



Lagos Mainland Residents' Perception of Media Reportage on Electricity Tarief Hike in Lagos State, Nigeria

Ogunyemi Oluwafisayo Fatimat¹, Fadeyi Oluwadamilola Dorcas², Emeke Precious Nwaoboli^{3*}

Caleb University, Nigeria¹

Glorious Vision University, Nigeria²

Benson Idahosa University, Nigeria³

Corresponding Email: emekenwaoboli@gmail.com*

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Abstract

The researchers examined Lagos mainland residents' perception of media reportage on electricity tariff hike. The objectives of the study were to examine the extent of awareness of Lagos mainland residents of media reportage on electricity tariff hikes; determine the media channel through which the Lagos mainland residents access reports on electricity tariff hikes; investigate the perceived credibility of media reports on electricity tariff hikes among Lagos mainland residents and to explore the relationship between media reportage and public perception of electricity tariff hikes among Lagos mainland residents. The researchers adopted the survey research design, while the questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Findings revealed that the majority of the respondents had a high 164 (43.7%) level of awareness of media reports on electricity tariff and that the majority 169 (45.1%) access the media reportage of the increase through social media and the internet 98 (26.1%). Consequently, the media's reportage has yielded positive outcomes, including heightened awareness and public discourse on the economic and social implications of the tariff increase, thereby amplifying their voices and advocating for their interests. Ultimately, the researchers recommended that the media should continue to critically report on the electricity tariff hikes, highlighting the impact on the public. It was also recommended that policymakers in Lagos State review the electricity tariff hikes to ensure they are fair and reasonable and take into account the economic and social implications for the public.

Keywords: Electricity Tariff Hike, Lagos Mainland Residents, Media Credibility, Media Reportage, Public Perception

Introduction

Electricity is a fundamental necessity for societal development, essential for advancing economic growth and connecting communities globally. It plays a very significant role in the

socio-economic and technological development of every nation. For many Lagos State residents (Lagosians), especially the mainland residents, electricity is more than utility but a lifeline, enabling them to power their homes, businesses, and communities (Oloruntobi, 2020). However, the recent hike in electricity tariff in Lagos State has sparked concerns among Lagos mainland residents, particularly for the Band A customers who are already struggling with unreliable power supply, invariably leading to reduced economic growth, increased poverty, and decreased competitiveness (World Bank, 2019). Media reportage has highlighted the tariff's impact on vulnerable populations, low-income households who spend a larger proportion of their income on electricity (International Energy Agency, 2018).

According to Murshed & Ozturk (2023), access to electricity in Africa is an elusive commodity, beset by a complex array of factors that have culminated in a widespread scarcity, affecting millions of people (Hassen et al., 2022). A significant disparity exists between the region's electricity generation capacity and its rapid population growth (Mehmood et al., 2022), particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the population has been increasing at an alarming rate (Alberini & Umapathi, 2024). Consequently, the total number of individuals lacking access to electricity has persistently escalated over time, with a staggering 600 million Africans devoid of power supply in 2018 (International Energy Agency, 2018).

Similarly, Nigeria grapples with a severe power supply crisis characterized by a profound mismatch between electricity demand and supply, wherein the available supply is not only inadequate but also erratic and unpredictable in nature (Hendam et al., 2022). This acute electricity deficiency poses a significant impediment to the country's development progress despite its abundance of natural resources (Sambo, Garba, Zarma & Gaji 2024). The power sector in Nigeria has gone through various challenges, which include under-investment and corruption in the sector, regular vandalization of gas lines, vulnerable and overloaded existing transmission systems, lack of infrastructural facilities, which has resulted in insufficient generation of power and inadequate supply of electricity to consumers (Talabi & Adaja, 2024).

The recent hike in electricity tariffs has further worsened the situation, having a devastating impact on manufacturers, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and the overall cost of doing business in Nigeria. In April 2024, the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) raised the electricity tariff for some groups of customers from #68/kWh to #225/kWh, a 300% hike, although it was later reduced to #260.8/kWh in May 2024 which has not in any way helped but reduced competitiveness amongst businesses surprisingly in both domestic and international market (Tolu, Olawin & Daniel, 2024). More harm that has been caused by the hike is the fact that the cost of production is on the high side as businesses have been unable to invest in new technology in order to expand their operation. However, the media has played a crucial role in amplifying concerns and fostering public discourse on this critical issue. Arijeniwa and Nwaboli (2023) stated that the role of the media in shaping public opinion on social issues cannot be overemphasized. The media sets an agenda by bringing issues to the forefront, inducing public engagement, creating awareness, and inspiring development efforts (Visakh & Manickavasagam Parvathy, 2022). As an agenda-setter, the media has effectively brought attention to the challenges faced by society, providing a platform for public discussion and debate and as well as influencing the way people perceive and understand the government's

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decision (Asemah & Nwaboli, 2021). The media continues to amplify the concerns of the citizens, promoting transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of decision-makers (Akpati, Ogunyemi & Adegboye, 2024), shaping the future of Nigeria's energy sector. Therefore, this paper is an examination of how Lagos mainland residents perceive media reportage on the hike in electricity tariff. In Lagos State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In defiance of the crucial role of the media in shaping public opinion, providing a platform for diverse perspectives, voices and facilitating public debate and discourse by bringing attention to important issues, such as the recent hike in electricity tariffs, there is a significant gap in understanding how Lagos mainland residents perceive the media's reportage on this issue. While previous studies like Talabi & Adaja (2024): "Newspaper coverage of electricity tariff increase in Nigeria: A Content Analysis of the Punch and the Nation Newspapers" examined the newspaper reports on tariff increase, Murshed & Ozturk (2023) carried out research on "Rethinking energy poverty reduction through improving electricity accessibility: A regional analysis on select African nations" also to improve the devastating condition of the electricity sector and Eatzaz Ahmed et al. (2020): Welfare analysis of energy price variation in Pakistan analyzed the impact of energy price variations on household' welfare in rural and urban areas of Pakistan, yet none have explored the audience's perception of the media's reportage on this issue especially in Lagos State, Nigeria. Therefore, this study aims to cover this gap by investigating the Lagos mainland residents' perception of the media reportage on the hike in electricity tariffs.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Examine the extent of awareness of Lagos Mainland residents of media reportage on electricity tariff hikes in Lagos State.
2. Determine the media channel through which the Lagos mainland residents accessed reports on electricity tariff hikes in Lagos State.
3. Investigate the perceived credibility of media reports on electricity tariff hikes among Lagos mainland residents.
4. Find out the relationship between media reportage and public perception of electricity tariff hikes among Lagos mainland residents.

Literature Review

Electricity Tariff Hike

An electricity tariff hike refers to an increase in electricity prices charged to consumers by electricity distribution companies or utilities. Nigeria's electricity distribution network serves five distinct customer categories, which are Band A, B, C, D, and E respectively. The Band A categories enjoy power for 20-24 hours, Band B enjoys 16-20 hours, Band C enjoys 12-16 hours, Band D enjoys 8-12 hours, and Band E enjoys 4-8 hours of electricity per day.

However, the impact of the increase is disproportionately higher for Band A and Band B customers compared to other customer categories. The hike in electricity tariffs is perceived to address the lingering challenges bothering Nigeria's electricity sector, ranging from derisory power generation inefficient transmission to unreliable distribution networks. (Sinha et al., 2020)

According to Andersen Digest (2024), the hike in electricity tariff enacted by the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) aims to align customer prices with the actual cost of electricity supply, thereby reducing the strain on the government's finances and creating a more conducive environment for private investment in the sector. In contrast to the perceived intention of an increase in electricity tariff, an energy lawyer and head of the Legal Department at MG Vowgas Group, Sonia Ebiki, told Gas Outlook: "The hike in Nigerian electricity tariffs and increase in gas prices for power generation are likely to significantly impact manufacturers, exacerbating inflation and posing challenges for small and medium enterprise." Similarly, The Nigerian Labour Congress and The Trade Union Congress argued that the tariff hike would drive manufacturers out of business, worsen inflation, and stifle small and medium enterprises (Ajala, 2024).

Lagos State Residents Utility Bill Payment and Experiences

Since Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) announced an increase in electricity tariff, Lagos State residents (Lagosians) have struggled to cope with the added financial strain, which has severely impacted their daily lives and household budget. Research such as Iniobong, Taofeek & Seyi (2024) has consistently shown that energy price increases have far-reaching consequences for households, affecting not only economic stability but also social, emotional, and material well-being, as evidenced in several other countries. The once tolerable bills have now surged to levels that many Lagosians find unbearable, and as the economy continues to struggle, the rising cost of energy is adding more fuel to an already heated situation (Asabor, 2024).

For the Band A category energy users in Lagos, what was seen as a reasonable exchange, paying more for stable power, has now become a burden. The increase rate of electricity parachuted from #68 per kilowatt-hour to #225 (\$0.15) per kilowatt-hour, which represents a significant 300% hike, leaving consumers in disbelief. Despite the increase, consumers still grumble and complain of frequent outages and unreliable service (Asabor, 2024). The increase has sparked protests in Lagos, with residents in Akinola, Aboru, and Oworonsoki communities taking to the streets on September 25, 2024. The upgraded power supply, introduced without notice, has forced residents to weigh the benefits of uninterrupted electricity against the fiscal stress of higher bills. (Olayide, 2024). Following reports on electricity tariff hikes, residents have seen their electricity bill skyrocket, with costs jumping from #6,000-#20,000 to #30,000-#100,000, or even more depending on house size and appliance usage. Some residents, like Chinedu Bosah, have experienced shocking rate increases, with #10,000 worth of electricity units depleting in just two days.

Media Intervention on Electricity Tariff Hike in Lagos State

The media plays an enormously influential role in public responses to the electricity tariff hike on the mainland of Lagos. The media have an unparalleled reach as a communication mechanism (Gunther, 1998, cited in Adedeji, 2020). Broadcast media, including television and Radio, has aired in-depth documentaries exploring the effects of electricity tariffs on households, businesses, and the broader economy (Tangwe & Manyi-Loh, 2020). They provide regular news segments and bulletins with updates, analysis, and expert insights on the tariff hike's impact, conducting interviews with affected consumers, business owners, and community leaders to share personal stories and experiences. The media's significant influence on societal dynamics cannot be overstated. By controlling the narrative on electricity tariff hike, the media outlets shape public opinion, influence information processing, and define how individuals perceive their surroundings and interact with others (Asemah & Nwaboli, 2022). They possess ample power to bring issues to limelight, determining what aspect of the electricity tariff hike should concern the public and prompt action. The media frames issues that bother the affairs of the public, shaping how they think, especially about the electricity tariff hike, its implications, and potential solutions. The way the media frames issues determines how they will be perceived by the public. For example, a news report about a political leader's policies may be framed as a success story or a failure, leading the public to perceive the leader in different ways (Egwa, Nwafor & Asemah, 2023). This profound function of the media has proffered and projected notable suggested solutions by experts, one of which is exploring alternative energy sources, such as solar power, to reduce dependence on the grid. On the part of the government, it was suggested that the government reconsider the tariff hike or provide subsidies to alleviate the financial burden on residents and businesses. (Visakh & Manickavasagam Parvathy, 2022)

Review of Empirical Studies

Fouzia and Ambreen (2022) investigated the accessibility and affordability of electricity among households in Karachi, India. This study surveyed Karachi City through a questionnaire. A comprehensive survey of 467 randomly selected households across 18 towns was conducted to gather in-depth information. Descriptive analysis revealed that despite subsidized tariff rates for low-consumption households, additional charges such as government charges, TVL fees, fuel adjustment charges, etc., constitute a significant proportion of total electricity bills. The study also identifies household cognitive-behavioral aspects of energy use by incorporating these sections of cognitive aspect and awareness of energy consumption patterns in the survey questionnaires. Key findings yield policy recommendations aimed at implementing reforms that reconcile economic and social objectives. The two studies are on the same subject matter, but the paper differs from the reviewed work in terms of evaluating Lagos's mainland perception of media reports on electricity tariff hikes as well as the locations where the two studies were carried out. (V. & G.V., 2021)v

Talabi & Adaja (2024) carried out a study to investigate Newspaper coverage of electricity tariff increases in the power sector, with a focus on how media representation framed the issue as a significant concern. The study used agenda-setting theory to support and analyze

the work, while content analysis was the research design used to analyze *The Punch and The Nation Newspaper* for the period of six (6) months. The cosmos of the study was 366, out of which 192 was the sample size, while the coding sheet and coding guide were the instruments of data collection. The study revealed satisfactory coverage of tariff increases in the power sector by the select newspaper, characterized by high prominence and frequency (Labuschagne, 2020). Recommendations include enhancing the media's interpretative function, spreading sources beyond official briefings, conferences, and press releases, and incorporating public opinions to ensure representative coverage. Both studies focus on electricity tariff hikes, but they differ in approach. The reviewed study examined newspaper coverage frequency, while this paper analyzed audience perception.

Nkosi, Krishna & Govender (2022) examined the impact of price increases on electricity demand among City Power's customers in Johannesburg. Data was collected from a random sampling of 107 respondents stratified as residential, commercial, and industrial customers using an online survey called QuestionPro. The researcher found that energy conservation is crucial to prevent national grid collapse; customers are interested in renewable energy sources to counter price increases. Other findings show that City Power should invest in self-generation and renewable energy, pending policy changes. The primary distinction between the reviewed work and this paper lies in their research foci and the location where the studies were conducted. The former investigates audience perceptions regarding media coverage of electricity tariff increases conducted in Lagos mainland, whereas the latter assesses the impact of price increases on electricity demand in Johannesburg.

Acheampong, Menyeh, and Agbevivi (2021) assessed and provided an in-depth analysis of Ghana's electricity market, focusing on regulatory frameworks, consumption patterns, and tariff pricing. The shift from hydroelectric to thermal power generation has implications for the energy trilemma. The researchers found out that thermal generation will remain predominant in 2021 – 20230. Energy security concerns persist due to distribution infrastructure gaps, and an inefficient tariff structure creates unintended consequences. Comparative analysis reveals Ghana's electricity tariffs are relatively expensive. The reviewed work focuses on an in-depth analysis of Ghana's electricity market, which is in contrast to the focus of the paper, which is to evaluate Lagos mainland residents' perception of media reports on electricity tariff hikes.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Framing theory and the audience perception theory. These two theories are highly relevant to how the media presents information about electricity tariff hikes influencing the perception of the Lagos mainland residents. The framing theory was first propounded by Gregory Bateson in 1972 (Arowolo, 2017), and as a mass communication theory, it is a concept that examines how media frames and presents information to influence audience perception and interpretation. According to Tarish, Abdalhakeem, and Al Hasani (2022), Framing theory is frequently used to understand the way individuals and agencies use word choice, connotation, and other factors to influence how others react to the information provided. The audience perception theory, on the other hand, according to Eromosele, Ezeji & Ogunyemi (2023), was propounded by Stuart Hall in 1973-80, which assumes that long-term

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exposure of audience to repeated media messages makes the audience immune to such messages. The incorporation of these theories into this study demonstrates how the strategic presentation of information in media reports on electricity tariff hikes can significantly influence the opinion, interpretation, and understanding of the Lagos mainland residents.

Research Method

The researchers gathered data using a survey research method and questionnaire as an instrument of data collection from a representative sample of Lagos mainland residents. A survey as a research design is a powerful tool for tapping into public opinion, uncovering perceptions, and understanding emotions among large groups. Okoro (2001) and Tejumaiye (2003) argue that the survey method is the best approach to getting information on the perceptions, feelings, opinions, attitudes, and views of respondents. The survey enabled the researcher to find the extent to which media reportage influences Lagos mainland residents' perception of electricity tariff hikes. The population of the study was 15,787,300, which represents the population of Lagos mainland residents in Lagos State. This is according to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (2022).

The sample size for the study was 384, and it was determined using the Cochran formula, with a margin error of 0.5 and a confidence level of 0.95. The researcher used multistage sampling techniques. In the first stage, the Lagos mainland residents were purposively selected because it is one of the largest metropolises to study, whereby proper responses that bother on the issue of electricity tariff hikes can be elicited from potential respondents. In the second stage, the researcher purposively selected Agboyi/Ketu LCDA and divided it into strata based on the category of income. The researcher then selected 5 wards, which include: Ketu, Mile 12, Alapere 1, Alapere 2 and Ajegunle-Odo Ogun respectively from the existing 7 wards in the select LCDA. In the third stage the researcher selected 3 communities from each of the wards. In the fourth stage, the researcher used simple random sampling to select 25 households in each of the 3 communities selected from the 5 wards which gave rise to 375, the sample size of the study. All copies of questionnaire distributed were monitored and duly reviewed. Descriptive analysis statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to analyse the collected data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Respondents' Level of Awareness of Electricity tariff hikes on the Media

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	121	32.2
High	164	43.7
Undecided	21	5.6
Low	41	10.9
Very Low	28	7.6
Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The table above shows respondents' extent of awareness of media reports on electricity tariff hikes. The table undoubtedly shows that the majority of the respondents had a high 164 (43.7%) level of awareness of media reports on electricity tariff hikes, while only a few had a very low 28 (7.6%) level of awareness.

Table 2: Respondents' Channels of Accessing Media Report on Electricity Tariff Hikes

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Television	56	14.9
Radio	28	7.5
Social Media	169	45.1
Internet	98	26.1
Video Content	24	6.4
Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The table above shows the channels through which respondents access media reports on electricity tariff hikes. The analysis depicts that the majority, 169 (45.1%), access the media reportage of the increase through social media compared to very few, 28 (7.5%) that access the report through Radio. This implies that respondents access the reportage of electricity tariff hikes through television because it is an inescapable part of modern culture that helps improve the world, triggers the imagination, raises curiosity, encourages education, and gathers millions around a common interest. This implies that most people access the campaign through television channels compared to other media channels, as stated in the study.

Table 3: Media Reportage of Electricity tariff hikes is Credible

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	141	37.6
Agree	133	35.5
Undecided	43	11.4
Disagree	37	9.9
Strongly Disagree	21	5.6
Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 above shows the perception of Lagos mainland residents towards the media report of electricity tariff hikes. It is clear from the table that the majority, 150 (39.0%) of the respondents, perceived the media reportage as credible, while only 21 (5.5%) perceived the reportage as less credible. The conclusion of this analysis is that the hike in electricity tariff media reportage is considered credible by the Lagos mainland residents.

Table 4: The Media Reports on Electricity Tariff Hikes Reflect the Views of Lagos Mainland Residents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	115	30.6
Agree	162	43.2
Undecided	42	11.2

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Disagree	28	7.5
Strongly disagree	28	7.5
Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 depicts that respondents 162 (43.2%) with media reportage of the electricity tariff hikes and that the reports reflect the views of the Lagos mainland residents. Leaving only a few to disagree with this assertion. This implies that respondents from the select local government area of Lagos State agree that the media reportage of the electricity tariff hikes is tailored to fulfill the ideals of societal development in the power sector in Lagos mainland and in the State as a whole.

Result and Discussion

The analysis from Table 1 indicated that 164 (43.8%) had a high level of awareness of hikes in electricity tariffs. 42 (11.2%) respondents had a low extent of awareness, 129 (32.3%) respondents had a very high level of awareness, 21 (5.7%) respondents were undecided, and 28 (7.0%) had a very low extent of awareness. This implies that a reasonable number of Lagos mainland respondents perceive their extent of awareness of the media reportage on hikes in electricity tariff as high. Therefore, respondents are highly aware of the report on electricity tariff hikes. The findings project the media as a powerful tool for information dissemination to a large, heterogeneous, and dispersed audience (Asemah, 2011, cited in Eromosele, Ezeji & Ogunyemi, 2023). Table 2 shows the channels through which respondents access media reports on electricity tariff hikes. The analysis depicts that the majority, 169 (45.1%), access the media reportage of the increase through the social media and the internet 98 (26.1%). This implies that respondents access the reportage of electricity tariff hikes through internet and social media platforms because it is an unavoidable part of modern culture that helps improve the world and gathers millions around a common interest. This is in harmony with (Ezema & Ezema, 2023) findings, which stated that social media platforms are in vogue in our world today for different organizations, ministries, financial institutions, and associations for interactions. The social media platform also ranked the highest in mobilizing people across the world.

The further findings in Table 3 show the perception of Lagos mainland residents towards the media reportage of electricity tariff hikes. It is clear from the table that the majority, 141 (37.6%) of the respondents, perceived the media reportage as credible, while only 21 (5.6%) perceived the reportage as less credible. This also is in agreement with Amah, Oladele & Asemah (2022) observation that the audience members interpret and judge a message and take a position. Therefore, the conclusion of this analysis is that Lagos mainland residents have judged the media reportage on electricity tariff hikes and have taken a position. Table 4 depicts that respondents 162 (43.2%) with media reportage of the electricity tariff hikes and that the reports reflect the views of the Lagos mainland residents, which in turn proffered and projected notable suggestions by experts, one of which is exploring alternative energy sources, such as solar power, to reduce dependence on the grid. On the part of the government, it was suggested that the government may need to reconsider the tariff hike or provide subsidies to alleviate the

financial burden on residents and businesses. Leaving only a few to disagree with this assertion. This implies that respondents from the select local government area of Lagos State agree that the media reportage of the electricity tariff hikes is tailored to fulfill the ideals of societal development in the power sector in Lagos mainland and in the State as a whole.

Further findings indicated that respondents also overwhelmingly agree with the media's report on electricity tariff hikes, which accurately reflects the views and concerns of the general public. Consequently, the media's reportage has yielded positive outcomes, including heightened awareness and public discourse on the economic and social implications of the tariff increase. Furthermore, the media's reporting has also highlighted the hardship faced by the public, particularly the most vulnerable populations, thereby amplifying their voices and advocating for their interests. Ultimately, the study suggests that the Media has played a crucial role in holding stakeholders accountable and promoting transparency in the decision-making process surrounding electricity tariff hikes.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The research conducted on Lagos mainland residents' perception of media reportage on hike in electricity tariff concludes that the media has effectively fulfilled one of its primary responsibilities. By shedding light on the concern of Lagos mainland residents on hike in electricity tariff and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, the media has demonstrated its capacity to hold those in power accountable and bring about positive change in the power sector such that there is availability of electricity for the residents of Lagos mainland. Based on the findings and conclusion, it is hereby recommended that;

1. The media should continue to critically report on the electricity tariff hikes, highlighting the impact on the public.
2. The media should continue to amplify the voices of the public, particularly the most vulnerable populations, to ensure their concerns about societal issues like the hike in electricity tariff are heard by policymakers.
3. The media should create more awareness and education on the electricity tariff hikes and their implications to ensure that consumers are informed and empowered.
4. Policymakers should review and revise the electricity tariff hikes to ensure they are fair and reasonable and take into account the economic and social implications for the public.
5. The policymakers should provide increased transparency in the decision-making process surrounding electricity tariff hikes to ensure accountability and public trust.

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