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African newspapers reportage of sanctions: analysis of framing and agenda setting

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Abstract. International organizations and numerous countries worldwide have implemented punitive measures, often in the form of sanctions, to express disapproval of certain events within a country or to compel change. A significant body of scholarly work has focused on these sanctions, particularly when imposed on countries outside of Africa, and how the media frames these actions. In various crisis situations, news framing and agenda-setting by the media have shown enormous effect on consumers' view of the crisis. This study investigates how media in Africa frames sanctions imposed on African countries, specifically examining printed media in Zimbabwe, Mali, and Niger Republic regarding political and economic sanctions imposed on these countries. Employing the framing and agenda setting theories, the study analysed 204 sanction-related headlines (Zimbabwe – 104, Mali – 70 and Niger – 30) from five media outlets with online presence in each country. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the initial stage, purposive sampling technique was utilized to choose print newspapers with online presence. In the second stage, the researcher utilized the search functionality on the newspapers' websites to identify headlines using the keywords “sanction” and “sanctions”. Quantitative content analysis was employed to analyse the data. Findings showed that a generic framing approach is widely used in the three countries. Further analysis reveals that the responsibility and conflict frames consistently dominate in all three countries. The study also finds a positive agenda-setting tone to be dominant in Zimbabwe. Conversely, both Mali and Niger Republic exhibit a dominant negative agenda-setting tone.

Keywords: media, Zimbabwe, Mali, Niger, political and economic sanctions, article headlines, generic, diagnostic and prognostic frames

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Репортажи в африканских газетах о санкциях: анализ фреймов и повестки дня

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Аннотация. Международные организации и многие страны мира вводят карательные меры, часто в форме санкций, чтобы выразить свое неодобрение определенным событиям внутри какой-либо страны или чтобы принудить к переменам. Значительная часть научных работ посвящена подобным санкциям, особенно когда санкции налагаются на страны вне Африки, а также средствам массовой информации, трактующим эти действия. В различных кризисных ситуациях подача новостей и определение повестки дня СМИ оказывают огромное влияние на мнение людей о кризисе. Цель исследования – определить, изучив печатные СМИ Зимбабве, Мали и Республики Нигер, как СМИ в Африке формулируют информацию о политических и экономических санкциях, введенных в отношении африканских стран. Опираясь на теорию фрейминга и на теорию установления повестки дня, проанализированы 204 заголовка статей, связанных с санкциями (Зимбабве – 104, Мали – 70 и Нигер – 30), из публикаций пяти средств массовой информации, представленных в интернете в каждой стране. Использовался метод многоэтапной выборки. Сначала для отбора печатных газет, присутствующих в интернете, задействовался метод целенаправленной выборки. На втором этапе применялась функция поиска на медийных веб-сайтах по ключевым словам «санкция» и «санкции» для выявления заголовков. При анализе данных применялся контент-анализ. Результаты показали, что в трех странах широко используется так называемый фреймовый подход. Обнаружено, что во всех трех странах стабильно доминируют фреймы ответственности и конфликта. При этом в Зимбабве преобладает позитивная тональность при определении повестки дня, в Мали и Республике Нигер – негативный тон.

Ключевые слова: СМИ, Зимбабве, Мали, Нигер, политические и экономические санкции, заголовки статей, общие, диагностические и прогностические фреймы

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Introduction

Recent data show that the modern world community lives in a dynamic migration flow that forms a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional and multilingual global social space, media space is becoming multivalent and debatable (Al-Kaisi et al., 2018). News media consistently plays a vital role in shaping perceptions and discussions around events. The way an event is reported, particularly the framing angle, influences people's understanding and interpretation of the event (Liu, 2019).

While media framing has been found to influence people's attitudes and behaviour, Lecheler and De Vreese (2018) argue that the media achieve this by subtly altering how issue is reported. Therefore, analysing news framing aids in understanding how news norms and practices translate into patterns in news reporting, which profoundly influence public thinking and attitudes (De Vreese, Kandyla, 2009; Lecheler, De Vreese, 2018). In various crisis situations, news framing and agenda-setting by the media have shown enormous effect on consumers' view of the crisis. For instance, Liu (2019) investigated how Russian and British media framed the 2014 Ukraine crisis. Liu found that Russian media is less propagandistic than British media. Similarly, Zengeni (2010) found that Western media's reporting of sanctions and the political situation in Zimbabwe portrayed the country negatively, thereby exacerbating the situation in the view of the media consumers. On the other hand, Kazun (2016) found that Russian media predominantly deproblematize the sanction situation in Russia, leading citizens to perceive sanctions as having less impact on the economy and standard of living. In other words, the media frames the sanctions in a way that downplays their severity.

From the foregoing, media have been characterized to positively and/or negatively shaped consumers perspective based on the framing angles used in presenting crisis events. In this study, framing and agenda-setting theories are used to analyse how media in Zimbabwe, Mali, and Niger Republic present sanctions-related news stories. These research questions are set to guide the study:

1. What is the dominant frame approach used in presenting sanction-related headlines in the media of these countries?
2. What is the dominant agenda-setting theme used in presenting sanction-related headlines in these countries?

Between 2000 and 2003, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the European Union imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe, alleging human rights abuses, property ownership violations, rule of law disrespect, and extensive political violence (Chingono, 2010). Since then, Zimbabwe has faced sanctions, with Western states citing the intention to correct anomalies, stop human rights abuses, restore democracy, and uphold the rule of law (Ogbonna, 2017). Some studies observed that the two-decades-long sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe have been ineffective in achieving its political and socio-economic objectives (Petrica, 2023). In December 2021, ECOWAS¹ imposed sanctions on Mali due to a coup d'état and military takeover. The sanctions were renewed in January 2022 after rejecting the military government's transitional election proposal scheduled for 2025. Similarly, the July 26, 2022, coup in Niger led to sanctions imposed by ECOWAS and UEMOA². These sanctions include the suspension of commercial transactions, freezing state assets, and suspension of financial assis-

¹ The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional political and economic union of fifteen countries located in West Africa. Retrieved February 21, 2024, from <https://www.ecowas.int/>

² The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) is an organization of eight West African states was established in 1994. The eight countries in UEMOA are also members of The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Retrieved February 21, 2024, from <https://www.uemoa.int/en>

tance³. Due to the sanctions of varying degrees imposed on these countries, they were purposively selected to investigate how African media frame sanctions and the agenda-setting tone used.

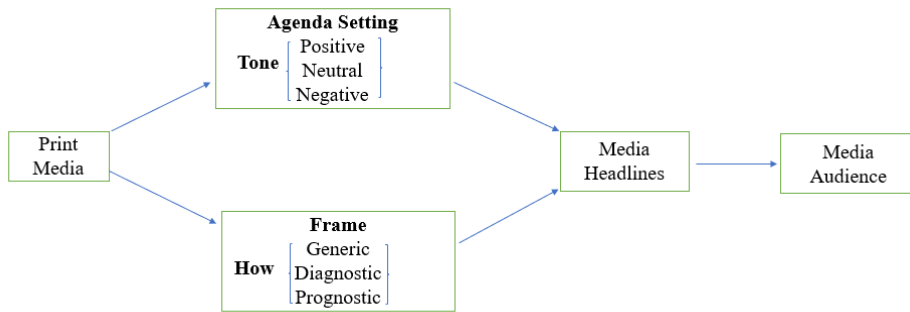
Theoretical framework

Framing theory examines how media influences public perception of political, economic, and social issues (Lecheler, Vreese, 2018). Entman defines framing as the selection of aspects of perceived reality to make them more salient in communication, promoting specific elements while downplaying others (1993). This process shapes individuals' views by emphasizing certain aspects of reality (Ouvrein et al., 2019). The theory proposes that the presentation of an event, or “frame”, influences how people process information about the event and provides a lens through which the audience perceives the intended perspective of journalists or media in an event. This study focuses on framing propositions outlined by D'Angelo (2017) to investigate the frames employed by media outlets in presenting sanctions.

Several studies (Godefroidt et al., 2016; Liu, 2019) have utilized generic, diagnostic, and prognostic news frames for analysing crisis-related news. Generic frames describe the structural aspects and presentation of general features applicable across different topics, times, and cultural contexts (D'Angelo, 2017; Semetko, Valkenburg, 2000). This frame includes subframes such as conflict, human interest, economic impact, morality, responsibility, and nationalization (Godefroidt et al., 2016; D'Angelo, 2017). To analyse news headlines using the generic frame, this study used the highlighted issues for categorisation. Diagnostic frames aid in understanding, identifying, and attributing problems (Benford, Snow, 2000), while prognostic frames are employed when news suggests alternative solutions and actions (Benford, Snow, 2000; D'Angelo, 2017; Liu, 2019). For this study, news headlines from Zimbabwe, Niger, and Mali media were analysed using the generic, diagnostic, and prognostic frames.

Agenda-setting theory primarily examines the relationship between prominent media coverage of an issue affecting society and the intensity of public attention directed toward the issue (Knudsen, 2014). In terms of media effects, agenda-setting proposes the salience of an issue in the media (Chen et al., 2019). The theory suggests that the media shape opinion by determining what issue is given the salient attention (Zahariadis, 2016; Chen et al., 2019). Various studies have employed diverse approaches to determine the salience of issues in the media. One of such approach is issue-pairing method. Respondents were asked to rate the most important of two issues based on their prominence in the media (McComb, 2004). This approach is often refer to the first level of agenda-setting when analysing news content. Media content can also be analysed based on the frequency of positive and negative tones attributed and the degree of positivity and/or negativity of attitudes toward a news story. This is regarded as the second level of agenda-setting in relation to media effects (Knudsen, 2014; Zahariadis, 2016).

³ Felix B., & Miridzhanian A. (2023, August 8). What sanction have been imposed on Niger since the Coup? *Reuters*. Retrieved December 10, 2023, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/what-sanctions-have-been-imposed-niger-since-coup-2023-08-08/>



The model of analysis of framing and agenda setting and headlines in print media

Source: created by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

Building on the second level of agenda-setting media effect, this study investigated the salience of positive and negative tones found in the presentation of sanction-related headlines in the selected media. Figure presents the model of analysis of framing and agenda setting and headlines in print media.

Methodology

The study focused on sanction-related news headlines in print media from Zimbabwe, Mali, and Niger. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the initial stage, purposive sampling technique was utilized to choose print newspapers with online presence from <https://www.w3newspapers.com/>. This website provides a comprehensive list of print media with online presence worldwide. Newspapers publishing daily were purposively selected from each country, with five newspapers chosen from each.

In the second stage, the researcher utilized the search functionality on the newspapers' websites to identify headlines using the keywords “sanction” and “sanctions”. A total of 204 headlines were randomly selected from October 2021 to July 2023, distributed as follows: Zimbabwe ($n = 104$), Mali ($n = 70$), and Niger ($n = 30$). Quantitative content analysis was employed to analyse the data.

Result

Framing sanction in headlines of Zimbabwe media. The analysis focused on examining generic, diagnostic, and prognostic frames for each headline. For Zimbabwe, the data indicates that 66.34% of headlines were framed using the generic frame, while only 16.35% used prognostic, proposing possible solutions to the sanctions ($n = 17$, see Table 1). Using predefined generic subframes proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and Van Cauwenberge et al. (2009), majority of the headlines (28.98%) framed sanctions around Responsibility. This suggests that some level of the government or individual in the country or outside is seen as responsible for the sanctions. For example, a headline in the *Daily News* of April 2022 reads: “Onus on West to remove sanctions: Mthuli”, indicating the responsibility of the West to lift the imposed sanctions.

The Conflict frame follows the Responsibility frame, accounting for 24.63% of the headlines (Table 2). This frame implies that sanctions arise from conflict between some level of government or entity. In this context, headlines suggest

that the sanctions resulted from conflict between the Zimbabwean government and regional or international governing bodies. For instance, a headline in the *New Zimbabwe* of April 25, 2023, reads: “U.S told to drop ‘antiquated’ sanctions against Mnangagwa to access lithium,” indicating that the sanctions are related to a crisis between some entity in the country and the West.

Table 1

Major frames in headlines of Zimbabwe media

Major frames	Headlines	%
Generic	69	66.34
Diagnostic	18	17.31
Prognostic	17	16.35
Total	104	100

Source: compiled by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

Diagnostic framing revealed that majority of headlines depicted sanctions as having a global or regional dimension (33.35%). In essence, the headlines portrayed a dispute between Western powers or other regional entities and Zimbabwe as the cause of the sanctions. Subsequently, the framing indicated instances of human rights violations, either within the country leading to the sanctions or resulting from sanctions imposed by Western countries or other regional powers like the EU.

Table 2

Sub-frames in Zimbabwean news headlines

Generic	Headlines	Diagnostic	Headlines	Prognostic	Headlines
Conflict frame	17 (24.63%)	Political cause	3 (16.66%)	Assistance	2 (11.76%)
Human interest	11 (16.0%)	Socio-economic cause	4 (22.22%)	Rejection	4 (23.52)
Economic consequence	11 (16.0%)	Human right violation	5 (27.77%)	Change in govt	1 (5.88%)
Morality frame	2 (2.89%)	Global/regional dimension	6 (33.33%)	Financial intervention	3 (17.64%)
Responsibility frame	20 (28.98%)			Internal reform	3 (17.64%)
Nationalisation	8 (11.5%)			External assistance	4 (23.52%)
Total	69 (100%)		18 (100%)		17 (100%)

Source: compiled by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

As regards the prognostic frame, analysis showed that the rejection (23.52%) of further strict sanction actions is a significant suggestion in headlines using this frame. This rejection is assumed to alleviate the suffering of the people and prevent further deterioration of the country's economy. While all countries rely on each other for trade to boost economies, those facing sanctions are likely to experience economic deterioration due to the inability to trade with the countries or blocs imposing the sanctions.

Similarly, external assistance is proposed as a possible solution. It is suggested that external cooperation, negotiations, and dialogue on political, socio-economic, religious, and/or human rights improvement issues with countries imposing the sanctions are potential solutions to address sanctions.

Framing sanctions in headlines of Malian media. To analyse the predominant frame in the selected headlines from Malian media, a content analysis of the generic, diagnostic, and prognostic frames was conducted. The results showed that majority of the headlines (72.86%) were framed using the generic news frame (Table 3). Diagnostic framing accounted for 14.29% ($n = 10$) of the headlines, indicating that only ten headlines were framed to show the cause of the sanctions. Additionally, 12.86% ($n = 9$) of the headlines were framed to suggest possible solutions to the sanctions.

Table 3

Major frames in Malian media

Major frames	Headlines	%
Generic	51	72.86
Diagnostic	10	14.29
Prognostic	9	12.86
Total	70	100

Source: compiled by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

The headlines underwent further content analysis to identify the dominant subframes. In the case of the generic frame, the results presented in Table 4 indicated that majority of headlines framed sanctions as related to conflicts within the country or between the country and other nations in the region or globally. For instance, *Info-Matin* published in February 2023: “Suspension of Air flights: Mali will now respond blow for blow”. This headlines, implies that Mali is ready to respond sanctions imposers equally. Fifteen headlines, accounting for 29.41% indicated that the sanctions were associated with conflicts. Similarly, 29.41% ($n = 15$) suggested that certain individuals in the country or some countries in the region and globally were responsible for the imposed sanctions.

Table 4

Sub-frames in Malian news headlines

Generic	Headlines	Diagnostic	Headlines	Prognostic	Headlines
Conflict frame	15 (29.41%)	Political cause	2 (20.00%)	Assistance	1 (11.11%)
Human interest	8 (15.69%)	Socio-economic cause	2 (20.00%)	Rejection	4 (44.44%)
Economic consequence	10 (19.61%)	Human right violation	2 (20.00%)	Change in govt	0
Morality frame	1 (1.96%)	Global/regional dimension	4 (40.00%)	Financial intervention	1 (11.11%)
Responsibility frame	15 (29.41%)			Internal reform	1 (11.11%)
Nationalisation	2 (3.92%)			External assistance	2 (22.22%)
Total	51 (100)		10 (100)		9 (100)

Source: compiled by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

Results for the diagnostic frame demonstrated that majority of headlines framed sanctions to show global or regional dimensions. In other words, the headlines indicated that sanctions resulted from disputes between Western powers or regional powers and the country. Political causes, socio-economic issues, and hu-

man rights violations were also portrayed in the headlines as possible reasons for the sanctions the country faced.

The prognostic frame revealed that rejection (44.44%) was predominantly suggested by the headlines framed using the prognostic approach. In this context, rejection implies that the headlines are framed voice rejection of further sanctions and call for the lifting of existing ones. An example of such headline include: “We urge the African Union to lift the sanctions it imposed on our country on January, 2022” (Maliweb.net, 2022). External assistance, involving cooperation, negotiations, and dialogue on political, socio-economic, religious, and/or human rights improvement issues with other countries, especially those that imposed the sanctions, is considered a possible solution to the sanctions and their accompanying effects.

Framing sanction in headlines of Niger Republic media. As observed with other countries, results indicated that majority of headlines (66.67%) were framed using the generic news framing approach (Table 5). Diagnostic framing accounted for 20.00% ($n = 6$), revealing that only six headlines were framed to suggest the cause of the sanctions, while 13.33% ($n = 4$) were framed to suggest possible solutions to the sanctions.

Table 5

Major frames in Niger Republic media

Major frames	Headlines	%
Generic	20	66.67
Diagnostic	6	20.00
Prognostic	4	13.33
Total	30	100

Source: compiled by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

To gain a deeper understanding of the frames' implications regarding sanctions, predefined subframes were employed to analyse the news headlines. For the generic frame, analysis revealed that Responsibility frame (35.00%) appears dominant. This suggests that majority of the headlines attribute sanctions to certain individuals or groups in the country and/or some countries in the region or globally for the sanctions. Similarly, 25.00% of the headlines attribute the sanctions to conflicts within the country or with other countries in the region and globally (Table 6).

Table 6

Sub-frames in Niger Republic news headlines

Generic	Headlines	Diagnostic	Headlines	Prognostic	Headlines
Conflict frame	5 (25.00%)	Political cause	1 (16.66%)	Assistance	1 (25.00%)
Human interest	3 (15.00%)	Socio-economic cause	2 (33.33%)	Rejection	2 (50.00%)
Economic consequence	3 (15.00%)	Human right violation	1 (16.66%)	Change in govt	0
Morality frame	1 (5.00%)	Global/regional dimension	2 (33.33%)	Financial intervention	0
Responsibility frame	7 (35.00%)			Internal reform	0
Nationalisation	1 (5.00)			External assistance	1 (25.00%)
Total	20 (100)		6 (100)		4 (100)

Source: compiled by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

The diagnostic frames showed that majority of headlines presented sanctions as having global or regional dimension and socio-economic causes. In other words, the frames suggest that the sanctions faced by Niger Republic are caused by disputes between the country and some other countries in the region or globally. Similarly, equal number of headlines (33.33%) in the diagnostic frame suggest that the sanctions are relatively caused by socio-economic issues such as inflation, rising unemployment, poverty, a lack of prosperity, limited educational opportunities, social insecurity, and/or a growing gap between young and old citizens.

Regarding prognostic framing, majority of the headlines suggest rejection of further sanctions and lifting existing sanctions as solution to the sanctions and their accompanying effects. One of the headlines reads: “National Council of Traditional Chiefs of Niger (CNCTN) deplores and rejects outright, the sanctions imposed by the ECOWAS and UEMOA bodies on Niger” (*Le Sahel*, Aug 4, 2023).

Agenda setting analysis. The study also considered the agenda-setting tone of the headlines. As described in Knudsen (2014), the positivity, neutrality, and negativity of the headlines based on agenda-setting principles were examined. The results presented in Table 7 indicate that a positive tone dominates the sanction-related headlines in the Zimbabwean media. For instance, *The Herald* reported, “Zim finds formula to burst sanctions” (June, 2023). Positive tone, as identified in the headlines, accounted for 57.69% ($n = 60$), while the negative tone in the headlines in Zimbabwean media stood at 30.77% ($n = 32$).

Conversely, a negative tone appears dominant in the sanction-related headlines from Mali and Niger Republic. While a negative tone accounted for almost half of the headlines in Mali (48.57%), half (50.00%) of the sanction-related headlines in the Niger Republic media had a negative tone. By implication, these headlines are likely to instil fear in the minds of media consumers. One of the headlines in Niger media reads: “Instability and sanctions risk aggravating the humanitarian crisis, especially for the most vulnerable” (*Actu Niger*, Aug 5, 2023). This implies negativity and creates fear for the people even if the effect of the sanctions could be mild.

Table 7

Agenda setting tone of headlines in the media of the selected countries

Agenda setting tone	Zimbabwe		Mali		Niger Republic	
Positive	60	57.69%	28	40.00%	8	26.67%
Neutral	12	11.54%	8	11.43%	12	40.00%
Negative	32	30.77%	34	48.57%	15	50.00%
Total	104	100	70	100	30	100

Source: compiled by Mustapha A. Adeitan.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study is to identify the dominant framing approach and types of sub-frames utilized in presenting headlines related to sanctions in Zimbabwe, Mali, and Niger Republic. Framing plays a crucial role in influencing media consumers' decisions and shaping their interpretation of news sto-

ries (eShan et al., 2020; Lu, 2019). The prevalence of the generic framing approach in the headlines of the three countries can be attributed to its comprehensive nature, encompassing various aspects related to events (Liu, 2019).

In this study, headlines were analysed based on six aspects related to sanctions, considered as sub-frames. The findings consistently indicate that the responsibility and conflict frames are predominant in all three countries. The responsibility frame portrays the headlines in a manner suggesting that individuals, groups, governments, or blocs bear responsibility for the imposed sanctions. Simultaneously, the conflict frame emphasizes the close connection between the sanctions and disputes among certain groups or countries. It is not surprising that these two frames are dominant, given that the three countries under examination are currently facing or have faced sanctions. For instance, in Mali and Niger Republic, the military junta's coup d'état has led to sanctions imposed by ECOWAS, UEMOA and some Western countries. In Zimbabwe, the allegation of human right abuse, abuses of land ownership and disrespect for rule of law (Ogbonna, 2017) have contributed to the sanctions imposed by Western nations.

The study also aims to identify the dominant agenda-setting tone used in media headlines related to sanctions. The findings reveal that in Zimbabwe, the tone is predominantly positive, indicating that majority of headlines are presented with a positive tone. This aligns with the assertion by Mazorodze (2021) that ZANU PF⁴ utilizes state media to set a favourable agenda and frame sanctions in a way that portrays the party positively. Conversely, in both Mali and Niger Republic, the dominant agenda-setting tone is negative.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study focuses on identifying the prevalent framing approach and sub-frames in headlines discussing sanctions in Zimbabwe, Mali, and Niger Republic. The generic framing approach is widely used in the three countries. Further analysis reveals that the responsibility and conflict frames consistently dominate in all three nations. Additionally, the study explores the dominant agenda-setting tone in media headlines related to sanctions, revealing a predominantly positive tone in Zimbabwe. Conversely, both Mali and Niger Republic exhibit a dominant negative agenda-setting tone.

This study is limited in its research focus, therefore it is recommended that further research look into the impact of ownership on media framing of sanctions as it has been proven that media ownership influences media output. Also, it is recommended that further studies investigate extended news contents as this study only focused on headlines. Extended content analysis will further give holistic understanding of framing strategies employed by media outlets. These recommendations will further enhance the fostering of a media environment, diversity of perspectives, and informed public discourse on issues related to sanctions.

⁴ Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front, the ruling party of Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. Retrieved from <https://www.zanupf.org.zw/>

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