



## **X-raying the Framing Patterns of Nigerian Government's Rice Policy on Facebook Under Late President Mohammadu Buhari's Administration**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The rice policy of the Nigerian Government that was introduced in April 2016, came with a stringent order, which led to the ban of rice through the land borders. Also, household food security became precarious since the rice policy was introduced. Thus, the task of influencing perception of the masses for a favourable evaluation of the rice policy requires the use of framing on social media platform like Facebook, to influence the public.

**Objectives:** This study investigated how Nigerian government under the administration of late President Muhammadu Buhari framed the rice policy on Facebook.

**Methods:** The study adopted content analysis. Forty-eight posts from April to December, 2016 on government accounts - *Aso Rock Villa; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development or Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and Muhammadu Buhari*, were content analysed using a coding sheet. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics and presented using frequency tables. The content categories for the data collected were *issue specific frames; issue generic frames; episodic frames and thematic frames*. The unit of analysis are graphics, texts, pictures and videos on rice. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The analysis across four coded items and four coders yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95, indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability of the coding instrument.

**Results:** Majority of the posts on rice by the Buhari government on its Facebook handles, were issue specific. This means that most of the posts on rice on Facebook that were posted on select government Facebook handles for this study, directly focused on the issues. In achieving its framing of the rice policy on Facebook platform, the government made use of graphics, texts, videos and images.

**Conclusion:** Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that the government social media handlers were not efficient as they reported few posts about the rice policy during the Buhari administration. With the radical nature at which the government started the rice policy in 2016, to have posts on the rice policy, as little as 48 posts on the select government handles, was not encouraging.

**Unique Contribution:** This study has offered new perspective into the increasing usage and influence of social media platforms in driving the policies of the government to the public.



Importantly, policymakers, and communication experts will find this study useful in preparing communication channels for popularising government policies through the social media.

**Key Recommendations:** The study recommends that the Nigerian government under President Tinubu should continue to use the social media to drive the rice policy, since it is a policy that is geared towards impacting the lives of the people. Also, the framing of the rice policy by the Nigerian government should not be limited only to Facebook. Other social media platforms with strong followers should be explored.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Food Security, Local Production, Social Media

## INTRODUCTION

Rice perhaps is Nigeria's most populous food. It is so because there is no day that passes that rice would not be eaten in a Nigerian home. Rice in Nigeria comes in different forms. There is the popular "jollof rice" which has earned the country a global name. There is also the fried rice and "ofada", to mention a few. Abbas, Agada, & Kolade (2018) opine that in the 1960s and 1970s, rice in Nigeria was a ceremonial meal and a status symbol as it was eaten in opulent homes and often times at festive periods. By 2016, demand for rice by Nigerians stood at 6.3 million metric tonnes of the 483,817,000 tonnes of global rice consumption. Nigeria's consumption of rice was 1.3% of the global share of rice consumed in the world (Allen & Ogbe, 2020).

The rice policy of the Federal Government under late President Muhammadu Buhari, that was introduced in April 2016, with a stringent order, led to the ban on rice importation through the land borders. It was a major development that affected the common masses. Also, household food security became an uncertainty since the rice policy was introduced. However, the benefits of the rice policy and its effects on the population are best measured through the opinions of the general public who have to make evaluative judgements about the policy. The task of influencing perception of the masses for a favourable evaluation from the public required the use of framing on social media platform like Facebook, to influence the public.

Before the coming of social media platform like Facebook, governments often influenced perception and public opinion through the traditional mass media, such as television, radio, newspaper, magazine, etc. (Tomz & Weeks, 2020). It is in the light of the invention like Facebook that political institutions that seek to persuade the publics must utilise persuasive techniques in the promotion of their policies. This is where framing comes in. Facebook with its technical features enable people to have an opinion on public policy with little censorship. Facebook is a frontier for policy discourse where the public can express dissent or approach for any policy making and implementation process.

Available literatures (Ihsaniyati, Sarwoprasodjo, Muljono & Gandasari, 2023; Inegbedion, Inegbedion, Asaleye, Obadiaru & Asamu, 2021; Mendelsohn, Budak & Jurgens, 2021. Oparaugo. 2021), reveal that there are a lot of studies on the rice policy of the Nigerian government. However, the studies have largely investigated the relationship between social media, framing and politics; how the social media have helped in creating a social change and the marketing of agricultural products. Also, most of the existing studies used survey methods to



elicit data from respondents (mostly farmers), on how the social media have helped them to market their products. These methods include the use of qualitative methods and questionnaire in gathering the data.

Having identified the gaps of previous literatures, this study's aim and objectives investigated how the Nigerian government under the Buhari administration framed the rice policy on Facebook. The study also sought to know the types of frames used by the government in the framing of the posts on rice on the Facebook handles of the agencies in charge of agriculture. The current study adopted content analysis by analysing posts on rice on the Facebook pages of the government. This is a clear departure from the focus of existing studies. Since the Facebook allows for interactivity which prompted the government to employ framing and other notable devices in political discourse, the researchers are not sure the manner in which the government presented its rice policy for it to be accepted by the public. The researchers are also not sure about the strategy used by government social media handlers to gain the upper hand in pushing narratives about the rice policy to the public. It is against this background, that the researchers attempted to study how the Nigerian government under the Buhari administration framed the rice policy on Facebook, with the intention of making it acceptable by the public.

### **Social Media as the Fifth Estate of the Realm**

Dutton (2009) in his work "the fifth estate emerging through network of networks" argued that social media is an emergent 5<sup>th</sup> estate. The emergent fifth estate has few features within an opportunity structure described as "the network of networks". There are, however, two key features of the fifth estate. These are the ability to support individuals and institutions to improve their power of communication. The compunction power is enhanced by networking beyond and within institutional arenas and the provision of capabilities for the creation of networks that can provide social benefits through social network sites. These two features thus enable a reconfiguration of access to people, information and services.

An appraisal of the medium is important to establish analytical elements for research. Social media have been identified as electronic based communication in which users are allowed to create communities with which they share information, personal content and other information amongst themselves. Web 2.0 is a shift from static webpages that characterised the first technical versions of the internet to a more flexible and interactive systems that allows for user content generation and social networking (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011; Undibayeva, 2019).

There are a lot of social media platforms that are used for social interaction, agenda setting and political discourse. One that readily come to mind is Facebook. This is because of its growing acceptance among the publics. NapoleonCat (2023) indicates that Facebook had as many mobile users in Nigeria. Nigeria has been labelled as one of a number of countries known as Facebook mobile countries. The technical features of Facebook includes a user profile, a newsfeed where connected users contents are displayed, reaction features that allows for users to use emoji's to react to contents, a comment section where users can post text, images in response to a user content, timelines, wall and messaging services (Kim & Hastak, 2018; Aichner, Grunfelder, Maurer & Jegeni, 2021). Other social networking sites are Instagram, X and a host of others. On



social networking sites, issues of government policies - like the rice policy - can be shared by individuals or organisations to members of a community.

### **Framing Theory**

Arowolo (2017) views framing as the method of reasoning about news items and the content of stories within related context. Framing and agenda setting are interrelated. However, framing points more towards current issues than a particular topic. The media when using framing, view certain issues and events before situating them within a similar context. With framing, we are able to understand how issues are presented to the audience in the style of frame, thereby persuading them to choose how to process information. By framing, the media create a frame by presenting news items with a prepared and biased contextualisation. Frames are therefore designed to link stories or issues to a bigger and clear picture.

Thus, frame emphasises salient issues and salient attributes of an issue. For example, a government official who presents the facts of the rice policy states what the salient issues are and attributes, which need to be emphasised for the audience. The emphasised attributes along with the style of presentation are called a frame. This has a way of influencing decision making. Frames can, therefore, be understood as concepts that work to organise or structure the meanings of a message.

The concept of framing means to create attention to certain attributes of the objects of news coverage and the objects themselves. Those who create and share political information, like the rice policy as framed on Facebook, are quite aware of the fact that framing occurs in the selective method of content generation. The notion is that the manner an issue is designed and presented to an audience comes with a media effect. The information is managed in a manner that influenced how the message is interpreted. Here, framing happens at the level of language (Benwell & Stokoe, 2010). Framing occurs at the language level and language utilises lexicogrammatical process by which the authors of text, graphics or videos, systematically choose between what is added or subtracted in a message. This summarily means that the choice of language by those generating contents for framing the rice policy of the Nigerian government is very important, even than the message. It is the language that would be used to engage the minds of the readers or audience to influencing their opinion on a particular issue.

### **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Oparaugo (2021) examines the relationship between social media and politics in Nigeria. He stated that politicians or state actors, utilise social media for political communication. That Nigerian politicians would put out long posts on Facebook pages on an issue by stating their position on a burning issue of public interest. Political office holders make use of this medium to address the general public on what they are doing to better the society, state or country. The opposition elements within the country on their part use the medium to in turn cast aspersions on those in government about their wrong policies and steps (Oparaugo, 2021).

Oparaugo (2021) further stated that the two common social media platforms that are used by Nigerian politicians are Facebook and X. The structure of social media platform like Facebook allows for the discussion of issues of public policy, unlike WhatsApp which is restrictive. The



study of Oparaugo (2021) was anchored on technological determinism theory as well as the uses and gratification theory. He identified political information as the content of political communication. Social media therefore allows for political talk among users. This current study on the framing of the Nigerian government's rice policy on Facebook is related to Oparaugo's study.

Mendelsohn et al (2021) in another study on modelling framing in immigration discourse on social media, observe that social media is the site for framing of political issues. This is for Mendelsohn et al (2021) an uncharted territory in research. Entman (1993) in Mendelsohn et al (2021) stated that framing picks particular area of an issue and makes them salient in communicating a message. There has been a barrage of research on how traditional media frames political issues but little on how the common people frame issues on the platform of social media. There are observations that a frame at this level is influential and can shape public policy. Their conceptual framework was modelled on these assumptions:

- (i) Social media allows for comparison of frames across political ideologies
- (ii) Provides insight to how messages resonate with audiences through what Mendelsohn et al (2021) calls interactive signals (retweet & reactions).

According to Mendelsohn et al (2021) framing has four functions. They are problem definition, diagnosing a cause, making evaluative judgment and suggesting solutions. Based on this, framing typologies were explored:

- (i) Issue specific frame in which there is the identification of aspects of an issue
- (ii) Issue generic frame is that in which emerges across varying issues

The study is related to the current study on the framing of the Nigerian government's rice policy on Facebook.

Inegbedion et al (2021) in a related study on the use of social media in the marketing of agricultural products and farmers' turnover in South-South Nigeria. The researchers set out with the objective of determining the extent to which the usage of social media in the marketing of agricultural products in Nigeria can lead to efficiency and high turnover on product sales by farmers. This is related to this current study because the Nigerian government made use of Facebook to frame its policy on rice to Nigerians.

The study by Inegbedion et al (2021) used survey research design, while the data were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. The research data were analysed using a t-test and least squares method. The study by Inegbedion et al (2021) found out that WhatsApp and Instagram were used in marketing agricultural products thereby leading to efficiency and high turnover of sales by the farmers. The use of these social media platforms also led to a significant reduction in the cost of marketing agricultural products as well as increased demand for agricultural products. This is also related to this current study which implies that Facebook's framing of the Nigerian government rice policy helped in the sustainability of local rice production. Inegbedion et al (2021) further hypothesised that WhatsApp and Instagram when



used to market agricultural products significantly affect reduction of cost and efficiency in products marketing and that the turnover of farmers were huge because of high demand for agricultural products. This is what the Nigerian government did with the use of Facebook in framing the rice policy.

Ihsaniyati et al (2023) conducted a study on the use of social media for development communication and social change: a review. The objective of the study was to review research materials on the use of social media for knowledge sharing to achieve development communication and social change. The researchers used qualitative method to analyse selected literature consisting of 57 articles. The results of the study among others show that Facebook platform is the most researched social media which was used for knowledge sharing.

The research by Ihsaniyati et al (2023) is related to this current study because it is social media inclined. The study found that Facebook is the most used social media, which this study supported. Also, some of the data used in supporting this study were drawn from Facebook. The study by Ihsaniyati et al (2023) is similar to this current study, as it was able to establish the fact that the Nigerian government made use of the social media – Facebook, to inform Nigerians about its rice policy during the period under review.

## **METHOD**

This study adopted content analysis to elicit data about the research. The population of study for this study are all the posts on the rice policy in 2016 on select Nigerian government handles on Facebook. The year 2016 was when the Nigerian government announced a more stringent rice policy by banning its importation through the land borders (Faleye, 2019). The sample size are 48 posts from Facebook accounts of select government handles. The handles are; *Aso Rock Villa; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development or Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and Muhammadu Buhari*, starting from April to December, 2016. The content categories for the data collected were *issue specific frames; issue generic frames; episodic frames and thematic frames*.

To accomplish this, rows were drawn on a sheet, with the framing typologies' tags indicating; IS – issue specific; IG – issue generic; EF – episodic frames; TF - thematic frames. For further clarity, issue specific highlights the issue as focal (Benson, 2013). Such frames have a representation of the issue (such as rice, etc.). Issue generic are policy frames that include aspects of issues that is important for policy making such as the economic aspects of an issue. Episodic frame is a type of generic frame that highlights an individual or specified event. Thematic frame takes an issue and explores the broad social context. (Mendelsohn et al, 2021). Each post from the 48 posts that were content analysed, was analysed on an individual basis. The unit of analysis - the items or objects that were counted are posts on rice on Facebook handles of the government in graphics, texts, pictures and videos forms. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The analysis across four coded items and four coders yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95, indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability of the coding instrument.



## RESULTS

**Table 1: Nigerian government's framing of its rice policy on Facebook**

| <b>Framing Typology</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Issue specific frame    | 28               | 58.3           |
| Issue generic Frame     | 20               | 42.0           |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>48</b>        | <b>100.0</b>   |
| <b>Framing Typology</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
| Episodic Frame          | 30               | 62.5           |
| Thematic Frame          | 18               | 37.5           |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>48</b>        | <b>100.0</b>   |

*Source: Content analysis data, 2023.*

The table above show how the Nigerian government framed its rice policy on Facebook. Using framing typologies, the researchers found out that majority of the posts by the Nigerian government on Facebook, representing 58.3 percent were issue specific. Majority of the posts were also episodic frames, representing 62.5 percent. Some of these posts were made on Facebook with pictures of the events, rice farms, rice milling companies and videos. Issue specific highlights the issue as focal (Benson, 2013). Such frames have a representation of the issue (such as land borders, rice, etc.), while episodic frame is a type of generic frame that highlights an individual or specified event (Mendelsohn et al, 2021). Some of these posts are reproduced below:

*Issue specific/episodic frame: October 16 2016: Nigeria Custom Service Press Release: The restriction on the importation of vehicles follows that of rice, whose imports have been banned through the land borders since April 2016*

*Issue specific/episodic frame: October 16 2016: Nigeria Custom Service Press Release: Rice imports remain banned through the land borders*

*Issue specific/episodic frame: June 11, 2016: Local Rice Boost: Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development – Chief Audu Ogbeh on a working visit to Olam Rice Processing Facility in Nasarawa State*

*Issue specific/episodic frame: September 15, 2016: I did not say rice is expensive because Nigerians eat too much rice – Ogbeh*

*Issue specific/episodic frame: December 16, 2016: In Kebbi State, we are stocking rice now and we encourage other states to do the same ... - Gov. Bagudu of Kebbi State*



*Issue specific/episodic frame: September 20, 2016: Dry season farming: Jigawa targets 150,000 hectares of rice ...*

*Issue generic/thematic frame: November 30, 2016: In spite of the challenges, we are making some progress; we have acquired **rice** mills of varying capacities for distribution to rice farmers ... - Ogbeh*

*Issue generic/thematic frame: October 10, 2016: The good news is the private sector is responding to agriculture in a way we have never seen in this country, they own the major rice mills ... - Hon. Minister – Chief Audu Ogbeh*

*Issue generic/thematic frame: December 23, 2016: A video was posted on the Aso Rock Villa Facebook & X pages where the Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo responded to a question from a Nigerian about the increasing price of rice in the market...*

*Issue generic/thematic frame: October 1, 2016: Snippets on President Buhari's address on the 56<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary... No. 23. At the same time, the federal ministry of Agriculture and the central bank have been mobilized to encourage local production of rice...*

*Issue generic/thematic frame: December 16, 2016: We are developing a 10, 000 hectares, fully integrated paddy farm on Greenfield site with an expected yield of 10MT per hectare over two annual crop cycles. This is based on four varieties of high-yield rice... - OLAM Farms*

## **DISCUSSION**

Using framing typologies, the researchers found out that majority of the posts by the government on its Facebook platform, representing 58 percent were issue specific, while 42 percent of the posts were issue generic. The researchers also found out that majority of the frames used in promoting the rice policy of the government on Facebook were episodic frames which represented 62.5 percent, while 37.5 percent of the posts were thematic frames. The fact that the government concentrated on issues surrounding the rice policy instead of creating ambiguity around the posts, indicated the effect of social media platforms on the people. It summarised the power of the social media, which is that it could be used to persuade its users. Most experts on content development or generation on the social media, frame their contents or ideas by directly pursuing the issues at stake. Also, due to the distractive nature of social media platforms, focusing on important issues when making posts particularly the ones relating to government policies, is important in order to get the desired results. Most of the posts on the rice by the Nigerian government on Facebook, that were framed on select government platforms or handles for this study, directly focused on the issue - rice. Both issue specific and episodic frames are about the issues which the findings represent.

Also, these findings are in tandem with the views of Benwell & Stokoe (2010) which posit that how an issue is shown to the audience bring about a media effect. Further, the views of Oparaugo (2021) supported the findings aforementioned, when the scholar opined that political actors in Nigeria made use of Facebook to convey political information. Also, Ihsaniyati et al (2023) in their study supported the use of Facebook for political communication by the



government. The researchers affirm that Facebook is the most sought after open interactive social media platform. Nonetheless, we must admit that not everyone who is exposed to the government's posts on rice as framed on Facebook will react to the message. This is where the idea of technological acceptance model come to mind. People tend to react to a media message that fits into their conscious minds. The fact that they are exposed to the posts on rice by the government on Facebook, does not necessarily mean acceptance. They may even share the post and discussed it with others, without accepting it.

The framing theory supported the findings of this study on how the Nigerian government framed its rice policy on Facebook. Hassan, Mathiassen & Lowry (2019) observe that with framing, the media have the power of selective focus on an important issue within a field of meaning. They noted that the presentation of an issue to the audience can influence the response to the issue. Political actors - government social media handlers, in ensuring that the people are informed about the rice policy, made use of framing in conveying their messages.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that the government social media handlers were not efficient as they reported few posts about the rice policy during the Buhari administration. With the radical nature at which the government started the rice policy in 2016, to have posts on the rice policy, as little as 48 posts on the select government handles, was not encouraging. Thus, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The Tinubu administration must continue the use of social media posts to drive the rice policy of the federal government. Since it is a policy that is geared towards impacting the lives of the people, government should engage social media handlers that are good in user generated contents.
- ii. The framing of the rice policy by the Nigerian government should not be limited only to Facebook. Other social media platforms such as X, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Instagram should be explored.
- iii. More studies should be done in other areas that there exist a gap in the reportage of Nigeria's rice policy.

## **Ethical clearance**

The data for the study were culled from the social media pages of the Nigerian government on Facebook platform. The names of the platforms were stated in the study. Equally, the title of posts on the social media platforms were clearly stated as they were not omitted during analysis.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors' Contributions.**

Ekhareafo and Adebumiti conceived the study, including the design. Adebumiti collated the data, while Ekhareafo handled the analysis and interpretation. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

### **Availability of data and materials.**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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