2019 National Minimum Wage Act in Nigeria in the selected newspapers.
- Determine the level of prominence of coverage given to National Minimum Wage Act in Nigeria in the selected newspapers.
- Ascertain the direction of coverage given to National Minimum Wage Act in Nigeria in the selected newspapers.

Theoretical Support

This study is anchored on Agenda Setting Theory and the Public Interest Theory. The theory of agenda-setting can be traced to the first chapter of Walter Lipman's 1992 book, *Public Opinion*. Lipmann argues that the mass media are the principal connection between events in the world and the images in the minds of the public. Without using the term "agenda setting", Walter Lippmann was writing about what we today would call "agenda setting". Following Lipmann, in 1963, Bernard Cohen observed that the press "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. The world will look different to different people". Cohen continues, "depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors and publishers of the paper they read". As early as the 1960s, Cohen had expressed the idea that later led to formalisation of agenda setting theory by McCombs and Shaw. Thus, in 1992, Walter Lipmann's book on *Public Opinion* set the stage for the theory of agenda setting by arguing that "the news media construct our view of the world (Wahl-Jorgenson and Hanitzsch, 2009). Also, Wimmer and Dominick (2000) observes that the theory on agenda setting by the media proposes that the public agenda or what kinds of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicise. This means that for instance, if the news media choose to give the most time and space to covering HIV/AIDS, this issue will become the most important item on the audiences' minds. The elements involved in agenda setting according to Folarin (1998) include: the quantity or frequency of reporting; prominence given to the reports through headlines display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or timing on radio and television; the degree of conflict generated in the reports; and cumulative media specific effects over time.

Another theory adopted for this research is the public interest theory. This theory was postulated to correct the imperfections in the market-driven economy. Peltzman (1989) in his path-breaking paper presented at Brookings Institute provided a formal proposition to the economic theory of public interest regulation. This theory holds that regulation of public activities is supplied in response to the demand of the public for the correction of inefficient or inequitable market practices. An implicit assumption of the public interest theory according to Uche (2000) is that regulation is in the main, aimed at protecting the public.

To achieve its aim, regulation based on the above principle should aim at equipping the public with relevant information necessary for decision making. Regulation in the public interest should also strive to protect the public from monopolies and industries that generate substantial external costs and benefits (Uche, 2000). Further assumption is that some forms of activities, businesses or otherwise do not always function in the interest of the public without supervision and control. This view which has an historical antecedent regulation in the past (and even today) had almost always followed some form of crisis or public dissent. For instance, in Nigeria the introduction of The National Minimum Wage was an attempt to redistribute income because of the failure of the market-driven economy to do so.

The two theories are therefore relevant to this work. While the agenda setting theory espouse the position that the media set the agenda of issues that the public consider important, an implicit assumption of public interest theory according to Uche (2000) is that regulation is in the main, aimed at protecting the public.

Literature Review

In stark contrast with what obtains in many other parts of the world, minimum wage negotiations, fixing and implementation in Nigeria has remained problematic due to insincerity on the part of the government. According to Opon & Kelikwuma (2021) “workers’ welfare is the responsibility of governments across the world through fixing and regulation of the national minimum wage. But in Nigeria, this has been problematic, and the entire process is characterised by industrial actions undertaken to compel the government to commit to wage negotiations and implementation”. Furthermore, in their work: “Analysing the Politics of Nigeria’s 2019 National Minimum Wage: Towards Public Policy. The duo highlighted the fact that the 2019 national minimum wage negotiations and implementation, has so far remained the most prolonged in Nigeria’s history. The forgoing makes it imperative why the Nigerian press should leverage on its watchdog role to bring to bear its powers to hold the Nigerian government accountable to the people.

In what appears to be a confirmation of the powers of the press (if well exercised) to hold the government accountable and make It responsive, Oden (2017) in his work: “Press Coverage of the Passage of National Minimum Wage Act in Nigeria”, came to the following conclusion: “It was however discovered that the extents to which the national minimum wage act were reported is adequate. It was observed that the successful passage of that act was due to adequate awareness created by the press on the bill”. Odens’ research work evaluated the press coverage of the passage of the 2011 national minimum wage bill into law. Using two national dailies-*Vanguard* and *Thisday* newspapers- which were analyzed over a given period of time. The assessment was based on the following criteria: the number of space allotted to the minimum wage bill, the depth of the story, direction- favourably or unfavourably, the

frequency and the ethical standard used in the coverage. Going further, he made a key recommendation:

“To further strengthen the proper implementation of this act, it is recommended that the media should get the relevant agencies to speed up steps toward the implementation”.

In what appears to be a corroboration of Oden’s recommendation, Fapohunda (2013) investigated, “Minimum Wage Implementation and Management in a Post-Recession Economy: The Nigerian Experience”. The study examined strategies for the effective management and implementation of minimum wage in Nigeria. Issues and challenges to minimum wage implementation were the labour market situation, level of unemployment and poverty; the unfriendly posture of some state governors on minimum wage; the study noted that some organisations have a culture of unfair labour practices; unavailability of statistics, faulty criterion in fixing minimum wages; poor enforcement capacity, the challenge of non-unionised workers, casualization and contract staff etc.

The study established that effective management and implementation of the minimum wage requires the efforts, commitment and collaboration of all stakeholders. Like Oden, Fapohunda further confirmed that the impact and usefulness of a minimum wage policy depends on implementation- whether minimum wages are paid or not.

In another study to ascertain how achievable the organised labours’ demands for a new minimum wage is in Nigeria, Eme and Ogbochi (2017) developed two major thesis to explain the rationale behind the need for an upward review of salaries and the opposing strand. These included constitutional issue and economic driven issue. They used documentary sources such as books, journals, reports and online sources which also adopted content analysis technique. Their findings revealed that wage reviews were largely not structured to address the basic needs of the workers because they were not engaged and involved before their implementation. The increase not being able to address their basic needs was occasioned by inflation, high cost of living and lack of basic infrastructure. The researchers, therefore recommend that the actors should negotiate since the (current) minimum wage paid is inadequate compared to the sustainable budgets for all the family income levels as well as the International Labour Organization and the United Nations and the International benchmarks. Despite the interest of journalists in issues that pertains to workers welfare, all the literature reviewed above points to the fact that there is little work done on Newspaper Coverage of Passage of National Minimum Wage Act. Marginean and Chenic 2013; Addison et al. 2013; Alaniz et al. 2011), cited in Opon and Kelikwuma (2021) contends that “many studies on minimum wage have come from economics focusing on the impacts of the minimum wage raise on employment and unemployment rates, the transition of workers across jobs and into and out of poverty, and in general labour market”. This is why this study is necessary.

Methodology

This study adopted content analysis as research design. Out of the major national dailies, two daily newspapers (*Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers) in Nigeria were purposively selected. The reasons for choosing these dailies are because of their wide circulation, high level of objectivity in the coverage of issues, and sustained publication.

The study covered the period of 6 months beginning from 1st of July to 31st of December, 2019. The population of the study amounted to 368 issues from the two selected newspapers covering the study period of 6 months. A sample size of 84 editions was obtained using composite week sampling technique. Therefore, 84 issues, 42 each from the two selected newspapers were content analyzed for this study.

Holsti's inter-coder reliability formula was used to calculate the coefficient reliability between the coder and assistant coder. The formula states thus: Reliability $\frac{2M}{N_1+N_2}$. Where M is the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree, N₁ and N₂ are the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coder. Therefore, the result shows inter coder reliability = 94%. This means that the coefficient inter-coder reliability is 94% reliable.

Table 1: Showing selection of sample editions/days

FOR THE GUARDIAN AND VANGUARD								
Months	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
July 2019	8 th	23 rd	10 th	4 th	19 th	20 th	21 st	7
August	12 th	27 th	14 th	22 nd	23 rd	10 th	4 th	7
September	16 th	3 rd	18 th	5 th	20 th	7 th	29 th	7
October	21 st	8 th	23 rd	17 th	25 th	12 th	6 th	7
November	18 th	5 th	20 th	7 th	15 th	30 th	17 th	7
Dec, 2019	23 rd	3 rd	18 th	5 th	20 th	7 th	22 nd	7
Total	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	42

Data Analysis

Data for the study will be analysed using tables and percentages in line with research objectives.

Table 2: Frequency of Coverage of National Minimum Wage by the two Selected Newspapers

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
The Guardian	12	57%
Vanguard	9	43%
Total	21	100%

Source: Field work, 2022

Judging from result in table 2, The *Guardian* had a total of 12 (57%) stories on National Minimum Wage in all the issues analysed, whereas for *Vanguard* a total of 9 (43%) stories.

In all, the two newspapers recorded a total of 21 stories on National Minimum wage. This implies that the two newspapers, *Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers did not give adequate coverage to stories on National Minimum Wage. There is an implication that the society who the media ought to serve as the watchdog will be less informed about issues on National

Minimum Wage leading to their ignorance of such occurrences and also depriving them the opportunity of being informed.

Prominence

Table 3: Distribution of Stories According to Page Placement by each selected papers

Content Category	The Guardian		Vanguard	
Page Placement	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Front Page	3	25%	1	11%
Back Page	0	0%	0	0%
Inside Page	8	67%	6	67%
Centre Spread	1	8%	2	22%
Total	12	100%	9	100%

Source: Work, 2022

Presentation in table 3 above reveals that the Vanguard placed just one (1) story (11%) on the front page whereas, the Guardian had three (3) stories about the 2019 minimum wage act representing 25% on the front page. In essence, unlike Vanguard, the Guardian newspaper gave more prominence to issues concerning the national minimum wage. However, both newspapers placed most of the stories in the inside page thereby putting a question mark to their commitment to reporting such important stories.

Table 4: Total Distribution of Stories According to Placement by the two Dailies

Placement	Frequency	Percentage
Front Page	4	19%
Back Page	0	0%
Inside Page	14	67%
Centre Spread	3	14%
Total	21	100%

Source: Work, 2022

Direction

Table 5: Distribution of Story According to Direction by each Daily

Content Category	The Guardian		Vanguard	
Direction of Story	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	4	33%	3	33%
Negative	2	17%	1	11%
Neutral	6	50%	5	56%
Total	12	100%	9	100%

The presentation of data in table 5 shows that the Guardian had 4 (33%) stories reported on a positive direction, 2 (17%) took negative direction, while 6 (50%) had a neutral direction. The Vanguard had 3 (33%) stories with positive direction, 1 (11%) stories on a negative direction, while 6 (50%) story also took neutral direction. Consequently, it can be concluded that the direction of the stories by the selected dailies were in the most neutral.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated Newspaper Coverage of the passage of the 2019 National Minimum Wage Act in Nigeria. Various editions of the selected newspapers (Guardian and Vanguard) were content analysed for the study. Findings from the research revealed that the selected newspapers did not give much coverage on the report of National Minimum wage as expected. The study also showed that the stories on the 2019 national minimum wage act reported on the selected national dailies were not given much frequency. This revelation is in contrast with Odens' (2017) research work which evaluated the press coverage of the passage of the 2011 national minimum wage bill into law. Results from that study revealed that the press coverage of the 2011 national minimum wage was adequate. The study confirmed the fact that the press has the power to hold governments accountable and (the watchdog role) if well exercised can make government more responsive.

On the aspect of prominence, findings showed that the selected newspapers did not attach much significance (prominence) to covering stories on the 2019 national minimum wage act. This is indicative in their placements. Data from the study clearly indicated that most of the stories appeared on the inside page, table 3 (on data analysis) shows that both the Guardian and Vanguard had most stories as pertains 2019 minimum wage act (67%) placed on the inside page, as against the front or back page.

Coming to research objective three (3), this dwelled on the direction of the coverage. Data indicate that the direction of the stories by the selected dailies were for the most part neutral. The foregoing is a clear testament that the two selected newspapers for the study did not attach much importance to news stories concerning the passage of the 2019 minimum wage act; as a result the level of coverage was grossly inadequate. These identified inadequacies also go further to affirm Opon and Kelikwuma (2021) position in their study titled; "Analysing the Politics of Nigeria's 2019 National Minimum Wage: Towards Public Policy. The research assert that the 2019 national minimum wage negotiations and implementation, has so far remained the most prolonged in Nigeria's history. This is also in line with the agenda setting theory adopted for this study which expressly espouse the view that public discourse, often more than not, revolves around issues that are frequently and consistently focused on by the mass media.

Hence, the print media should do more by giving adequate coverage to issues of public policy interest such as the minimum wage bill in future so as to make it a public discourse and as such, draw workable solutions from the key players in the system so as to bring lasting solution to the problem. This is especially so given that the mass media as a social institution also has social obligations.

Conclusion

Judging from the data analysed and findings, it is clear that the selected newspapers coverage of the passage of 2019 minimum wage act was weak. This conclusion is drawn from the findings that more than sixty percent of news stories (67%) on the passage of the 2019 minimum wage act were placed on the inside page, as against the front or back page. Although, when compared to the Vanguard, the Guardian gave more prominence to stories on the 2019 minimum wage. However, both newspapers had most of their stories on the 2019 minimum wage placed on the inside page. More so, the selected newspapers failed to adopt

other forms of news reporting formats such as; editorials, features, picture story and cartoons in order to give weight and relevance to the issue.

The position of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), cited in Asemah et al (2016) which states that “in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue but, how much importance to attach to the issues from the amount of information in a news story and its positions” is instructive in this regard. The mostly straight news format used was not enough in the enlightening process of the masses, thereby promoting mass ignorance about such important occurrences.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this work, the following recommendations are made:

- The Nigerian media should be more aggressive in covering and reporting issues that affects the public, such as the national minimum wage act which impacts the wellbeing of Nigerian workers.
- Future reporting on national minimum wage should be given more weight and relevance by going beyond straight news and incorporating other formats of news reporting such as: features, editorials, columns, cartoon stories etc.
- Further research should be conducted to identify the reasons why industrial actions has remained the only way to draw the attention of Nigerian government to the plights/demands of workers and the role of the press in that regard with a view to proffer workable solution to the crisis once and for all.

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