

Is News All About Politics?

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Abstract

News covers all sorts of information that is worthy of publication. It includes reportage of all aspects of society following a strict observance of the media's social responsibility function. In recent times, news publications have taken up specialized forms in respect to a more diversified audience. However, the so-called general interest newspapers are not so general in its interest. This study sought to ascertain if their idea of general interest is slanted to favour publication of more news on politics than any other aspect; the reason why this slant is prevalent and its effects on the audience and the society on the long run. The research employed the explanatory mixed method, using content analysis (Systematic random sampling) in two newspapers- *Guardian* and *Daily Sun* and survey research method (purposive random sampling) in Enugu State. Through the former, 644 out of 2862 news messages were published concerning politics (not as high as initially presumed). Respondents of both the interview and the questionnaire confirmed this high reportage. The survey methods affirmed the restive situation in the country was given as one of the major reasons for this trend and to a large extent; this large reports on politics have crippled the awareness to the needs of other aspects of the society but has also, sensitized the Nigerian society to the occurrences in leadership positions. The study, therefore, recommended that government should strive to be active in other areas of society so that they can give the media what to talk about and journalist should work towards a near equality in news coverage of all aspects of the society.

Keywords: news, politics, social responsibility and society

INTRODUCTION

Ndolo (2006) asserts that news have gone beyond mere oddities to mean "a significant report of an event that has deep implications to a particular group of people or a society." This shows that news is the communication of selected information on current events which is presented by print, broadcast, internet or word of mouth to a second/third party or mass audience. News has two priorities: it must be current; it must mean something to people. It is the job of all the news media to tell people what is going on in their community- locally, nationally or globally. In this sense, the news media provide a valuable public service and as well, have motives which may include information, education or knowledge, public interest and so on. According to Ebo (1998:14) for these motives to be achieved by news (which is seen as the basic function of mass media as spelt out by its first duty "to keep people fully, accurately and truthfully informed"), there has to be a complete organization of the various ingredients that makes it worthy to be presented as news in order to achieve its success and set goal. One of these ingredients is its first duty to religiously execute its social responsibility. This posits that mass media should serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas, comments, even criticism, as well as, give a balanced viewpoint of the constituent groups in the society.

According to Brown & Udomisor (2015), the press plays the key role of midwife in the facilitation of communication in the society. This role is pivotal to the sustainability of society as it facilitates economic, cultural, social and political growth through information dissemination, education, entertainment and mobilization. Little wonder the press has been tagged the "fourth estate" in recognition of its stately duty of being a link between government and the governed and for its watchdog function on the society. Hynds as cited in Daramola (2003) avers that: "At the beginning, the newspaper was society's primary instrument of mass communication and till today the log book of human affairs than any other means of communication" (p.120). In taking up this role, the newspapers have a responsibility to, "... project a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society" (Patterson, 2006, as stated in Oladeinde & Ajibola, 2008:375). Such segments include: features, health, politics, science and technology, crime, arts and culture, women affairs et cetera. News entails that every one of these societal aspects be reported.

But in section 22 of the constitution, titled the 'obligation of the mass media', it is expressly stated that "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people (Okoro & Okolie 2004:59)." However, most pressmen have mistaken this concept and have limited most of their reports to politics. As a result, most, if not all, historical accounts of the Nigerian press are premised on its overt political nature. This trend dared scholars like Golding & Elliot (1979) as cited in Oso

(1991) to remark that 'Nigerian journalism was ... created by anti-colonial protest, baptised in the waters of politics, and matured in party politics'. He mentioned also that the origin of the press is enmeshed as an organ of political agitation. However, this legacy has continued to influence the practices and outlook of the Nigerian press.

They were not wrong. A glance at the dailies would show various news headlines and news details all bothering or trying to link up on politics. So, really, is news all about politics? With the reports on politics swallowing up a lot of 'eye-time' (news holes), how much space is given to other topics in society in comparison to political stories? Why is there an imbalance of reports? What are the influences of these overt political scoops on the audience and in the long-run, society? This research will attempt to provide valid answers to these questions.

This study employs two research designs- content analysis and survey. The content analysis is limited to the manifest content of two Nigerian newspapers- *The Guardian* (usually associated with the elites) and *Daily Sun* (usually associated with the common man). The survey, though covering Nigeria, is limited to the South-East region of Nigeria where responses from newspaper readers would be collated. Newspapers are found in almost every geographical area in the South-east region of Nigeria made up of five states (Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi). However, this study is limited to Enugu State due to the nature of the research.

News and society

It is impossible for most people today to imagine a morning without the radio or television news, magazines or newspapers. The day begins for most people with the news- the reporters' voice is the voice they hear every morning and possibly the last one they hear before retiring to bed at night. News has become part of our daily public and private lives. Its powers lie in the public's dependence on it. It has singularly succeeded in making itself indispensable to modern societies. Its power, its reach and its influence are immense. Melvin Mencher puts it beautifully:

The public has come to depend on the reporter. Without him to report the news, much of the world would be ignorant of events in and around them. It may sound common place but think for a moment why people queue up in the morning to buy newspapers (or magazines). They all want to know what is happening or likely to happen in their immediate environment, their countries and other part of the world. They trust the reporter to tell them truthfully. They depend on him. Without him, their world would not be the same- fire, flood, accident.

All societies need the reporter not usually for what he is but for what he does. Information is power. News is information; therefore, news is power. Former Nigerian President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, decided to stop reading Nigerian newspapers and magazines "in order to enjoy the peace of mind that I had longed for all my life." Shagari was overthrown in a military coup only four months into his second four-year term as president. The military detained him for a long stretch. In confinement, he watched the press gloat over his fall from power and blamed him for everything that went wrong in the country. He did not find this funny, hence his decision to put a comfortable distance between himself and Nigerian newspapers and magazines (Agbese, 2007).

Agbese went on to explain that in the beginning, the hunger for news was perhaps simple. The town-crier and the village gossip met the society's simple need for information or official announcements in the village community. Presently, the situation is a far cry from what was applicable in the past. We live in an information age; so, news (good or bad) is the business of the news media. Thousands of newspapers and magazines of all descriptions are published in hundreds of languages daily, weekly or monthly throughout the world in efforts to satisfy public hunger for news, education and entertainment. The world is saturated with news like never before in its history. It is an integral part of the morning rituals in modern society.

Aspects of news

Every news story is built on reality and reporters today reduce the complex world to a limited number of categories to simplify surveillance of the facts that go into news stories. According to Charles Fenton (1954), "one important set of categories is the somewhat natural division of geographic territories." This by implication means that facts for news stories come from events, activities or situations that are local, regional, national or international.

Within each territory, there are additional well-understood classifications based on specialized topics. Division of labour in news organizations came as a result of different subject matters and degrees of interest emanating from the various segments of population in these different categories. This entails that news stories are usually divided based on different grounds. Fenton made his news division based on geographical territories- local, regional, national and international news stories. Ernest Hemingway (1976: 212-216) states his distinction judging from the event and how it is reported. He listed the concept of hard news: "emphasizes fresh happenings as they occur;" soft news: focuses on situations, people or events that have "human interest." Okunna (1999) also divided news (medium) along general-interest and special-interest lines.

Shoemaker expanded Hemingway's division and placed a lid on the cover when she divided the aspects of news into two broad divisions: Hard news and Soft news. She subdivided hard news into: Politics, economics, crime, war and disasters, certain aspects of law, science and technology while she explained soft news as "sometimes referred to in a derogatory fashion as infotainment" and Arts and entertainment, sports, lifestyles, sporting matches, art exhibits, and so on" (Shoemaker, 1996).

All the newspapers under study happen to be general-interest papers. General-interest according to Okunna (1999) refers to a wide variety of reading materials that are intended to appeal to virtually every kind of reader. These include entertainment, opinion, news (various kinds), interpretation etc. It appeals to the general audience. There is something for a majority of the public (not necessarily everyone). Following this backdrop, it is an anomaly to see the so-called general interest papers projecting predominantly one aspect of news (politics). In this study, the researcher would be working based on the conceptualization of this section while focusing on the politics sub-division. This would be done in an attempt to understand the essence of political news in news reporting as to why it is dominating news reports in Nigeria.

Political news

Hodari P. T. Brown, an aspiring presidential candidate for the American 2024 elections says, "Many people wonder what the true nature of politics is but most don't really understand that politics is everywhere from the class setting to the local grocery store. Therefore with politics impacting every component of our lives, this will hopefully help others become more aware of the issues that are important to the political arena and in turn start a chain reaction of more citizens becoming involved in the political process on all levels." It seems like a lot of our media have taken this cue and now make numerous reports bordering on politics but before we proceed further or jump into conclusions, it is pertinent to understand the concept of politics and communicating it. Political news is made through political communication. Therefore, political communication can be said to be a process whereby political information is passed on to whom it may concern by those assigned or who assume such responsibility. It may be carried out within political parties; it may take place between different political structures; it may be within a bureaucracy; within interest groups but basically, between the government and the citizenry.

The channels of political communication include those of organizational communication and the media of mass information. Even such channels as the family, interest groups, political party activists, government agencies and opinion leaders are also used. Lord Windlesham (as cited in Tracey, 1977), gives a definition which illuminates the organization and objective of political communication. In his words, political communication is, the deliberate passing of a political message by a sender to a receiver with the intention of making the receiver behave in a way that he might not otherwise have done. This definition contains three components: a political message; a method of passing or distributing the political message and an intention to making the receiver respond in a particular way.

He goes on to say that in a democratic politics, political communication is not seen as one way process but as a "dialogue between the governing and the governed, each attempting to influence and persuade the other." However, it has been observed that all times, the output of government messages is far larger than the input of messages from the society. Clearly, political communication is purposeful. The information or messages given out which may be decisions, plans, appeals, demands, etc. by either the government, political party or the citizenry are thoughtfully packaged. Styles may differ. As Almond (quoted by Wiseman, 1966) notes, it may be, "manifest or latent, specific or diffuse, particularistic or generalistic, affectively neutral or affective. But all that it seeks to achieve is political support which leads to stability and growth of the political system." Indeed, it could be said that political communication is for development, albeit political. Following this, it is dared to believe that political development is a desideratum for all sector and human development.

Yet however important political news is, other news aspects are just as important. For example, according to Nwabueze (2011) agricultural journalism plays the crucial role of keeping the audience enlightened on trends in agriculture, ensuring agricultural education and mass mobilization for agricultural development as well as coverage for both agricultural and agro-allied sectors. From this, it is obvious that the agricultural beat is a very vast one but how many of our dailies carry agricultural news? And even if they do, how many stories get published? Agriculture is just one of the many other beats that is facing near extinction in news reportage as a result of a subconscious new scale of preference the media organisations have set up.

This would bring into play the social responsibility of the press to "be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society. The press whether it wishes to do so or not can clarify the ideas of society as it reports the failing and achievements of everyday" (Ukonu, 2007). The press should engage in reporting all forces that promotes and militates against the goals of society. They shouldn't be one-sided for profitability. No doubt the newspaper is a business that must make profit to subsist. Still, it has a social mission it must carry out. Essentially, it must educate, entertain, advocate, mobilise on all aspects of the society. It has to be a vehicle for social control and a catalyst for social change and progress. Yet, these things are barely

attainable in the society, with media organisations especially the newspaper houses tilting their news to predominantly one aspect of society

Empirical studies

It is worthy of note that this topic lacks an abundance of literature. This is one of the reasons that propelled this research. The concept of newspaper content and framing has been here a while yet, the studies as to the unequal presentation of all aspects of society has managed to elude researchers. Studies majorly researched on include newspaper coverage and framing basically as pertaining to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), corruption news, climate change issues, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) for national development amongst others.

However, these studies would prove useful in observing newspaper content influence on the attitude of the audience and the society at large, while looking a short and long term consequences. In one study by Batta, Ashong & Bashir (2013) while quoting a BBC report (2008) on media reporting of climate change and its influence on the audience found that “people in Nigeria mainly acquire information on climate change from the media and schools. However, there is a knowledge deficit in the media making audience education ineffective.” This conclusion draws a strong link between the media and audience believability of media products. Therefore, in the case of lack of adequate knowledge from the media, there is an obvious deficit in the people’s full comprehension of climate change and the environment is paying dearly for it; what happens when there is an over-reportage of a sector of the society, what influence would it have on the audience and what ripple effect would take its toll on the society? This study would seek to provide answers to this question.

But one study by Brown & Udomisor (2015) on the **Evaluation of political news reportage in Nigeria’s *Vanguard* and *Guardian* newspapers** found a low rate of political reportage. Even though the reports are significantly high, but in comparison to other subject matrix, it is relatively low with the total (from two newspapers) of 264 for Government/Politics while ‘Others’, Sports/Entertainment, Business/Economy and Education/Technology/Art ranked the highest with 1318, 850, 817 and 722 respectively. These results are arguable because the period of study was between April-June of 2013. It was not randomly selected and so, bias could abound as well as error (Ohaja, 2003). These results could prove unreliable because an incident may have occurred that necessitates an unusually high coverage of a subject matter and a blackout of others.

Yet another study confirmed the increased rate of political news reportage compared to other areas while explaining the reason behind such spate of political news in newspapers. Oso (2012) listed certain factors that might have influenced this increased rate of political reportage. According to him, they include that the Nigerian mass media system has developed within the dynamics of the country's political economy. “almost all the existing newspapers are now part of some business conglomerates.” These conglomerates are either directly or indirectly affiliated to a party, for example, Orji Uzor Kalu of *Sun Newspapers* is a PDP member, Bola Ahmed Tinubu of *The Nation* is in APC, Gbenga Daniel of *Compass* is in PDP, James Ibori for *Daily Independent* is for PDP, Jimoh Ibrahim for *The National Mirror* and *NewsWatch* is also for PDP etc. This point was emphasized in yet another study on **Political communications: press and politics in Nigeria's Second Republic** by Rahman Olalekan Olayiwola in 1991;

Apart from outright ownership, the dominant class has been able to influence the press through the promotion and articulation of certain concepts and discourses which are largely taken for granted, though ideological. Such concepts include national interest, development and security, democracy and constitutionalism. Thus, further strengthening the presence of the knowledge-gap theory in Nigeria where those that have access to the media (the elites, usually politicians) are the ones that indirectly set the agenda in the media. In his words, “in Nigeria, the news is highly privileged and a highly contested space by both the political and corporate elite for its propaganda and publicity value”; another reason for the increased publishing of political news above other aspects of news is the “the degree of political affinity and socio-cultural proximity that obtains between media personnel and the political elite” (Blumler & Guretvich, 1995:66). Early Nigerian journalists shared a lot with the political elite. They were all socialised into the Lagos colonial society and had a common antipathy towards colonialism. In fact, the two spheres were more or less fused—journalism was politics, politics was journalism. This closeness has trickled down to present-day as it is noticeable, “in the last few years, many journalists have also gained appointments as press secretaries, media advisers and political consultants to governments and prominent politicians. Many state governments maintain media consultants made up of prominent journalists who meet regularly to advise them on their publicity and public communication activities. Such individuals act as a form of informal channel of influence flow to media organisations;”

Yet another is the parlous economic situation of many media organisations. Many of them cannot adequately take care of the welfare of their workers in terms of payment of salary, training etc. This has seriously whittled down any form of commitment to professionalism among journalists. It has made them less responsible as to consider equal representation of all aspects of society as some of them have taken to reporting ‘the most juicy’ beat- politics; the influence of the advertisers have also caused news to be tilted to the most productive beat, one that can draw a certain kind of elite audience. With all these factors pushing news to tilt in one

direction, what short-term effect and long-term implication would it have on the audience? This research would seek to provide answers.

On another front, a study carried out in 2014 by Fadairo, Fadairo & Aminu on **Coverage of Corruption News by major newspapers in Nigeria** while trying to measure newspaper coverage of corruption in the various sectors of the economy in three newspapers over the period of five years using content analysis worked on 913 corruption articles from nine sectors and found that 522 news items accounting for 57.2% of the whole corruption stories was in politics and governance while agriculture was at the bottom rung of the ladder. This finding showed that not only is politics the most corrupt but it is also the most reported, thereby, giving credence to the original supposition made that politics is more reported than any other sector. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, this study would check the rate of political news coverage as compared to other sectors of the society not characterized by any special phenomenon but news in itself whether hard or soft.

Theoretical framework

Gate-keeping theory

According to Wogu (2008), all mass media have a large number of gate-keepers. They perform a variety of functions and play several roles. They can delete or modify a message. They can stop a message by refusing to 'open a gate.' In a print organization, for example, these people include the reporter who gathers the information and writes a news story; the editor who edits the story to make sure it is in the right 'shape;' the typesetter; the proof reader and finally, the printer who produces copies of the magazine. All these people are called media gatekeepers and it is only what passes through their 'gates' that can reach the audience as the message or magazine content. Other gatekeepers, according to Hiebert et al (1989:453) cited in Folarin (2002), are government, content source, advertisers, individual consumers and consumers joined together in pressure groups. Folarin (*ibid*) adds that gatekeeping is not restricted to accepting and rejecting of information but it also involves shaping, display, timing, repeating the message for emphasis and so on. Quoting Mr. Ekeli, general manager of the Delta State Printing and Newspapers Publishing Corporation during a lecture, he added that gate-keeping can also be termed self-censorship. The gatekeeper is often bound by certain actions that dictate his output (news). These include, timing, ownership pattern, perceived needs and preferences of the audience, management policy, editor's perception of reality, views held by editor's colleagues, influence of advertisers, appraisal of offerings by the competition, availability of photographs or film footage, legal considerations, professional ethics, ideological perspectives and political orientation amongst others.

This theory explains how political news is reported at the detriment of other news aspects. It shows that the gate-keeping decision affects the audience ability to perceive a media experience. That is how the audience can be excessively exposed to one area of news without being fully informed on another.

Agenda-setting theory

Lippmann (1922), as quoted in Okunna (2002), stated that the media help to "put pictures in our heads." This explains the power of the mass media to set the agenda and raise issues of public importance. This function is closely related to public opinion generation, since it is often the mass media that raise issues upon which public opinion is expressed. McCombs and Shaw (1972) as cited in Wogu (2008) wrote that members of the "audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it." According to Cohen (1963:13), "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling you what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." Undoubtedly, the world appears different to different people depending, not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors and publishers of the papers they read.

The elements involved in agenda-setting include (Folarin, 2002:75):

- The quality or frequency of reporting;
- Prominence given to the reports- through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, film, graphics or timing on radio and television;
- The degree of conflict generated in the reports and
- Cumulative media-specific effects over time.

As Kunczick (1988) points out appropriate procedures for examining agenda-setting involves comparisons between media content over a certain period and the subjects that most people in the society are discussing. The greater the consonance, the more the agenda-setting hypothesis is confirmed.

Having studied this theory, it is appropriate to deduce the influence of the media on the audience. This helps the researcher to know the possibility of a high influence of the media on the audience or otherwise. Thus, with knowledge of this theory, the influence studies of this research topic can be tackled.

Research methodology

The triangulation method was applied in this study- content analysis and survey research method. The population of study for the content analysis covered all the news messages in two newspapers published in Nigeria- *Guardian* and *Daily Sun* for the year 2014. The different newspapers represent the different segments of the society. While *The Guardian* is targeted to the elites, *Daily Sun* is for the masses. The population of study for the survey comprised of all adults living in Enugu State. Also, media experts in both field and academia were used for the population of the interview.

For the content analysis, the researcher worked by the proportion of the population needed. 12 issues were picked for the first six months of 2014- two publication for each month were studied. Therefore, for the two newspapers, 24 issues were studied. In the survey, the data from 15 news analysts were collated. Using the Australian calculator, by the National Statistical Service (NSS), the following data were entered and it automatically generated the sample size for the survey. In this formula, once values for the variables are provided, the calculator completes others. The variables supplied include,

- Confidence level: 95%;
- Proportion confidence interval: 0.05
- Population size: 3,267,837
- Confidence interval: 0.049

The sample size is therefore given as 76.

The sampling technique adopted for the content analysis was systematic random sampling. The researcher divided the 182.5 days in half a year by 12 (number of issues under study). This is because the newspapers under study are produced daily. It resulted to a study of newspapers every 15 days. Therefore, the days of study are as follows: day 1 (January 2), 15 (January 17), 30 (February 1), 45 (February 16), 60 (March 3), 75 (March 18), 90 (April 2), 105 (April 17), 120 (May 2), 135 (May 17), 150 (June 1) and 165 (June 16). The same days would be used for the two newspapers for the year 2014. This will enable the researcher carry out a representative study of the period.

The purposive sampling technique was used for the survey. The interview sought for news analysts- those that feature more frequently on newspapers and have knowledge of the media while the questionnaire distribution required literacy and newspaper readership. That was why the city's urban area was picked.

The code sheet for content analysis groups the contents into units to guide a researcher in collecting data. It divides the content into magnitude, frequency, media, story types and placement. The categories are detailed as follows:

A. Media

1. *Guardian*
2. *The Sun*

B. Story type

1. Column
2. Letter to the editor
3. News extra
4. Special reports
5. News reports
6. Editorial

C. Space or length of stories

1. 1-20 inches
2. 20-40 inches
3. 41 inches- 1 page
4. Above one page

A total of 76 questionnaires were administered by hand to the selected sample. Also, the research employed the aided interview which allowed the responses to more precise as to eliciting answers to the questions.

Data presentation and analysis

Description of data

Table 1: Number of newspaper news messages (excluding advertorials and picture news)

Weeks	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Sun</i>	Total
Day 1 (January 2)	109	110	219
Day 15 (January 17)	128	121	249
Day 30 (February 1)	110	75	185
Day 45 (February 16)	131	105	236
Day 60 (March 3)	134	126	260
Day 75 (March 18)	129	130	259
Day 90 (April 2)	106	129	235
Day 105 (April 18)	93	115	208
Day 120 (May 2)	132	129	261
Day 135 (May 17)	112	154	266
Day 150 (June 1)	126	101	227
Day 165 (June 17)	134	123	257
Grand total	1444	1418	2862

Table one detailed the amount of news stories contained in the two newspapers for the dates chosen for study. It turns out that *Guardian* newspapers had 1444 news stories excluding advertorials and photo news while *Daily Sun* had 1418.

Table 2: Frequency of all aspects of society reported in the news magazines

(A) Media		Politics	Science & technology	foreign	Arts & life	Business and Economy	Sports	Education	Health	Agriculture	Total
<i>Guardian</i>	Freq	310	145	134	132	195	234	91	121	82	1444
	%	21.5	10.0	9.3	9.1	13.5	16.2	6.3	8.4	5.7	100
<i>Daily Sun</i>	Freq	334	52	104	237	188	211	98	101	93	1418
	%	23.6	3.7	7.3	16.7	13.3	14.9	6.9	7.1	6.6	100

Table two above shows that *Guardian* published 310 news messages (21.5 percent) on politics while the remaining 1134 (78.5 percent) was distributed amongst eight other aspects of society within the period studied. *Daily Sun* had 334 (23.6 percent) news stories covering politics while the outstanding (1084- 76.4 percent) was spread in the other eight sectors as represented in the paper.

Table 3: Story type on politics

(B) Type	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Sun</i>	Total	Percentage
Column	30	42	72	11.2
Letters to the editor	59	63	122	18.9
Cartoons/line drawings	32	12	44	6.8
Special report	6	10	16	2.5
News report	170	192	362	56.2
Editorial	13	15	28	4.3
Grand total	310	334	644	100

Table three indicates that 362 (56.2 percent) published stories were news reports which make it the highest form of political reportage while opinion write-ups in form of letters to the editor followed up with 122 stories (18.9 percent).

Table 4: Space or length of stories on politics

(C) length	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Sun</i>	Total	Percentage
1-20 inches	67	75	142	22.0
21-41 inches	108	131	239	37.1
41-one page	93	89	182	28.3
Above one page	42	39	81	12.6
Sum total	310	334	644	100

Nineteen (7.5 percent) of the stories had 1-20 inches space while 53 (20.9 percent) other stories were in 21-40 inches space, seventy-five (29.6 percent) were between 41-1 page while 106 stories (41.9 percent) was above one page.

Interview data

One of the findings from the interview was focused on the frequency of political news reportage. Fifteen persons were interviewed and nine persons (60 percent) stated that it is high while six persons (40 percent) argued that it is moderate. Another report from the interview sought for the causes of this trend in political reportage. The

results are portrayed below:

- To improve communication between the government and the governed (for development purposes): four persons opted for this which is 26.7 percent of the total population;
- For the sake of continuity in purpose considering the reason for the introduction of newspaper which was grossly political: five persons picked this reason which accounts for 33.3 percent of the total population;
- The interest of the medium gatekeepers including the interest of the advertisers: two persons went for this reason which makes up 13.3 percent of the study;
- That it is a vibrant beat and following the state of living of journalists, it is a money-making one. Even supposed human-interest stories are usually giving political angles to “touch it up a bit”. Hence, more coverage. Ten persons (66.7 percent) suggested this;
- The restive situation in the country: thirteen maestros (86.7 percent) think this is a good reason for the high rate in reportage.

The following extracts were made from the questionnaire:

Table 5: Responses to questions 8-13:

Aspects of society	Very much	Not much	Not at all	Not answered	Total
Education	12	53	7	3	75 respondents
Entertainment	32	26	10	7	75 respondents
Economy	29	39	4	3	75 respondents
Health	18	49	0	8	75 respondents
Politics	58	12	0	5	75 respondents
Sports	43	29	3	0	75 respondents

The above shows that the respondents receive more information on politics on newspapers than any other aspect. This is because 58 of them affirmed this by ticking ‘very much’ when asked how much information on political news they get from news magazines.

Also, in measuring question 17 concerning excessive reportage on political news, 45 respondents gave a positive that there is an excessive reportage of political news while 30 respondents gave a negative. This means that the odds of a high rate in political reports are 3:2.

In quantifying the question 14 and 15 which sought to measure the influence of political news as set by the press. Question 14, “when discussing about societal issues with your friends or colleagues, which aspect of the society is likely discussed” collated showed that 32 respondents opted for Nigerian politics; 21, Nigerian sports; 20, Nigerian entertainment (fashion); 2, Nigerian business; 1, Nigerian health while none went for Nigerian education. In addition, the people most exposed to newspapers who tend to discuss more of news pertaining to politics are usually the opinion leaders in the gatherings (as culled from the interview) and question 15 verified the response in question 14 showing higher rates to favour politics.

In answering question 16 about the reason for likely discussion of political news, out of the 32 responses, 14 explained that they stumble upon the discussion between their friends, 15 said it is usually topical issues they discuss (which happens to be about politics, thanks to the agenda-setting function of the press), two mentioned that politics is the culture in vogue while one didn’t answer the question.

In assessing the response for question 18 as pertaining to the coverage of news in the newspapers, 43 think it is not appropriately covered with 26 decrying the dearth of agriculture, health and human interest feature stories; 27 believed that the news reports is how it ought to be while five were indifferent.

However, in administering the questionnaire, the researcher encountered error. One of the questionnaires was unaccounted for. The respondent misplaced the questionnaire and so, it wasn’t computed. Hence, 75 questionnaire data were collated.

Discussion of findings

1. Research question 1.

What is the percentage of political news reports in comparison to other divisions of the society?

The data in table two showcasing the frequency of the coverage of political news as well as other aspects of the society can be used to answer this question. The table shows that within the 12 weeks studied, out of 2862 news messages published, the newspapers had 644 political news messages as against the 197 for science and technology, 238 for foreign news, 369 for arts & life, 383 for business & economy, 445 for sports, 189 for education, 222 for health and 175 for agriculture.

Considering these statistics, it is safe to say that the volume of political news report, for the year 2014, is quite disproportionate. In respect to the triangulation method of research, the following facts also confirm the claim made above:

- The 60 percent of views extracted during the interview sessions agreed that the report on political news

is somewhat high as against 40 percent that maintained that it was moderate;

- In measuring question 17 in the questionnaire, the ratio of those that affirmed a high rate of political news reports as against those that gave a negative was 3:2;

The result of these findings is in agreement with Haque cited in Udomisor (2002) who observes that the news media devote a substantial part of their time and resources to covering politics. It likewise, correlates with that of Ghorpade (1986) who postulated that the press plays an influential role in a country's political milieu, which is, according to him, why readership of newspapers is known to grow higher during election years and that by emphasizing certain issues over others, the press plays an agenda-setting role among the educated elite in the society. Also, Fadairo, Fadairo & Aminu (2014), in a bid to emphasize the coverage of corruption news was able to mention that political news is the most reported of every other sector in the newspapers.

2. Research question 2.

Why are the rates of the political information the way they are?

This question can be answered with the data extracted from the interview which lists factors that are causing this high coverage and reports on political news. However, the most prominent reason that was given was the issue of the present state of Nigeria as regards her political arena and how every part of the society is tied to it. As former News Editor for *Record* newspaper, Mr. Andrew Ngene (in a personal interview conducted on February 14, 2012) explicitly puts it, "if there is stability in the political atmosphere (of the country) there would be stability in other areas and report of them would come naturally."

Therefore, the answers to the question include,

- The need to improve political communication between the government and the governed for development as well as to keep the government accountable;
- For the sake of continuity in purpose following the reason for the introduction of newspaper to the system which was purely to attain nationalism, was influenced by regional excesses and was primarily to serve the political interests of the country;
- The interest of the medium gatekeepers including the interest of the advertisers, the bias of the editor et cetera. This is in line with Oso (2012) and Olayiwola (1991) when they mentioned ownership of the medium as a factor that influences coverage. They added that almost all newspaper owners are affiliated to one party or the other, hence, an increase in political news reports;
- The poor welfare of the journalist which has made them opt for a supposed "profitable" political beat and even in situations where the stories are of human interest or business, attempts are usually made to tilt it to a political angle so that it can be relevant to their pocket. This is in line with Oso (2012) when he mentioned that most journalists don't even have enough to survive on, hence, the veering off into the 'juicy' political beat or even a higher tendency to slant other non-political stories to have political undertone;
- The restive situation in the country following the decisions made (the centenary celebrations, national conference and oppositions that came with them), the citizens' demonstration (for the abducted Chibok girls) and the Boko Haram menace, the upcoming general elections of 2015, the mass decamping of political party members etc.

3. Research question 3.

What are the effects of these rates on the audience and the society being exposed to it?

Following the facts culled from question 19 in the questionnaire that questioned respondents of their view of politics in Nigeria, 90.7 percent (68) views were negative while 8 percent argued that it is gradually developing but the remaining 1.3 percent was undecided. This result shows that constant exposure to political news (which is vastly negative) has corrupted the average Nigerian's mind concerning politics. To him, it seems nothing good can come out of politics. Nobody wants to venture into politics because it is a 'dirty game' and if they have to, it would be to take their share of the 'national cake'. This negative mindset has caused extensive damages to the system.

Also, the agenda-setting theory of the press has made it that it is only politics that the average Nigerian is interested in. A look at the information in table three, considering the number of letters to the editor on politics (about 122 letters as against 644 political news stories) shows that the readers have little interest in other areas. Out of 236 letters (from the two newspapers) to the editor, 122 were based on political news. This is approximately 51.7 percent of the total number of letters sent. As politics enjoy this attention, other areas of society suffer and decay. For example, child labour has increased from 4 million children in 1994 to 11 million children in 2007. The number is predicted to double by 2015 (ILO, 2007); farmers are not fully aware of the agricultural plan of the government for them- access to fertilizer, seedlings, incentives etc.

However, the continual reports on politics have given the Nigerian population an awakening to the system of operation. It has aroused certain political awareness. This is shown from the prevalence of politics in

discussions. It has caused the politically illiterate to be conscious of the country's political scene. This has led to a somewhat committed and ardent citizenry. This was manifested in the just concluded 2015 elections where Nigeria recorded a high voters' turn-out for the elections. People looked out for any authentic news medium to verify reports of the election results and the newspaper proved resourceful enough.

For the society, the interview data culled from a historian, Chioma Abuba have revealed that the Nigerian populace lacks a vibrant reading culture of newspapers. So, where sensitization and grass root mobilization ought to take place (as in how the tides of the war changed in Stalingrad during the WWII to resist Germany in 1939-1945) is not feasible because most Nigerians don't read and so heavy reliance is placed on the radio. This is in line with Brown (2014). She went on to further add that the long-term effect of newspaper culture is to scuttle existing social systems and bring up a better system depending on the factors at play (as manifested in the nationalistic era of the early 1940s). And because people don't read, they depend on rumours, opinion leadership etc. (diffusion theory) which has led to undue infiltration of foreign culture into our system.

Also, the mistrust people have developed for the newspaper as a result of the false or 'paid' detail in the newspaper, thanks to news commercialization and the brown envelope syndrome, the dearth of investigative journalism in the country and the general drop in proper education of journalist and lack of copy editors leading to mass error in sentence composition and news details (Ezebuka, 2015). All these have hindered actual positive long-term effects of newspapers in the society.

One news experts have revealed that the society is on the brink of a revolution, thanks to the constant accountability of the government to the governed through the 'attentive' role of the media to the political beat. The case of the BBOG (Bring Back Our Girls) campaign received a worldwide recognition because of the devoted attitude of the media to the reports.

Conclusion

The presumed large difference between political news reportage and other aspects of the society have been clarified as not so great. In fact, some studies argue that it is only normal that the newspapers report as much political detail as it does after all, most of the owners of these newspapers are affiliated to political parties (Oso, 2012) and also, "the degree of political affinity and socio-cultural proximity that obtains between media personnel and the political elite" right from the pre-independence era still holds till date (Blumler & Guretvich, 1995:66). That is why many journalists easily gain appointments as press secretaries, media advisers and political consultants to governments and prominent politicians.

Throughout the study, it was clear that newspapers not only favor a higher number of political reportage but it lacks proper investigative background of not just political news but most of its news details. It abounded in grammatical errors as well as information inaccuracies (the issue of the 48 billion dollars initially unaccounted for as announced by Mallam Sanusi Lamido, the then CBN governor. The newspapers were so quick to report the details without investigation and when the figures kept changing as well as their reports, it became obvious that the newspapers were as unserious as the man). However, it gave room for response and reaction to news messages published which is in line with their social responsibility.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is the issue of equal representation of society in newspapers. News has been vastly misinterpreted for politics only because the supposed general interest newspapers are not 'generally-interested' in discussing societal issues. They usually slant their focus to one area just as *Daily Sun* obviously did; at least, *Guardian* tries to present as much aspects as it can. Newspapers are paramount in the opinion-moulding function of media, therefore, what it reports are usually taken as final and are used to make life decisions (Ekwo, 1996), so, the idea of slanting publication to suit personal wants is not a good idea.

Recommendations

This work is important to the government the audience and the press. The first recommendation is that the press should strive towards near equal representation of all aspects of the society in the media especially newspapers. This is not just a social responsibility of the press but also, it would help the audience to be equally informed in news concerning all segments of the society. They should also strive to report government's efforts to help the country and not just their faults. This would encourage the government as well as citizens of the country. They should also keep the readers well informed on their responsibilities as citizens of the country so that they know that the onus of responsibility rests on them as well as government. There is however the need to praise the newspapers studied for serving as a platform for exchange of opinions and criticisms via opinion articles and letters to the editor. In addition, there should be mass sensitization on the need for investigative journalism. Also, educational qualifications as stated by NUJ should be taken seriously (see Ukonu, 2007) before a journalist is accepted to work on the job (most unethical practices and errors are found from unqualified journalists that are on the job for just their stomachs). In addition, independent committees should be set-up to man the post in case of unethical and corrupt practices of the press- visibly make-known a scape-goat of any defaulting press man.

For the government, they should understand that the press cannot report if they don't function. Therefore, they should shift focus partly from politics to other aspects of society. Even if they are already doing so and it is not yielding results, they should charge the national assembly to be effective in carrying out their oversight functions; prep anti-corruption agencies to watch out for old 'money-bags'; be effective enough to impeach any unserious politician; remove unnecessary job positions in government and basically, keep praying to God for Nigeria.

The audience is just as responsible- they should be wary of dependence on one media source. This is because if one fails to deliver a message either by commission or omission, read it up in another medium. This way, you miss out on very little and are made aware of every aspect of society. Before this, the audience should cultivate the habit of reading- avid reading. They should also be sensitive to the chain of new reports and demand details of the journalist in any area of their focus. There is nothing like no news because, no news is news. The journalist should take this cue and shout from the rooftops so that the attention of the government is drawn to that area and action is put in place.

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April 30, 2015.

Dear Respondent,

I am a Masters student of the above named department and university.

I am conducting a study on an issue in the society which asks, **Is news all about politics?** the work is in fulfillment of the course entitled, Print Journalism Seminar (MAC 531). I would appreciate it, therefore, if you will kindly answer the under-listed questions as honestly as you can.

Your candid opinion and answers will be treated in absolute confidence as this is only an academic exercise.

Yours faithfully,

Ezebuka, C. E.
Reg. No: PG/MA/14/67464

INTRODUCTION

There are boxes provided against the answers to every question. Carefully read them and tick (✓) in the appropriate boxes to answer the questions.

Demographic data:

- 1) Age (a) 16-23 (b) 24-31 (c) 32-40 (d) 40-above
- 2) Sex (a) male (b) female
- 3) Marital status (a) single (b) married (c) divorced
- 4) Formal education (a) SSCE (b) first degree (c) others (specify) _____
- 5) Occupation (a) student (b) civil servant (c) self-employed (d) unemployed

Psychographic data:

- 6) Do you read newspapers? (a) yes (b) no

Please, if your answer to no 6 is "no", kindly discontinue from filling the questionnaire

- 7) How often do you read newspapers? (a) everyday (b) once a week
(c) once in a month
- 8) How much information on education do you get from newspapers? (a) very much (b) not much (c) not at all
- 9) How much information on entertainment do you get from newspapers? (a) very much (b) not much (c) not at all
- 10) How much information on sports do you get from newspapers? (a) very much (b) not much (c) not at all
- 11) How much information on health do you get from newspapers? (a) very much (b) not much (c) not at all
- 12) How much information on business do you get from newspapers? (a) very much (b) not much (c) not at all
- 13) How much information on politics do you get from newspapers? (a) very much (b) not much (c) not at all
- 14) When you are in gatherings, what is the most likely topic to be discussed?

- 15) When you talk about societal issues with your friends or colleagues, which aspect of the society is likely discussed? (a) Nigerian sports (b) Nigerian politics (c) Nigerian health (d) Nigerian business (e) Nigerian entertainment (f) Nigerian education
- 16) Why? _____

- 17) Do you think the newspaper reports quite a lot of political news stories more than they ought to? Yes No
- 18) What is your idea of the news reports in Nigeria? Do you think it covers all areas equally?

- 19) What is your take on politics in Nigeria? _____
