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FRAMING A PANDEMIC: EVALUATING NIGERIAN PRINT MEDIA REPORTAGE
OF CHINA BEFORE AND FOLLOWING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)
PANDEMIC

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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of

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at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING A PANDEMIC: EVALUATING NIGERIAN PRINT MEDIA REPORTAGE OF CHINA BEFORE AND FOLLOWING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

Ernest Chukwunyere Makata

This study investigates the effect of the Coronavirus pandemic on the framing of news about China/Chinese by three selected Nigerian Newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *The Sun*. A total of 350 articles mentioning China or Chinese were examined using the content analysis method to determine the news writers' dominant frames. The research employs the qualitative method. Three frames emerged as dominant in the analysis, the Economic Consequence Frame, the Human-Interest Frame, and the Conflict Frame. The result shows that Nigerian Newspapers paid more attention to China after the index case of COVID-19 in Nigeria. It also discovered that most of the news reflected negative news about China globally and Chinese residents in Nigeria. The implication is that the Covid-19 pandemic influenced the framing of China in Nigerian Newspapers. Given the rapidly growing Chinese population and interests in Nigeria, more research is needed to determine if news framing affects Nigerians' attitude toward China and its citizens.

DEDICATION

To my late parents, Samuel, and Eunice Makata

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Chapter One

Introduction

On December 31, 2019, Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported a cluster of quick evolving pneumonia cases in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China. Further evaluation revealed that the pneumonia is because of a novel coronavirus (WHO, 2020). This novel Coronavirus, now identified and described as SARS-CoV-2 or simply COVID-19, is a pandemic as it has spread to almost all the countries of the world. The first known case in Africa's Sub-Saharan region was on February 28, 2020, in Nigeria. The index COVID-19 case was an Italian citizen who returned to Nigeria from Milan (Kretchmer, 2020). Since then, Nigeria has recorded thousands of Covid-19 infections, recoveries, and deaths and still counting.

China, the country with the first incidence of COVID-19, has received a backlash following the pandemic from across the world. In Australia, there is a call for an unbiased inquiry into the origin of the pandemic. Germany and Britain, which had supported the work of the Chinese Technology giant Huawei, especially as they plan to expand the 5G technology, are considering a pause to their contract with Huawei. (Erlanger, 2020). In America, President Donald Trump has not backed down in terming COVID-19 the "Chinese Virus," despite the call by many for him to stop using the term (Rogers et al., 2020). The notion that the Virus came from China and that the Chinese citizens must bear the brunt of the blame

for spreading it has spiked racial attacks on Asians worldwide. Torres (2020) reports that Asian Americans face discrimination and violence following the Coronavirus outbreak. Consequently, one wonders how the Chinese in Africa and Nigeria face the backlash if any at all. While tracking demographic data in Nigeria is difficult, a Chinese Embassy in Nigeria report estimates 20,000 Chinese residents in Nigeria (2004). This number has increased since 2004 as Nigeria has signed more bilateral and exchange agreements with China. We estimate that there are about 50,000 Chinese citizens in Nigeria, legally and illegally. Nigeria and China have a strong economic partnership that has been growing exponentially in recent years. This thesis is an inquiry about how Nigerians perceive China/Chinese, using the lens of media reports and Opinion Columns from selected Nigerian Newspapers.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to determine if the Coronavirus outbreak impacted how the Nigerian media frames news about China and the Chinese. This study seeks to know if news framing of China, and the Chinese, in Nigeria changed following the outbreak of COVID-19. We aim at identifying what changed and how it changed if any.

The research question is summarized thus:

1. Are there significant differences in news frequency about China/Chinese, by Nigerian Newspapers, before and during the outbreak of the COVID-19?
2. What kind of frames were used to cast Chinese news before and during the Coronavirus Pandemic by Selected Nigerian Newspapers?

1.2. Hypothesis

We hypothesize that:

1. There is an increase in the news frequency, regarding China/Chinese, by Nigerian newspapers during and following the outbreak
2. There are more negative news reports about China and the Chinese in the Nigerian press after the COVID-19 outbreak. We assume that Nigeria's media reported more negativity in Nigerians' attitude toward China following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We tested this hypothesis through a content analysis of Newspaper reports and opinion columns of three randomly selected newspapers in Nigeria: *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *The Sun*. The result of the analysis forms our discussion, conclusion, and recommendation.

Significance of the Study

The coronavirus pandemic is one event in the 21st century that has rejigged how we see the world. Among other things, it brought China to the stage of scrutiny by the world and by the media in a particular way. In the first place, this work adds to the repertoire of studies on media Framing, Agenda-setting, and Priming. Secondly, it increases the wealth of knowledge about the China-Nigeria relationship and Africa in general. We believe this work contributes to race studies as it seeks to identify frames denoting racial targeting, if any, of the Chinese following the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3. Scope

This thesis limits itself to identifying changes in the news report frames about China and the Chinese in Nigeria. It is not meant to weigh the effects of the news reports on Nigerians and their perception of China and the Chinese. To determine how Nigerians perceive these news reports is out of the scope of this thesis. The use of framing in news reports, as we have noted, is often used to create a picture, perception, or even attitude on the users of the media product. This thesis does not evaluate that aspect of framing.

It is also important to note that this covers a period of 5 months. The first report of Coronavirus in Nigeria was on February 28, 2020. However, the first case in China was officially reported on December 31, 2019. For our purpose here, we worked with articles published between December 2019 to April 2020. In other words, two months before the first case in Nigeria and three months after that. These news reports, opinion columns, and comments are from three National dailies in Nigeria: *The Nation*, *The Punch*, and *The Sun* newspapers. Apart from these newspapers being popular among readers in Nigeria, we selected them above others because of their online presence. This work limits itself to the online version of these newspapers.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

Framing theory in Media and Communication studies took its roots from Sociology and was brought into the limelight by Erving Goffman (1974). According to him, "framing" is a "schema of interpretation" within which communicators and individuals perceive, understand, detect, categorize, and report events. Another definition given by Gamson and

Modigliani (1987) states that a frame is "a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events ... The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of events ... The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (p. 143).

Since its introduction to media studies, framing has grown as a media theory, especially in news reporting. De Vreese (2005) points out that communicative processes are all about creating frames because communication is not static but dynamic. Communication involves frame-building – how frames emerge and frame setting, explaining the nexus between media frames and what the audience makes of them.

Recently, framing theory has been accentuated by the works of Robert Entman. He surmises that "to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a 'perceived reality' and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993a, p. 51). Therefore, framing is a conscious act, in the sense that journalists or media outfits purposely emphasize some aspects of the news above others. Writers and journalists use framing to attract attention to what they want their readers to think about.

Entman believes that framing has a function and intention, and this is linked with framing being a tool for agenda-setting and priming. Accordingly, "agenda setting serves as the first function of framing as it defines the problems worthy of government attention." On the other

hand, priming serves as "the goal, the intended effect, of the framing activities" (Entman, 1993b, p. 165). Framing, understood from this point of view, depicts the media as the watchdog of the society, which appropriates to itself that title as the Fourth Estate of the realm in a democracy. Entman highlights that agenda-setting happens even unintentionally. However, when agenda-setting combines with priming, it becomes a media bias. He defines bias as "consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side of conflicts over the use of government power" (Entman, 1993b, p. 166). Hence, framing theory examines trends of intended and unintended media bias too.

Consequently, framing theory is chosen as the theoretical base for this research because it presents the appropriate standpoint for evaluating the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on media reports about China. This theoretical framework helps us identify the frames of reference by news writers before and as the outbreak persists. We can categorize whether the journalists changed the tone of reportage positively, negatively, or were constant prior, and after the emergence of COVID-19.

Chapter Two

Understanding Chinese – African Relationship

In this chapter, the focus is to highlight China's presence and influence in Africa, in general, and Nigeria in particular. We hope that a cursory narration of the nature of China's presence in Africa, will help us understand why the media in Nigeria should consider publishing about China important, in the first place.

2.1. The Chinese in Africa

Some scholars believe that African and Chinese business and political interactions date back to over four centuries (Mohan & Kale, 2007). However, a more recent relationship between the African continent and China comes in three batches. According to Adisu, Sharkey, and Okoroafo (2010), the first batch or phase focused on plantation farming, mining of minerals, and railway construction. This happened from 1850 to 1950. The second phase, 1960-1980, followed the inauguration of the People's Republic of China. The new Republic turned its gaze to Africa while the West and Russia engaged in the cold war. It was also when many African countries fought for independence from colonial Europe, and China backed such moves. The third phase, which is also the current phase, started in 1990.

It is indubitable that China is currently deeply involved in Africa and can be called the most significant major player on the continent (Jacoby, 2007). Van Dijk (2009) notes that beginning in 2008, China overthrew European countries and the US as Africa's major trading partner. China has also used aids, investments, and trades to cement its relationship

with Africa. Hence, China is involved in many aspects of the African economy. China's current active involvement in Africa circles around mining, agriculture, communication, and construction.

2.1.1. The Motive for the Chinese Presence in Africa

While China's active participation in the African economy is apparent, many have wondered about the motive behind this seemingly exhaustive involvement. In his attempt to explain this, Konings (2007) notes two reasons: the quest for cooperation between the continent and China and the One-China Principle's pursuance. On the other hand, Van Dijk (2009, pp. 11–12) identifies eight objectives behind China's presence in Africa. According to him, China is in Africa to (1) assure a steady supply of raw materials for Chinese industries, (2) create a market for Chinese products, (3) obtain land for agriculture, (4) create easy migration opportunities for Chinese citizens running away from overpopulation (5) Gain diplomatic support from the continent (6) Act as an available alternative to the western development model, (7) present itself as a viable cooperation partner, and (8) accentuate her status as a superpower. In other words, the motive for Chinese involvement in Africa is multifaceted. One thing that is easily noticeable is that China is not interested in expanding communism or regime change in any country in Africa.

2.1.2. The Population of the Chinese in Africa

Tracking the number of Chinese people in Africa is a challenging endeavor. This difficulty is due to the paucity of statistics both from the African countries and from China. However, Africa's Chinese resident population is about a million people (Y.J. Park, 2016). Most of

the Chinese in Africa reside in South Africa, which hosts about 500,000, followed by Angola, with an estimated Chinese population of 258,920. Nigeria has experienced an increase in the Chinese population for up to 20,000, and Tanzania has about 10,000 of the Chinese population (Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.). One could safely bet that most countries in Africa have a Chinese resident.

2.1.3. Features of Chinese Investments

Scholars have noted that Chinese investments in Africa are state-directed, engineered, and encouraged by the Chinese government (Gu, 2009; Kragelund & Bastholm, 2009). Chinese presence and investment in Africa came in stages. According to Gu (2009, p. 572), there are five stages of growth of Chinese business involvement in Africa. Stage one covers between 1949-1980. Then there were only a few Chinese companies in Africa. Their principal responsibility was to implement the Chinese government's development aid projects. In the second stage, the 1980s to the mid-1990s, Africa witnessed Chinese national and provincial companies but few private companies. From the mid-1990s to 2000, the third stage, the emergence of large state-owned enterprises, came. They were mainly concerned with seeking resources, strategic assets investment, infrastructure provision, and investment. At this third stage, too, private companies from China started to flock to Africa. The Fourth Stage happened from 2000 to 2005. within these years, most Chinese state-owned and private companies were established in Africa. They started building development clusters such as industrial parks and trade zones. From 2005 to date, the fifth stage, marks a rapid and pervasive expansion of state-owned Chinese enterprises and private companies in Africa.

The government of China is unequivocal about her interest in Africa. Hence, her decision to continually invest in Africa in a manner and style different from the African European counterparts. In a 2006 official China's African Policy blueprint, the Chinese government states that:

The Chinese government encourages and supports Chinese enterprises' investment and business in Africa and will continue to provide preferential loans and buyer credits to this end. The Chinese government is ready to explore new channels and new ways for promoting investment cooperation with African countries and will continue to formulate and improve relevant policies, provide guidance and service, and offer convenience. African countries are welcome to make investments in China. The Chinese government will continue to negotiate, conclude, and implement the Agreement on Bilateral Facilitation and Protection of Investment and the Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation with African Countries. The two sides should work together to create a favorable environment for investment and cooperation and protect the legitimate rights and interests of investors from both sides. (Government of China, 2009).

The above statement clarifies that China understands the need for reciprocity in her dealings with Africa. Whether Africa can maintain a balanced trade with China is another story and not within this work's purview. Suffice it to say that establishing businesses in China by Africans is a herculean task. It is more or less a one-way investment traffic.

Be that as it may, the Chinese government has continued to assist African countries and invest heavily. Chinese investment in Africa includes financial instruments such as grants, soft loans, and debt relief. It is not within the scope of this study to analyze the details, quality, and quantity of these instruments. However, it is noteworthy that some of these grants come in material and labor and not in cash. The Chinese government employs Chinese companies that execute the required projects for the borrowing country. They also include low-interest rates, interest-free and preferential loans, and debt relief on accruing loans, especially where they involve projects, not within Chinese companies' scope. (Meine Pieter Van Dijk, 2009).

2.1.4. Categories of Immigrants in Africa

The presence of the Chinese SOEs (State-owned Enterprises) and private companies entails Chinese immigrants in Africa. These immigrants include those working for those companies and immigrants who came on their own to seek greener pastures in Africa. In 2017, the official Chinese report showed that about 9,790,000 laborers, including large numbers of contract engineers, have been dispatched to Africa to work in different fields. Most of these people allegedly return to China after their contracts expired (Wang, 2018). The report tallying the number of workers includes only those who were officially granted permission to work, for SOEs in Africa, by the Chinese government. These Engineers and laborers work in Construction, Oil and Energy, Agriculture, and Telecommunications. In any case, Sautman (2006) estimates that the number of Chinese immigrants in Africa could be between 220,000 and 427,000. In his assessment, Park (2009) claims that the figure is between 583,050 and 820,050.

The numbers given by Sautman and Park are possible because there are also other categories of Chinese immigrants to Africa that are involved in private businesses. Some of these people came to Africa on visitors' visa waivers and stayed on or are contract workers who turned to private companies when their contracts expired. Many of these undocumented immigrants remain in Africa illegally (Wang, 2018). To this end, any analysis concerning the categories of the Chinese people in Africa will meet the challenge of inaccurate data. By and large, there are two categories of the Chinese people in Africa: the temporary workers who came to execute contracts with SOEs and Private Companies and then immigrants who have found Africa a fulfilling place to dwell and do business. Chinatowns are rising in different cities in the continent of Africa. It is a sign of some move towards permanence.

2.2. China and Nigeria Relationship

That China is significantly present in Nigeria is no longer news. However, it is was not always like that. In the 1960s and 1970, Nigeria treated China as a fellow "third-world" country or developing partner. Nigeria did not look forward to China for any developmental import. Moreover, in that period, China was not aligned with Nigeria's major partners – the United States and Europe. Hence, most of Nigeria's FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) came from the US and Europe.

However, that story changed with the rocketing rise to economic power by China. At the other end of the spectrum, Nigeria was sinking fast in every developmental index. The subsequent military coups in Nigeria shook the foundation of Nigeria's developmental

trajectory. Odeh (2014) notes that Nigeria's military leaders were getting frustrated with the demands of the West. At the same time, China was making incursions into Africa and presenting herself as an alternative partner. It all came to a head with the economic sanctions imposed on Nigeria following the perceivable dictatorial tendencies of the General Sani Abacha military junta (1993-1997). With the West not forthcoming with their FDI, Nigeria "faced East" and so entered China. Under General Abacha, the Chinese Premier, Li Ping, visited Nigeria to sign the protocols for power generation and road and railways infrastructures in Nigeria (L.E. Odeh, 2014).

Notably, China – Nigeria's bilateral and diplomatic relationship entered a new era during the return to democracy by Nigeria, under President Olusegun Obasanjo. Odeh (2014) notes that Obasanjo founded the Nigeria-China Investment Forum. He also introduced the policy of Oil for Infrastructure. China needed oil to power its industries, and Nigeria needed critical infrastructures that China can provide. Although the Oil for Infrastructure policy did not survive Obasanjo's tenure, Nigeria continued engaging China even more robustly in development, economic, and trade relationships.

2.2.1. China and Development Assistance in Nigeria

Nigeria occupies a strategic position in Chinese investments in Africa. As of 2016, Nigeria ranked as China's number one engineering market, number two export market, number three trading partner, and significant destination investment in Africa. Hence, one can understand that China's FDI, which stood at \$85.8 million in 2013, was increased to about \$116.87 million in 2014 (Akinterinwa, 2016). The Brookings Institute estimates that Nigeria tops

the list of China's investments in Africa. Nigeria retains 17% of Chinese investments in Africa (Sow, 2018). The Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (2019) states that the Nigeria-China trade volume is about \$70 billion.

Consequently, China became more involved and is currently the most significant international player in Nigeria in the power, oil, and construction sectors. In 2014, Nigeria signed a \$12 billion contract for railway infrastructure with the Chinese government. In September 2016, Nigeria and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that enables China to invest in railways, refineries, agriculture, and power. Hence, on September 15, 2016, Nigeria gave China a contract worth \$23 billion to construct refineries in Kogi, Lagos, and Bayelsa states (Toogood, 2016).

Under President Muhammadu Buhari's current administration, Nigeria signed the much-praised Mambilla hydroelectric power project, worth \$5.8 billion. It is to be constructed by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and financed by the China Export-Import Bank (Premium Times, 2017). China has also signed agreements with the Nigerian military and supplied military equipment to Nigeria. Some argue this investment in security has arisen because of some Chinese citizens' kidnap in the oil-rich Niger Delta region.

2.2.2. Perception of the Chinese Presence in African and Nigeria

As with every relationship, and one that involves international and interracial encounters, people will definitively have perceptions about the relationship. The Chinese presence in

Africa has created much buzz in scholarly and non-scholarly analyses that range from "excitement to panic, disappointment, and uncertainty, and not just from Africans but from the whole international community"(Chidaushe, 2007, p. 107). Some have opined that China's presence in Africa is a welcomed development. It will serve as a veritable alternative, counterbalancing the global economic system's structural skewed nature and the marginalization African countries face (Penny, 2007).

Disagreeing opinions input that China is merely in Africa for expansion and exploitation. Thus, China has no interest in offering a sustainable economic or developmental pathway. They emphasize that China and Africa's relationship is an enabler for the influx of cheap Chinese goods into African countries, thereby damaging these countries' economic potentialities (Broadman, 2009; Dobler, 2005; Goldstein et al., 2008). China's critics also point out that there are significant incidences of substandard working conditions within Chinese firms operating in Africa (Lee, 2009). Other critics emphasize the human rights abuse by China and her inordinate relationship with rogue governments in Africa, notable for human rights abuses and neglect of democratic principles (Brown & Sriram, 2009; Chau, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2003).

Besides the opinion of scholars, a 2009 survey of 250 African students, drawn from nine African countries (Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, and Zambia), by Sautman and Hairong (2009) indicate that the respondents have a positive perception of the Chinese in Africa.

Narrowing it down to Nigeria, the perception of the Chinese presence in Nigerian goes between the good, the bad, and even the ambiguous. The good part is that the Chinese are very much involved in Nigeria's trade and manufacturing industry. Private Chinese firms mainly depend mostly on local labor for their operations. Hence, they help curb the menace of unemployment. A survey of about 16 Chinese firms discovered that each employed, on average, 377 Nigerians. These Chinese firms embrace the Nigerian business environment and are ready to establish even in crisis-prone states (Chen et al., 2016).

Similarly, a 2016 Pew Research Center survey indicates that about 70% of Nigerians have a favorable rating of China. About 83% of Nigerians perceive the bilateral dealings between Nigeria and China between 2014 -2019 as beneficent (Silver et al., 2019). More recently, a survey report indicates that Nigerians living near a major Belt and Road (railway) project grew more positive toward China after a Chinese company completed the railway. The research suggests that Nigerians residing within 150 kilometers (93 meters) of the project had a positive perception of China. The positive curve rose from 62% during the project's construction to 71% after completing it (Quinn, 2020). This positive reaction means that the people were satisfied with the Chinese Company's job executing the project.

On the other hand, commentators believe that the business alliance and the overreliance on Chinese imported commodities have crushed the Nigerian economy. For instance, the textile industry, which was booming in Nigeria, witnessed a colossal collapse, such that between 1985 to 2010, the textile industry in Nigeria lost over 180,000 jobs (Page, 2018). Currently,

the textile industry in Nigeria is comatose. Nigerians also perceive most Chinese goods available in Nigeria as fake. The blame has been on the government for failing to stop such importations. Some blame opportunistic Nigerian traders, who connive with willing Chinese partners, to import them to Nigeria (Page, 2018). The Chinese are also very much profoundly involved in bribing government officials and local authorities, freely engaging in illicit mining of minerals, and illegally logging timbers, which they ship to China (Aiyetan, 2016; Environmental Investigation Agency, 2017; Page, 2018).

From the above, one can tell that there is a mixed perception of China by Nigerians. Regarding the execution of projects, Nigerians see them as a faithful partner. On the other hand, many Nigerians see them as exploitative and with no ethical compass.

In summary, there is a significant presence of Chinese people in Africa. This situation entails that Africans, especially journalists, cannot ignore the Chinese population and the Chinese government's activities in Africa. We highlighted the Chinese population in Africa, the modes, and Chinese economic and developmental interventions in Africa, especially Nigeria. We also underlined the prevalent perceptions of China by scholars. We found out that there are divided opinions about the benefits and the disadvantages of the Chinese presence in Africa. From our presentation above, one could note that China does not interfere with their host countries' political life. They stick to providing economic and developmental assistance irrespective of the administration in power. We point out that this has been one of the criticisms against China as they do not bother about the abuse of human

rights in their host countries. It will be preposterous for China to ask for positive human rights records when it maintains none itself. China is rarely concerned that the aids it gives to an authoritarian regime could oppress the people. We pointed out that in Nigeria, the Chinese presence is perceived as positive by many. Together, the prevalence of substandard products from China and their engagement in bribery, illicit mining of minerals, and illegal lumbering also attract a negative perception of the Chinese people in Nigeria.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

3.1. Framing and News Media

Framing is a concept in communication that has gained currency in media studies in recent years. In his analysis of the concept of media framing, Matthes (2009) identified two classifications of framing definitions: The general definitions and operationalizable definitions. According to him, general definitions do not provide precise principles or guidelines for making frames operational. He cites Gitlin, who defined framing as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters." (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7), as an example of a general definition of frames.

On the other hand, Entman's (1993a) definition of framing is upheld by Matthes as representing an operationalized definition of framing. Accordingly, operationalized definitions provide "functional specifications," enabling "inferences that distinguish framing from themes, arguments, assertions, and other under-theorized concepts" (Entman et al., 2009, p. 176). This operational attribute of framing makes it preferable in analyzing media contents. Most framing studies and analyses are under this category.

Consequently, framing understood in the light of the operationalized definition is instrumental in studying media interpretation of events. Hence, "framing is a process

through which a communication source defines and constructs a public issue or controversy and can have significant consequences for how people view and understand an issue" (Schmitz et al., 2003, p. 386). To this end, framing provides the best platform for examining how the media perceive, interpret, or frame China consequent upon the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyzing media reports by employing the tool of framing analysis exposes the frames with which the journalist or the newspaper presents news. These frames become the windows through which readers receive news.

Furthermore, De Vreese (2005) classified frames to be either generic or issue-specific. Generic frames "transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts" (p.54). Generic news frames focus on coverage of politics, for instance, and can be further particularized to a specific election. On the other hand, issue-specific news frames "are pertinent only to specific topics or events" (p.54). Such issues can be terrorism, women's movement, social justice movements, labor disputes, health, immigration, et cetera. Therefore, depending on the research area, underscoring media frames can help determine a news material's particular focus.

In their studies, Semetko and Valkenberg (2000, p. 551) recognized five generic methods by which journalists frame news: First is the Conflict Frame. Conflict frames occur when the story emphasizes the conflict between parties or individuals. The second is the Human-Interest Frame, which focuses on the individual as the epitome of the issue under coverage.

It also deals with how emotions are interpreted. The third is the Responsibility Frame. The responsibility frame emphasizes the attribution of responsibility, crediting, or apportioning of blames on political institutions or individuals. The fourth is the Morality Frame, whereby news reports interpret events from the perspective of morality. Finally, we have the Economic Consequence Frame, which concentrates on the event's economic relevance to the people or Nation.

3.2. Effect of Media Framing on Immigrants

In a study that examined immigration and integration in the Netherlands, Vliegenthart and Roggeband (2007) explained the salience and how the media's framing of events affected discussion about immigration in the parliament and outside the media. They opined that news values from the media "determine why some, but not other events make it into the news" (p.229). They also argued that "making it into the news is something different from significantly shifting the framing of an issue for some time. For a news material to change the framing of events, it must (1) dominate the news for a more extended period or permanently change the political power base in society. (2) be incongruent with how the issue has been framed before the event or result in political actors propagating other frames gaining dominance in society" (p. 229). Hence, circumstances can change the way the media can frame a group, nations, or individuals, and these frames might end up as tools for use by policymakers, as was the case in the Netherlands.

A study by Lawlor and Tolley (2017) investigated how the print media in Canada, over ten years, framed Immigrants and Refugees. The research indicates that there are marked

differences. While the media framed immigrants in economic terms, they frame the refugees' claims as doubtful and negative, as people who have come to take advantage of the system. The study concluded that the media gave more attention to refugees and that the framing is "disproportionately negative." From this point of view, framing can be deployed to investigate the positive and negative indexes of news reports.

In another study, Wallace (2018) argues that events can change the framing of news about immigrants and refugees. The study, which focused on how contexts changed the Canadian press framing of Syrian refugees, examined eight English national and regional print media over four years (2012 – 2016). The findings indicate that the publication of Alan Kurdi's death, the young Syrian boy who got drowned as the family was escaping the crises in Syria, changed the news about Syrian refugees. The media framing regarding Syria changed from the conflict frame, which dominated the press before the picture emerged, to "a more humanizing depiction of refugee families and their resettlement" (p. 209).

3.3. Media Framing of China in Africa

Since the ascension of China on the global economic stage, the country has come under intense scrutiny. China's presence in Africa is of particular interest to many scholars and non-scholars alike. In a survey to gauge Africans' popular perceptions about China, Gadzala and Hanusch (2010) found out that generally, Africans perceive China positively. According to the study, this positive perception is contingent on issues relating to politics and economics. They identify that some elite, especially those conscious of social justice and human rights, are critical of China.

In an exploratory study to determine the media framing of China in East Africa, Wekesa (2013) discovered that there is no significant margin between positive and negative perceptions of China in East Africa. The study took its samples from the New Media Group (NMG), an umbrella for various media publications operational in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa. The economic consequences and conflict frames were dominant in the analysis. The study found out that while many of the publications were optimistic regarding the economic relationship between China and East Africa, they were negative while examining the relationship's effects on fostering good governance and democracy – conflict frame.

There is a gaping dearth of studies regarding how Nigerian Newspapers frame China in their news materials. Nevertheless, in a Master's thesis submitted to Rhodes University, South Africa, Umejei (2013) examined This Day Newspaper's framing of China's involvement in Nigeria. The study identified that two frames dominated This Day's framing of China in Nigeria: The Partner/Role-model frame and the Elite Frame. The Partner/Role-Model frame typifies the Nigeria-China relationship as beneficial for economic reasons over politics and human rights abuses. On the other hand, the Elite frame claims that the relationship is neo-colonialist, one-sided, and exploitative. The study did not examine any event like COVID-19 that could have triggered any variation in reporting China's presence in Nigeria.

3.4. Media Framing of China amidst Pandemics

China has had its share of troubles when it comes to diseases that tend to be widespread. Consequently, China is under international scrutiny when such diseases arise. A study by

Huang and Leung (2005) examined the framing of SARS (SARS-CoV of 2003) by The Washington Post, The Strait Times of Singapore, and the Canadian Globe and Mail. They found out that there were gaping variations in the framing of China and Vietnam. Even though both are communist countries, and run by restrictive governments, and shared some other similarities, the study concluded that the newspapers framed Vietnam more positively than China. China was framed as failing to respond well to the epidemics due to "institutional problems," "power struggle," and portrayed as a country laden with "health and environmental issues." On the other hand, the newspapers framed Vietnam under two dominant flattering descriptions: employing an "open communication strategy" and having a more "cooperative government."

A similar position was taken by a study evaluating Avian Flu (H5NI) framing by The New York Times and The Washington Post. Song's (2007) study opined that the newspapers first defined the Avian Flu as a Chinese health crisis, an Asian health crisis, and then a global health crisis. The study identified that The New York Times and The Washington Post framed the disease as originating from China and spread to the rest of China's world. The newspapers portrayed the western countries as bastions of disease control while denigrating the Chinese control efforts as inadequate. "Both newspapers use China's poor health conditions and problematic handling of the bird flu outbreaks to explain the widespread of the disease and to justify the criticism that the country received" (Song, 2007, pp. 64–65).

The arrival of COVID-19 to the theatre of pandemics has created many narratives around the Virus. One can say that the most obnoxious of it all is the designation of the Virus as "Chinese Virus" by such an important figure as Donald Trump, the President of the United States (Rogers et al., 2020). Besides, the pandemic has devastated global economies and generated a lot of furor and discrimination against the Chinese and Southeast Asians (Torres, 2020).

While studies on COVID-19 in all its ramifications is still ongoing, and therefore not much scholarly materials are available, some scholars have made exploratory studies on framing China regarding COVID-19. For instance, Schild et al. (2020) found out that there was an increased emergence of sinophobic behavior on Web Communities in the face of COVID-19. According to the study, there is a noticeable increase in discussions about China and the Chinese, attendant to COVID-19. The study raised its data from 4Chan's/pol/ and Twitter. The study reported a significant rise in the use of sinophobic slurs, especially in 4Chan's/pol/, and a little lesser on Twitter. The study further confirmed that the increase in the "sinophobic slurs coincides with real-world events related to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic" (Schild et al., 2020, p. 1).

Among other things, scholars are studying the psychological effect of the framing of COVID-19. In a running-ahead study, Tabri et al. (2020) evaluated if framing COVID-19 as an existential threat predicts arousal of anxiety and racial prejudice against Chinese people. In the study, participants were asked to self-report anxious arousal and subtle or

blatant discrimination against Chinese people. The control group was exposed to materials that portray the Virus as an existential threat. The study concluded that framing COVID-19 as an existential threat conjures anxious arousal and is positively correlated with subtle and blatant prejudice towards China and the Chinese people.

On the other hand, scholarly articles regarding media framing of the Coronavirus in Nigeria have focused mainly on whether the newspapers are reporting the pandemic, and how helpful they are for public awareness about the disease. To this effect, Nwakpu et al. (2020) studied media framing and audience response to the coronavirus pandemic. The study, which analyzed four major Nigerian newspapers (*The Sun*, *The Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, and *The Punch*), found out that media framing of the pandemic helped in creating awareness and flattening the curve.

In a similar analysis, major Nigerian online newspapers (Premium Times, Sahara Reporters, and Daily Post) were found to have emphasized the frames of fear and death, government/political influence, rumor, and misinformation concerning the pandemic (Onwe et al., 2020). Despite that, the newspapers, the study concluded, helped to inform the people about COVID-19 and the precautions they need to take.

No study has examined the media framing of China and the Chinese people in Nigeria following the Coronavirus pandemic from available research. No one has examined if there is any significant change in the media framing of China and the Chinese people before and

following the arrival of the pandemic to Nigeria. Hence, this work is unique in its quest and novel in its approach.

Chapter Four

Research Method and Data Analysis

This research aims to understudy the frames used by selected Nigerian newspapers while reporting about China, before and after the emergence of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2). We analyzed the newspaper articles using the content analysis method to answer the research questions.

4.1. Content Analysis

As earlier stated, the method used in this research is content analysis. According to Berelson (1952), content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). A broader definition given by Kolbe and Burnett (1991) identifies content analysis as "an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication. These communications can also be analyzed at many levels (image, word, roles, etc.), thereby creating a realm of research opportunities" (p. 243). It is important to note that content analysis is not all about quantification. Downe-Wamboldt (1992) emphasizes that "content analysis is more than a counting game; it is concerned with meanings, intentions, consequences, and context" (p. 314).

Consequently, we think that content analysis is the appropriate method for this research. Again, content analysis is a suitable method for frame analysis. It is employed to "interpret how an issue or event is reported in the newspaper, television, or a website" (Kitzinger,

2007, p. 138). Content analysis can be used as a quantitative and qualitative method, and whichever approach one uses is dependent on the purpose of the study (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

For this study, we use the qualitative method. Qualitative content analysis is a qualitative method used to analyze data and interpret its meaning (Schreier, 2012). It comes in handy as "an option if you have to engage in some degree of interpretation to arrive at the meaning of your data." (Schreier, 2012, p. 2). We employ qualitative content analysis in this study to interpret and identify frames and their meaning.

4.2. Sourcing the Data

The study focused on three Nigerian Newspapers: *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *The Sun*. These Newspapers were chosen because of their widespread availability in print and their strong online presence. This study relied solely on the online publications of these newspapers.

The Punch, a daily tabloid, appeared in the Nigerian newspaper market on November 1, 1976. It describes itself as "the lively paper for lively minds." Its headquarters is in Lagos, Nigeria. *The Punch* was among the papers proscribed during the military junta in Nigeria and thus had some interruptions in publication during those years (Punch, n.d.).

The Nation, a daily newspaper, started publishing on July 31, 2006. The paper states that it is "not beholden to any interest group and that "loyalty is to *The Nation*." It has been

published uninterrupted since its inception and has nation-wide coverage. *The Nation* is also a Lagos-based Newspaper and has won awards, including the second most read newspaper in Nigeria in 2009 and *The National* newspaper with a robust presence in all the geo-political zones (*The Nation*, n.d.).

The Sun was incorporated on March 29, 2001. It began production of the Nigerian Sun on January 18, 2003, initially as a weekly newspaper, and transitioned into a daily Newspaper on June 16, 2003. It shares many similarities in design with the popular UK Sun newspaper. *The Sun* brings the tabloid-style to bear on politics, economy, crime, religion, sports, arts, culture, et cetera (Nigerian Daily Newspapers, 2014).

4.3. Coding

The index case for COVID-19 in Nigeria was on February 28, 2020. We examined the newspaper articles two months before the index case and two months after the second index. Hence, we examined articles published in December 2019, January 2020, February 2020, March 2020, and April 2020.

Furthermore, we extracted the newspaper articles for this study by searching for "China" and "Chinese" in the respective newspapers' search section. They are as follows:

Newspaper	Month	Number of Articles (n= 350) 100%
<i>The Punch</i>	December 2019	9
	January 2020	13
	February 2020	6
	March 2020	20
	April 2020	27

		Total: 75 (21.43%)
<i>The Nation</i>	December 2019	8
	January 2020	27
	February 2020	34
	March 2020	17
	April 2020	89
		Total: 175 (49.71%)
<i>The Sun</i>	December 2019	13
	January 2020	4
	February 2020	29
	March 2020	16
	April 2020	38
		Total: 100 (28.57%)

Table 1: Breakdown of articles mentioning China/Chinese in three Nigerian Newspapers.

4.4. Framing Analysis

As we noted earlier, this research employs the qualitative method in its analysis. A qualitative method to frame analysis underscores tools for recognizing and measuring media content frames (Tankard, 2001). Hence, in organizing our sources, we took cognizance of Tankard's eleven framing devices viz: "headlines; subheads; photos; photo captions; leads; sources selection; quote selection; pull quotes; logos; statistics and charts; and concluding statements and paragraphs" (Tankard, 2001, p. 101). Most importantly, this study focused on headlines while selecting materials. Every headline that bears the name "China" or "Chinese" within the months under review in the respective Newspapers was selected.

We put a premium on headlines because "a headline is the most salient cue to activate certain semantically related concepts in readers' minds; it is thus the most powerful framing device of the syntactical structure" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 65).

Finally, we adapted the measurement of news frames employed in this research from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). Their study identified five frames for measuring news. However, for our purpose here, only three applies.

4.4.1. Conflict Frame

This frame is often used to accentuate conflicts between individuals, groups, or institutions. We examined if and how the Newspapers presented conflicts between China, the Chinese, and Nigeria.

4.4.2. Human Interest Frame

This frame highlights the human face or the newspaper report's emotional angle. We used this frame to measure the frequency of publications regarding China with the period we studied.

4.4.3. Economic Consequences Frame

This frame captures the economic consequences of issues or events. This study used this frame to examine how the newspapers reported the economic consequences between Nigerian and China as the COVID-19 pandemic evolved.

Chapter Five

Findings and Discussions

In the previous chapter, we outlined the method for analysis in this research. This chapter presents our findings from the articles we examined. Our results here are directed towards answering the research questions set in the first chapter. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the samples' description, using the three frames of analysis stated in the previous chapter. The second section focuses on discussing the findings in response to the research questions.

5.1. Frame analysis of the articles

Frame analysis requires examining included or excluded keywords, sentences, metaphors, catch-phrases, stereotyped images, and depictions in headlines, sources selection, pulled-out quotes, and concluding paragraphs in the text (De Vreese, 2005, p. 54; Entman, 1993a, p. 52). There are often two broad ways of analyzing news frames: the inductive and deductive approaches. De Vreese (2005) points out that in using the inductive method, scholars allow the frames to emerge from the material during analysis. On the other hand, those who employ the deductive approach to investigate frames define and operationalize the frames before investigation. Hence, "when working with a deductive approach, the relevant question is: what (which components) in a news story constitutes a frame" (De Vreese, 2005, p. 53). This research uses the deductive approach of frame analysis.

Consequently, we determined the news framing portfolios used in our analysis by following the outline given by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as earlier stated. We arrived at which article falls into which of the frames by asking specific questions from which we deduced their categories. These questions are also from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) but adapted and modified for our purpose in this research.

Conflict Frame: Semetko and Valkenburg opine that journalists use this category to frame conflicts between individuals or groups to attract attention. To arrive at articles that fall into this category by asking the following questions:

- (A). Does the story reflect disagreement between parties or individuals or countries?
- (B). Does one party, group, or individuals accuse each other?
- (C). Does the problem reflect violence, crime, physical or psychological abuse, or belligerence?

Human Interest Frame: Semetko and Valkenburg described this as the frame that brings a human face to an event or issue. "Framing news in human interest terms is one way to achieve this. Such a frame refers to an effort to personalize the news, dramatize or 'emotionalize' the news, in order to capture and retain audience interest" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). To arrive at articles under this frame, we asked the following questions:

- (A). Does the story exhibit a human face on the issue?
- (B). Does the article use headlines, adjectives that are compassionate, empathetic, or caring, portray philanthropic or charitable acts?

(C). Does the write-up reveal or suggest how the event influences people, groups, or countries?

(D). Does the story show amicable resolution and solidarity between parties?

Economic Frame: This frame indicates how reported events or issues have economic consequences on the people, groups, or nations. We asked the following question:

(A). Is there any reference to financial benefits or losses in the present or the future?

(B). What does the article say about economic consequences on groups or individuals?

(C). Does the article highlight costs or expenses, or gains incurred by following any course of action?

5.2. Description of Samples

The sample consists of 350 articles, including news reports (national and international) and opinions mentioning China. The articles appeared in *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *The Sun* between December 1, 2019, to April 30, 2020. In media analysis, "news and opinion are examined together as part of a complex whole to the construction of public discourse" (Tucker, 1998, p. 146). We selected these articles from the three newspapers under discussion.

Furthermore, February 28, 2020, is a key date for this research because it marks the first or index case of Covid-19 in Nigeria. Hence, we randomly chose two articles before this date and another two after that for our analysis. In other words, we selected two articles published between December 1, 2019, and February 28, 2020. The next two came from reports

published between March 1, 2020, and April 30, 2020. Again, this research is about finding out if the framing of China in Nigerian newspapers changed significantly before and following the Covid-19 outbreak. Moreover, if Nigerian newspapers featured more negative reports after the index case than before it.

Before we set out to analyze the contents of sampled articles more elaborately, here is a table indicating the number of newspaper articles that fall under the frames used for this analysis.

Newspapers	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>The Sun</i>
Economic Frame	15	25	16
Human Interest Frame	10	61	46
Conflict Frame	50	89	38
	N = 350		

Table 2: Showing the number of news items from each newspaper and under the three frame categories.

<i>The Punch</i> Newspaper							N = 75
	December	January	February	March	April	Total	
Economic Frame	4	3	1	2	5	15	
Human Interest Frame	1	3	0	2	4	10	
Conflict Frame	4	7	5	16	18	50	

Table 3: A breakdown of news items per month by frames in *The Punch* Newspaper

<i>The Nation</i> Newspaper							N = 175
	December	January	February	March	April	Total	
Economic Frame	4	5	2	6	8	25	
Human Interest Frame	2	6	16	4	33	61	
Conflict Frame	2	16	16	7	48	89	

Table 4: A breakdown of news items per month by frames in *The Nation* Newspaper

<i>The Sun</i> Newspaper						N = 100
	December	January	February	March	April	Total
Economic Frame	7	0	5	1	3	16
Human Interest Frame	4	3	17	5	17	61
Conflict Frame	2	1	7	10	17	38

Table 5: A breakdown of news items per month by frames in *The Sun* Newspaper

5.2.1. The Economic Consequences Frame

The Punch Newspaper

The Punch published fifteen articles only, under this frame, within the period of our focus for this research. The reports highlighted the economic benefits or consequences of the Nigerian and Chinese relationship. For instance, the first news item in December 2019, focusing on China, was about mining in the northern part of Nigeria. The article, “Chinese Mining Activities In Nigeria Not Beneficial – Minister” (Chiedozie, 2019), cites the Minister of Mines and Steel Development, Olamilekan Adegbite, complaining about the role of China in the Nigerian mining industry. According to the Minister, "The dominance of China and other Asian countries in the Nigerian solid mineral sector has contributed little to the value chain in the sector. China dominates mining in Nigeria with minimal roles for Nigerian firms" (Chiedozie, 2019). Here the framing is negative because it does not paint China's mining activity as economically beneficial to Nigeria.

In a bitter-sweet special features article, “Chinese Projects: Succour for Nigerian Artisans, Pain for Professionals” (IHUA-MADUENYI, 2019), *The Punch* highlighted how Nigerian artisans and professionals perceive China's involvement in Nigeria. The feature article examined how China's dominance in significant construction contracts affects Nigerian

skilled and unskilled workers. While the artisans feel that despite the challenges of working for the Chinese companies, they feel better because it puts money in their pockets. On the other hand, Nigerian professionals in the construction industry feel put out of jobs and lament the lack of technology transfer that should be happening between Chinese and Nigerian professionals.

Between March and April 2020, *The Punch* did not focus much on China-Nigeria's economic relationship. However, two April articles stand out: On April 9, 2020, *The Punch* reported the Minister of Health's clarification over the medical supplies given to Nigeria by China. The supplies worth \$1.3 million accompanied medical experts who arrived to help Nigeria in treating Covid-19 patients. In that article, "Covid-19: NAFDAC to Ensure Quality of Chinese Medical Supplies – FG" (NAN, 2020b), Nigerian COVID-19 patients were only about 250 in number. It is noteworthy that Nigerians vehemently opposed the coming of the Chinese experts. The government, however, views this arrival of the Chinese medical personnel as beneficial.

The Nation Newspaper

The Nation published twenty-five articles under this category. The newspaper's reports before the outbreak of Covid-19 were optimistic about the economic consequences of Nigeria's relationship with China. For instance, in "MAN, Chinese Investors Partner to Boost Investment" (Okereocha, 2019), *The Nation* frames China and Chinese investors' partnership as a good fortune. MAN (Manufacturing Association of Nigeria) hopes that Chinese investors will help boost the economy and improve Nigeria's manufacturing

capacities. Hence, "this partnership with China is a handshake that will bring much value to our processes. We are looking at making it easier for an average Nigerian businessman to relate with an average Chinese man such that we will be able to break down the barriers."

In another report before the index Covid-19 case in Nigeria, "Why 2020 to 2030 Might Be China's Decade" (Samuel J, 2020) glamorized China and its strategic position in future world history. The framing of this article supports China as providing significant economic benefits to Nigeria and the whole world. It sees China in a positive light.

As the pandemic raged on in March 2020, *The Nation* remained upbeat in its framing of China as having beneficial economic consequences for Nigeria and the world. Most of the articles under this frame category expressed how China is recovering from the pandemic and opening its economy. In the report, "85 % of Our Footwear's Comes from China" (Kanabe, 2020), an interview with President, Indigenous Manufacturers, and Dealers of Footwear Association (IMADIFA), the framing of the content indicated an outcry by the local businessmen, over the effect of the pandemic on their businesses. It does not depict a negative attitude toward China but rather a dependents' disappointment over the patron and supplier's fortune.

April 2020 witnessed the highest number of reports mentioning China in *The Nation*, with a record of 89 articles; only eight fell under the economic frame category. Nevertheless, the reports were framed to present the importance of maintaining the cordial relationship between Nigeria and China. In the article "Let Coronavirus Not Put China, Nigeria

Asunder” (Okoro, 2020), the partnership between Nigeria and China is deemed as crucial that Coronavirus should not put a wedge to it.

The Sun Newspaper

The Sun had 16 items in this category. Before the index case in Nigeria, articles framed to reflect the China-Nigeria relationship's economic consequences were generally positive. The newspaper primed the contract between the Zamfara State government and Chinese investors in mining and agriculture and published it twice. Thus, the article “Zamfara, Chinese Investors Sign Agreement On Agric, Mining” (Raphael, 2019) was published on December 27, and 28 2019 respectively. In a way, this publication uses repetition as agenda-setting and framing. Agenda setting, in media coverage, is the "idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues (e.g., based on relative placement or amount of coverage), and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11).

The article, “Coronavirus Outbreak Won't Reverse Chinese Economy – Envoy” (Aidoghie, 2020a), appeared on February 28 and 29, respectively. It had the same author and content. The article lauded the speed with which China recovered from the devastations of the pandemic. It was all admiration as the report alluded that China-Nigeria trade soared to \$19.27b in 2019. The article positioned China's economy as resilient and their fight against the pandemic as exemplary.

The Sun published only four news items under this category between March and April 2020. All the articles again emphasized the importance of the relationship between Nigeria and

China. For instance, “China-Africa Friendship, A Treasure – Chinese Foreign Ministry” (Aidoghie, 2020b) narrates how China values African. The Spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Zhao Lijian, was quoted as saying "the Chinese people always see in the African people, partners, and brothers through thick and thin. China-Africa friendship is unbreakable as it is deeply rooted in this land. African friends can count on getting fair, just, cordial, and friendly reception in China" (Aidoghie, 2020b).

Another positive report about the Nigeria-China relationship decries any external efforts, especially by the US, to sour the relationship between Nigeria, Africa, and China. The report, “Leader Of Chinese Investors In Nigeria Decries Us Propaganda Against Africa-China Friendship” (Cyril, 2020), disparaged the US while praising China's impact in Africa. The article cited the Chairman, Chinese Investors Association for Development and Promotion in Nigeria, Ronnie Liu, as saying, "when we take stock of the benefits of FOCAC in 20 years and those of Africa-US relationship, we don't look far to see the difference and also know who has been the real friend and who is the enemy between the two large world economies" (Cyril, 2020).

5.2.2. Human Interest Frame

***The Punch* Newspaper**

The Punch had thirteen items under this category. These were news items that framed China or Chinese nationals as sympathetic to Nigeria/Nigerians or any other part of the world. They also include articles that emphasized the generosity of China and its citizens. One sampled piece from this category is “Chinese Business Community In Ogun Donates Health

Centre” (Awoyinfa, 2019). It expresses the generosity of the Chinese business community in Ogun State. Igbesa community in Ogun State, Nigeria, hosts the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone. Hence, the six-room block donation is a community development effort to cement the relationship between the free-trade zone and the host-community.

In Chinese “Opera Troupe Thrills FCT Residents, Nationals” (Adepegba, 2020a), China is typified as not just in Nigeria for business purposes but also cultural exchange. The article highlights cultural exchange as necessary to the China-Nigeria relationship as trade. Hence it quotes the Cultural Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy, Mr. Li Xuda, as saying, "as the Chinese New Year is approaching, let's take this opportunity to say Happy Chinese New Year to you. The troupe visits Nigeria with the aim to (sic) promoting cultural exchanges and strengthen the traditional friendship between China and Nigeria" (Adepegba, 2020a).

In the months following the outbreak in Nigeria – March and April 2020, a few sprinkles of articles sought to position China as sympathetic to Nigeria. One that reflects a controversial circumstance is “Coronavirus: 15 Chinese Doctors Arrive In Nigeria” (Adepegba, 2020b). The article buttresses the arrival of volunteer Chinese doctors who came to help Nigeria fight against Covid-19. Many Nigerians and Civil Society groups opposed their arrival. However, the government welcomed them with open arms. They also came with medical supplies, which the government described as essential and beneficial to Nigeria. The Federal Government welcomed the team that came with "16-ton test kits, ventilators, disinfection machine, disposable medical masks, drugs, infrared thermometer, and other items ordered by the Federal Government"(Adepegba, 2020b). Despite this article showing a conflict

between Nigerians and the visiting Chinese medical personnel, it also shows China's human face, which helps with needed personnel and material to an ally.

Another article, “Chinese Firms Rally Support Against Coronavirus” (Awoyinfa, 2020), shows the concern of Chinese firms as they distribute materials to Nigerian institutions to ease the effects of Covid-19. Under Human Interest Frame, these Chinese firms' gifts, emphasized by *The Punch*, are charitable acts. The journalist shows China and its citizens as caring for countries suffering the physical and economic effects of the Virus, which was first discovered in China.

The Nation Newspaper

The Nation featured only eight articles mentioning China in December 2019. However, out of this was a featured opinion piece, “A Peep Into China's Socialist Democracy” (Onunaiju, 2019). The article reflects on the 4th Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of China on October 30, 2019. This opinion piece gives a human face to China's Socialism, which has been criticized by many. However, the most evident opinion piece sympathetic to “China is Fight the Virus, Not the Chinese” (Emewu, 2020). As the news of the novel Virus emerged as rapidly as the Virus itself, the writer encouraged Nigerians to disregard information painting China in a bad light as the Virus's originator. The article submits, "since the Chinese is NOT the Virus, I rather fight the Virus by loving and embracing the Chinese. I won't be fair to him/her and humanity to alienate or profile or castigate the Chinese spared by the Virus at a time I should be consoling them for the loss of lives, peace, and livelihood. That is what humanity rightly demands of us" (Emewu, 2020).

As the pandemic gained traction in February 2020 and kept spreading worldwide, *The Nation* published another telling opinion piece that sought to give robust sympathetic support to China. In the article, “China: Beyond The Scourge Of Coronavirus” (Onunaiju, 2020), the writer showed a strong and resilient China. This opinion piece gives a human face to China's effort to combat the Virus after it came under heavy criticisms from governments globally, especially the US. The writer sees China as "a resilient nation that has emerged stronger from numerous trials and tribulations" and whose "effective response has averted the further spread of the virus in the world." The piece concludes by stating categorically that the coronavirus outbreak is "not outside the realm of emergencies anticipated by China's system of eternal vigilance"(Onunaiju, 2020).

As the pandemic spread in Nigeria, *The Nation* denoted China as generous and concerned over the effects of Covid-19. Over the accusation that China is repressive to Nigerian citizens in China, Adekunle (2020) reports, “Truth And Fantasy About Chinese Maltreatment Of Nigerians.” The writer expressed that most Nigerians who cry foul and call China racist are those whose visas are out of status. Accordingly,

The Chinese government has a functional system that deals with racism, and I am aware their government does not tolerate any form of racial abuse of any nature against foreigners. From our findings, what transpired was that few Africans from different countries visited China between December 2019 and February 2020. This

period coincided with the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China. (Adekunle, 2020).

While acquitting China of racism and the cruel treatment of Africans, this article frames China as considerate, respectful, and sympathetic.

Another article emphasizes China's (Chinese) generosity to Nigeria and how they help at a time of great need. "Covid-19: China Supports Lagos With N170m Medical Equipment, Cash" (Okoeke, 2020) reports how The Chinese government, in alliance with the association of Chinese women living in Nigeria and abroad, donated medical equipment worth N170 million (One hundred and seventy million Naira) along with a check of over thirty-five million Naira to the Lagos State Government. The article frames China as having a shared destiny with Nigeria. Thus, "viruses have no borders and are a common challenge faced by all mankind. China and Africa are a community of shared destiny, and helping African countries fight the pandemic is the proper meaning of China-Africa friendly cooperation"(Okoeke, 2020).

The Sun Newspaper

The Sun featured forty-six articles under this category. Many of these articles were international news involving China, most significantly, the recoveries from Covid-19 as reported by the Chinese authorities. *The Sun* continued to frame China as a generous and concerned partner. Hence, "The Chinese Embassy Donates 32 Laptops, Stationery, Others to Nyanya Primary School" (NAN, 2019a). Another, "Igbo Honour Chinese Scholar with Chieftaincy Title" (Attah, 2020), reports an honor given by a Chinese by an Igbo

community. Chieftaincy titles are regarded highly in Nigeria, and a titleholder is accorded all the respects due to a native. Prof. Job Yu Zhangbao, the Director of the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, was titled Ezi Oyi I (Reliable Friend) of Igbos. The framing shows him, and indeed China, as a caring friend.

There is a continuous framing of China by *The Sun* as maintaining a high Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) profile. For instance, “Covid-19: Chinese Group Donates Medical Protection Materials To Bauchi” (Orude, 2020) reports the donation of medical materials to a Bauchi Community. In his presentation, Mr. Lui Zhaolong expressed care and concern by saying, "we are sorry for your suffering on the coronavirus and sorry for the challenges in front of the state. We hereby give 2,000 surgical facemasks and 2,000 medical gloves as the immediate first donation" (Orude, 2020).

While responding to critics who considered the arrival of Chinese doctors to Nigeria to help in the fight of Covid-19, “Covid-19: Chinese Doctors Have Experience That'll Be Useful To Us –Osagie Ehanire” (Ezeh, 2020) portrays the presence of the doctors as beneficial. In the interview with the Minister of Health, Dr. Ehanire, clarified that the doctors were not invited by the Federal Government but came as a Chinese construction company's corporate social intervention. Hence, the visit is an offer that is costing nothing to the Federal government. Instead, they have rewarding benefits as the country will learn a lot from them regarding Covid-19.

5.2.3. The Conflict Frame

***The Punch* Newspaper**

Fifty articles were published under this category by *The Punch*. These articles, in our consideration, using our categorization factors, are framed to depict conflicts between individuals, groups, or nations. For instance, *The Punch* gave two spots to a cybercrime incident involving Chinese citizens in faraway Nepal. On December 24, 2019, *The Punch* wrote, “Police Arrest 122 Chinese For Suspected Cybercrime, Bank Fraud” (Reuters/NAN, 2019). The next day, December 25, 2019, *The Punch* featured, “Nepal Arrests 122 Chinese Over Suspected Cybercrime” (AFP, 2019). Repetition is a sort of emphasis. Moreover, the emphasis is a framing method (Nelson, 2019).

As the news of Covid-19 became widespread in January 2020, *The Punch* did another repetition as emphasis. This time, it was about the closure of a Chinese Supermarket. “Coronavirus: FG Shuts Down Chinese Supermarket in Abuja” (Akinkuotu, 2020), published on January 29, 2020, expressly blamed the shutdown on Coronavirus, going by the headline. However, the same story, “FG Shuts Chinese Supermarket, Probes Officials” (Onuba, 2020), on January 30, 2020, was little reserved in its title. On the surface, the FG's reason for the closure is the alleged breach of consumer rights abuse and sale of some expired frozen foods from China. However, further reading into the content revealed that the Federal government took that action because of the fear of the novel Virus. Hence, the Chief Executive Officer, FCCPC, Mr. Babatunde Irukere, is quoted as saying, "the origin of the products is China, and the evidence of viral infections is that it started from animal to human transmission" (Onuba, 2020).

Between March and April 2020, *The Punch* featured articles portraying conflicts between China/Chinese and Nigeria/Nigerians. For example, it deployed repetition as emphasis while reporting an event between Nigerian workers in a Chinese firm and their employers. Hence, “Lockdown: Workers Set Chinese Company's Vehicle Ablaze in Ogun” (Olatunji, 2020a) was published on April 15, 2020, and again the next day, April 16, 2020, as “Aggrieved Chinese Firm's Workers Vandalise, Burn Company's Vehicles” (Olatunji, 2020b). Repetitive news framing does affect the audience over time (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013).

Two issues raised many concerns and dominated news reports: Chinese medical experts' invitation and Nigerian citizens' maltreatment by China. A *Punch* opinion columnist on the abuse of Nigerians in China, while excoriating the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, for his lack of perception by quickly agreeing with the Chinese government that Nigerians are not maltreated, framed China as an untrustworthy partner. Thus,

this was a government (Chinese government) that had a Chinese scientist arrested for informing fellow scientists about the outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan Province where it first happened. Till date, China did not officially acknowledge it was wrong to have had the scientist arrested. Postings on social media of the real situation regarding COVID-19 in their communities were generally taken down by the Chinese government. A one-party state, China aggressively forbids people from really expressing dissenting views. Human rights as we know them in liberal

democracies are belittled, and China demonstrates this in its effort to combat the COVID-19 outbreak (Ajibade, 2020).

The Nation Newspaper

In this category, most of the articles by *The Nation* were mostly foreign news. They highlighted China's challenge and efforts with the Virus and the international bickering between China and the US as the Virus spread. As the information about Coronavirus filtered into Nigeria, *The Nation* carried the report; “Fed Govt Mobilises Against 'Importation' of Disease from China” (Emorinken, 2020). This headline alone conjures the image of China being an "exporter" of the Virus. It expresses distrust and conflict. One curious publication by *The Nation* is an article it culled from the New York Times. The news report, “Coronavirus: China in Mass Arrest of Sufferers” (*The Nation*, 2020), frames China as employing highhandedness on her citizens as it combats the Virus. The article refers to the Chinese whistleblower Li Wenliang, 35, as "silenced by the police and died on Friday after becoming infected with the Virus. His death set off an outpouring of grief and anger on social media, with commenters on social media demanding an apology from the authorities to Li and his family" (*The Nation*, 2020).

As Coronavirus affected more people in Nigeria, *The Nation* using a repeated emphasis published, “Covid-19: Nigerian Lawyers Sue China for \$200b” (Unachukwu, 2020). The article appeared again on April 27, 2020, under the rider, “Lawyers Sue China for \$200b Over COVID-19” (Our Reporter, 2020). In this case, the lawyers led by Prof Epiphany Azing (SAN) sued the Peoples Republic of China over the Coronavirus pandemic's effects

on Nigerians. Hence, they demanded \$200 billion for "loss of lives, economic strangulation, trauma, hardship, social disorientation, mental torture, and disruption of the normal daily existence of people in Nigeria" (Unachukwu, 2020).

The Sun Newspaper

News about China did not seem to have preoccupied *The Sun* before February 2020. Between December 2019 and January 2020, only 17 (13 in December 2019 and four in January 2020) featured in the newspaper. Most of the news reports focused on business deals and humanitarian aids between China and Nigeria. However, there was a report about an alleged attempted kidnap of a Chinese by a welder (NAN, 2019b). *The Sun* mentioned Coronavirus connected to China for the first time on January 28, 2020, in "Coronavirus: Chinese Authorities Urge Citizens to Avoid Travel Abroad as Death Toll Climbs to 106" (Ajiri, 2020). While this is a benign warning of the citizen by Chinese authorities, it embodies a developing conflict. In another instance, *The Sun* used repeated emphasis to frame sodomy by two Chinese in Nigeria. Hence, on February 9 and 10, 2020, respectively, it published, "2 Chinese Arrested for Sodomy in Lagos" (Oji, 2020). This emphasis highlights an act considered a crime in Nigeria (Associated Press in Abuja, 2014).

The post index case publications by *The Sun* mainly focused on the accusation of maltreatment of Nigerians in China and Chinese medical personnel's invitation to help fight Covid-19 in Nigeria. Publishing an article culled from the Daily Mail, *The Sun* sought to frame China as issuing conflicting information regarding the number of deaths from Covid-

19. Thus, “Wuhan Locals Believe Coronavirus May Have Killed 42,000 People Not 3,200 Claimed By Chinese Authorities” (Daily Mail, 2020).

The Sun also published articles involving the closure of Chinese firms in Nigeria, indicating conflicts. “Covid-19: Kogi Closes Company, Places Chinese Workers on Compulsory Isolation” (NAN, 2020a) was published by *The Sun* to show a dispute arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Kogi state placed the Chinese in the company on compulsory isolation, although Kogi had not registered a single case of Covid-19 (Adeyemi, 2020).

The above-highlighted newspaper articles are just samples drawn from the whole. However, they embody a whole gamut of information regarding the framing of China in Nigerian newspapers. In the next section, we will discuss these findings and express how they respond to our research questions and hypotheses.

5.3. Discussion

At the onset of this research, we hypothesized that the Coronavirus pandemic's emergence would increase the frequency of news about China in Nigerian newspapers. We also hypothesized that China would be framed more negatively in Nigerian newspapers due to the pandemic outbreak. In the preceding discussions, we highlighted the perceived frames under which the news articles about China fall. We now fix our attention on the research questions.

Q1. Are there significant differences in news frequency about China/Chinese, by Nigerian Newspapers, before and during the outbreak of the COVID-19?

There are significant differences in the news about China/Chinese published before and as the pandemic progressed in Nigeria. For instance, between December 2019 and February 28 and 29, 2020, when Nigeria had her index case, *The Punch* published n= 28, *The Nation*, n= 69, and *The Sun* n= 46. However, between March 1, 2020, to April 30, 2020, we have *The Punch* n= 47, *The Nation* n= 106, and *The Sun* n= 54. This answer leads us to the first hypothesis attached to this question.

H1. This answer matches our first hypothesis that the frequency in the publication of news about China would increase with the pandemic spread. This also indicates that the Nigerian newspapers were following the trend of events around the world. The newspapers focused more on China as the Coronavirus spread. They published information about what is happening in and to China/Chinese internationally and within Nigeria. Even though none of the newspapers had an international correspondent, not to talk of one based in China, they could report on China by culling news and rewriting news from global media.

The coverage of China/Chinese increased in March 2020 and April 2020 due to local conflicts about Chinese medical personnel's invitation to combat the Virus. Another issue that received much attention is the alleged maltreatment of Nigerians in China. These two items increased the frequency significantly. Thus, the three newspapers published a combined total of n = 207 out of the n = 350 items. That is about 59.14% of the total article in those five months under review. *The Punch* had 62.67%, *The Nation*, 60.6%, and *The*

Sun, a 54% increase in frequency, respectively, between March and April 2020. This hypothesis, therefore, holds.

Q. 2. What kind of frames were used to cast news about before and during the Coronavirus Pandemic by Selected Nigerian Newspapers?

We identified that Nigerian newspapers used three frames to cast the news about China viz: Economic Frame, Human Interest Frame, and Conflict Frame.

Under the Economic Consequence Frame category, the three newspapers seem to be generally positive and unchanging in their perception of China before and following the pandemic. The difference in tone with news involving Nigeria-China economic relations remained upbeat within the period this study considered. The newspapers appraised China as a reliable economic partner and, at times, positioned it as essential to Nigeria's economic survival. We also observed that it has the least frequency in the number of articles, registering only n=56 articles (16%), including opinion pages out of the n=350 published between December 2019 to April 2020 referencing China. Consequently, there was less news about economic deals and interactions between Nigeria and China in these months. It is obvious and expected due to the pandemic.

One can observe from above that *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *The Sun*, gave good coverage to acts of kindness by China and the Chinese in Nigeria. The three newspapers published a combined n=117 (33.43%) articles under the human-interest frame category. The Human

Interest frame affects perception and attribution of responsibility in politics (Boukes et al., 2015) and attitudes towards medical advancements (Hong, 2013). Thus, one can expect that framing China and the Chinese in Nigeria as caring and charitable could evoke a change of attitude towards them. Furthermore, there was a significant increase in these philanthropic activities after the index case of Covid-19 in Nigeria. Perhaps, these philanthropic acts were to mitigate negative perception of China by Nigerians.

Finally, the conflict frame got the most attention in all the newspapers. Out of the n=345 news items published about China between December 2019 and April 2020, 177 (50.57%) fell under the conflict frame category. The pandemics with international politics and economic battles between China and the USA perhaps contributed to this situation. From the news reports, one can observe that as the Virus spread in Nigeria from March 2020, the Nigerian government and her agents also started being restrictive on Chinese operations in Nigeria. Some Chinese firms were closed following sting operations, unlike before. The alleged maltreatment of Nigerians in Guangzhou, China, and Chinese medical personnel's invitation to Nigeria also raised many articles under this category. Be that as it may, Nigeria's government, in its official capacity, maintained strong support for China even when some Nigerians were protesting and suing China over the pandemic.

H.2. Based on the findings that there was more news considering China and Chinese people in Nigeria and elsewhere as embattled, one can say that there was more negative news about China consequent upon the pandemic. China was portrayed generally by many articles as

facing a potential economic challenge. The newspapers as well highlighted the economic and political combat between China and the US. Some articles reported China as falling out of favor with some other countries. Reports about Nigerians' opposition to the arrival of medical personnel from China can also be considered negative. China was also framed as abusive to Nigerians when reports emerged about how Chinese authorities maltreated Nigerian citizens in China. All these are negative news items attendant to the index case of Coronavirus in Nigeria. In this case, the hypothesis also holds.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

This study's primary objective was to identify if news frames about China in the Nigerian Newspapers became changed significantly with the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic. We sought to find what news frames were dominant in characterizing news reports about China and its relationship with Nigeria. China is an essential trade partner, and as years go by, Nigeria continues to be irredeemably dependent on China. China counts Nigeria as a major partner in Africa, and Nigeria currently relies on China for any hope of infrastructural development. This symbiotic relationship, which some have described as predatory in favor of China, should expectedly always catch the media's attention. The Covid-19 pandemic provided another opportunity to examine if the media framing of China changed in any way. That, we believe, we have done in this study.

We identified three dominant frames that Nigerian newspapers use in framing reports about China. These frames characterize China as (1) an essential and reliable trade partner, (2) a benevolent partner, and (3) a partner full of conflicts of which Nigerians should be wary. These three frames are the perspectives Nigerian newspapers want their readers to view China. In this research, we found out that the third frame (Conflict Frame) was more emphasized after the pandemic became widespread.

In sum, this research makes two key conclusions: First, Nigerian newspapers focused more attention on China after the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak than before the pandemic. Hence,

Nigerian newspapers were effective in relating to their readers the news about China and Coronavirus. Secondly, was China was significantly framed as problematic and at conflicts with the world due to the pandemic. Again, local news involving Chinese citizens in Nigeria also got heightened attention. While many news reports highlighted their philanthropic activities, most of the articles focused on how China/Chinese struggled with negative criticisms and closure of their firms by Nigerian authorities following the pandemic.

This work contributes to the repertoire of Framing studies, especially as it concerns Nigerian Newspapers. Framing studies is a growing field, not only in communications but also in psychology, economics, political science, and sociology. At the same time, some scholars have called the future of framing studies into question due to inconsistencies in the field currently (Cacciatore et al., 2016). In response, other scholars have called for the "redemption" of framing studies and therefore formed a forum for further deliberations on framing studies' future (D'Angelo et al., 2019). In any case, we believe that this work contributes to framing studies, despite the shortcomings and possible contributions to the "inconsistencies."

6.1. Limitations

This study has the following observable limitations.

6.1.1. Time

Coronavirus is an ongoing pandemic, and a lot had happened since April 2020, when the scope of this research ended. This does not nullify the evidence presented here. For our

purpose, we had enough to answer our research questions. Nevertheless, if we did this study at a time, we would have had more evidence to compare.

6.1.2. News reportage style in Nigeria

Our conclusions on the contents of the articles we evaluated were affected by the Nigerian newspaper's news reporting style. The journalists wrote their reports as if they were simply taking minutes of the events. It was not easy to find accompanying analyses that reveal the journalist's bent. Framing relies on discovering how the journalist uses words and value judgments to write the news.

Furthermore, we found out that Nigerian newspapers do not have foreign reporters or even contacts with residents in the foreign countries they report. They rely on rewrites from foreign news media or on rewrites from the Nigerian News Agency (NAN) for international news reports. Hence, we discovered that the newspapers reported about the same articles and with the same framing. However, this did not limit our research because news framing analysis concerns finding what was published and what is left out.

6.2. Future Research

This study did not examine the news framing effect on Nigerians regarding China/Chinese following the Coronavirus pandemic. It calls for future research to determine if news framing impacts Nigerians' perception and attitude towards China.

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