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# **Analysis of the Content of Nigeria's Newspaper Editorials**

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## **Abstract**

*This study analyzed the editorials of Nigeria's national newspapers to determine the nature, content, type, and quality of presentation. The major focus of the study is to assess the role of editorials in community conversation by analyzing their stand on community and national issues. The results of the analyses showed that editorials concentrate most of its themes on socio economic issues and news editorials are commonly used to present these issues. To maintain their role as a community voice, it is recommended that professionalism, objectivity, ethical considerations, fairness and sound journalism should constitute the hallmark of editorial policies and writing. To also ensure that these journalistic principles are not flagrantly abused, editorial independence is suggested. To enhance this independence, corporate or people ownership of newspaper organizations is advocated. This will curb the excesses of individual newspaper publishers who are hell bent on pursuing parochial, personal interests against community and national goals.*

## **Introduction**

Communication is a vital aspect of human living. It is fundamental to the growth and survival of any society because a good system of communication enables

people to exchange meaning and share experiences. According to MacBride et al (1981, p.3):

Communication maintains and animates life. It is also the motion and expression of social activity and civilization, it leads people and peoples from instinct to inspiration through variegated processes and system of enquiry, command and control; it creates common pool of ideas, strengthens the feeling of togetherness through exchange of messages and translates thought into action reflecting every emotion and need for the humblest tasks of human survival, to supreme manifestations of creativity or destruction.

The assertion that whatever we do communicates something to others, further amplifies the importance of communication to human existence and interaction. As such, communication is a means of facilitating social integration and cohesion in a society and it takes place in various forms and at different levels. One of such forms of communication, which has become popular in Nigeria among newspapers, is the editorial. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, an editorial is an article in a newspaper or magazine written by the editor or under his direction, giving the opinion or attitude of the paper upon some subject. Editorial can also be defined as the subjective opinion of the management of a newspaper. It is that branch of journalism that conveys to the public the media organization's opinion on issues in the news, as well as issues on public interest.

An editorial is also an article that states the newspaper's ideas on an issue. It provokes debate and offer enlightened judgments to readers. These ideas are presented as opinion. Editorials appear on the newspaper's editorial page, a page which includes editorials, columns, opinion articles, reviews and cartoons. If the paper contains more than one opinion page, the others are called op-ed pages. Another important item that appears on the newspaper's editorial page is the masthead, also known as a staff box, which includes a statement providing the details of publication—that the editors, photographers and other key staff members are, as well as a synopsis of the newspaper's editorial policy (Kenneth, 1994).

Beginning in the early 1930s, editorial page columnists such as Walter Lippmann, David Lawrence, Raymond Clapper and Arthur Krock had gained

many readers through interpreting national and international events. Their bylines were displayed prominently, generally on the right side of the editorial page. These writers were not well known, and they were not well paid. If they disagreed with what they were told to write, they could try to find another job. Since then, editorial writers on many newspapers have carved out for themselves more secure and more prominent relations with their publishers and with their communities. They have adapted to, and helped to change, the condition in which they work.

There is really no history of the emergence of editorial writing in Nigeria as it is very difficult to ascertain precisely when editorials first featured in Nigerian newspapers. But the Editorial page is one of the components of all major national newspapers in Nigeria and all over the world. Almost all Nigerian newspapers publish editorials on a daily basis and although it is not easy to ascertain the number of people who read these editorials, it appears the readership is quite wide as it serves as a voice of the voiceless in the society.

What attracts editorial writers to editorial writing? One attraction is the opportunity to help set the public agenda. The power to set the agenda for public discourse is no small power. Editorial writers generally have more freedom than reporters to decide what they will write about. The second vital reason editors are attracted to editorial writing these days is that they are getting the chance to have their voices heard in the making of policy. Editors are also attracted to editorial writing because of the flair involved in the writing. Writing a clear, insightful, educative and informative editorial can provide a great deal of pleasure to the writer.

The above reasons also partly answer the question: Why have an editorial page? One reason is tradition. For a century and a half or so, most Nigerian newspapers have set aside a page for the opinions of their writers, their readers and other contributors. A second reason for an editorial page is prestige. No self-respecting newspaper would dare appear without an editorial page (except maybe on weekends). A third reason is that it offers the newspaper the opportunity to have a well informed subjective opinion on national and global issues that concern the public. A fourth vital reason is that the editorial usually provides community leadership. Leadership does not necessarily require that opinions be changed. One role of the editorial is to reinforce and help clarify opinions that are already held. Another role is to call the attention of the

community to problems, projects and situations and to press for community action on such situations.

Omojola (2005) notes that editorials could be used as instruments of persuasion to influence public opinion on pertinent national issues. In other words, a media organization that discovers that a particular event, situation or circumstance has to be improved upon or changed, could write an editorial on that situation or circumstance, thereby using the medium to orientate the public towards its belief or stand on the issue, situation or circumstances. They also use such opportunity to move public opinion in support of the issue canvassed.

An editorial could also give critical and in-depth analysis on national issues. The critical analysis is very crucial because it serves as the justification for the writing of such editorial. It is also from this in-depth analysis that the conclusion is drawn, which gives meaning to the editorial. The publication of an editorial also gives readers the benefit of knowing all the sides to a story with a goal of making him take a personal stand on the matter. An editorial also helps to uncover the "news" behind the news. This means that the part of the news left behind by reporters during their coverage of news situations are usually brought to light in informative and incisive editorials. An editorial could also encourage the infusion of a new orientation concerning a particular issue, event or situation or better still, bring a media organization's experiences, expectations and innovations to bear on a particular issue.

This study basically looked out six types of editorials that are common in the Nigerian print media industry. These include news, social, policy, special, tribute and speculative editorials. There are other types depending on who is explaining them. However, we must note that any of these editorials could be critical, condemnatory, expository or persuasive. Some of these may also be classified as editorials by other authors. The critical or condemnatory editorial criticizes national issues and states that a matter of utmost importance has been neglected. This type of editorial is common amongst Nigerian national newspapers because Nigeria as a country is challenged by so many socio-economic and political problems that are urgently demanding attention. In the face of lack of performance to solve these problems, Nigerian newspapers are full of such editorials that focus on this lack of performance.

However, if the editorial criticizes, it should always be constructive, emphasize the positive about what is been criticized and ensure that convincing

facts and reasons are given for the alternative action. The media audience must be made to see reasons to stand with the news organization on its position with regard to the issues been criticized. Expository editorials on the other hand explain in precise details issues or subjects that are not easily understood by the public. This involves clarification of such issues in a way to make the public take a decision and also involves explanation of relevant technical terms if any. Expository editorials could be descriptive, analytical and historical. Editorials that explain are somewhat like expository essays. They attempt to interpret or inform rather than to argue a point of view. The only expression of opinion comes in the interpretation of the facts.

The persuasive editorial is one by which a media organization tries to get its readers to agree on its position concerning an issue. It is a way of inducing agreement of cooperation from its readers. A media organization can persuade its audience by being objective in its analysis, pushing out arguments that are very strong enough to convince and persuade readers and also through emotional appeals. Generally, editorials that persuade offer specific solutions to a perceived problem and expect immediate action towards adopting such solutions.

We now briefly discuss the six basic editorial types which the Nigerian print media organizations focus on most of the time. First is the news editorial. News editorials discuss issues raised in the news of the day. In other words they have a news peg or lead. Social editorials on the other hand concentrate on controversial and contemporary socio-cultural issues of public concern. Policy editorials are basically about government policy. Such editorials analyze government policy and give meaning to the implications in a way the average media audience or general public could appreciate. Special editorials on their part discuss issues of special concern as they arise in the society. Such issues are usually current and topical and may not be addressed in the other editorials earlier mentioned.

The other type of editorial commonly found in Nigerian newspapers is tribute editorial which celebrates the lives of important personalities who died in incidence of significance. Tribute editorial is not a biography; rather it is an editorial that bothers on the achievements of the personality and how his demise has been a loss to the target audience or reader. Speculative editorials on their part carry unconfirmed reports about an issue or an event. This simply means that such editorials are not totally sure of the facts and figures presented. It

should be noted that one cannot tell whether an editorial is speculative or not except the conclusion of the same editorial states it as such.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to analysis the editorial content of Nigeria's daily national newspapers. Specifically, the objectives of this study include:

1. To find out the content of editorials in Nigerian national newspapers.
2. To find out the type of editorial mostly used by Nigerian national newspapers.
3. To explain the importance of editorials in contributing to community conversation.
4. To analyze the roles of editorials in influencing public opinion and national discourse.
5. To determine the quality of the editorial content of Nigerian national newspapers.
6. To determine the position of editorials on reported issues and topics.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the theme of editorials of Nigeria's national newspapers?
2. Which type of editorial do Nigerian national newspapers mostly use?
3. Is the editorial of Nigerian national newspapers of good quality?
4. Do Nigerian national newspapers' editorials always take stand in support of the issues of the day?

### **Significance/Contribution of the Study**

This study has the capacity to help Nigeria's daily national newspapers to refocus and redesign the role and place of editorials in newspaper business. This is informed by the fact that the print media industry has not entirely done well in this area of reportage. Speculations in the media seem to suggest that socio-cultural cum political partisanship in the body polity has crept into the editorial boards of most Nigerian newspapers. Appointments to such boards are no longer made on merit or statesmanship but on socio-ethnic and political patronage.

The ownership/publisher influence on editorial content and matter is

also becoming overbearing. The real media professionals are not completely allowed to do the press business. The consequence of this unhealthy situation is that the publishers (who are mostly non-media persons) call the tunes because they believe they are paying the piper. This study, therefore, will enhance the effectiveness of editorials in serving as a voice of the community and the voiceless individuals in a society.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Barry Bingham, editor and editorial writer, Louisville *Courier-Journal* says the editorial page is a natural source of thoughtful comment, of the calm analysis that puts the news in its proper perspective and keeps the reader adequately informed about topical issues. Waldrop (1955, p.3) also comments further:

The average newspaper reader today is terribly short on time. The editorial writer can save time for him, and keep him well-informed. He can do for readers what so few have a chance to do for themselves—research the background of news events, bring blurred facts into focus, weigh the value of news in the scales of sound judgment. That is exactly what intelligent readers' want done for them today.

The Rochester *Times-Union*, in a 1951 two-column editorial, explains that in this complex age, a newspaper's service to its readers cannot end with the collection of facts. The bare facts are often so misleading as to be false when taken alone, and issues presented by the bare facts are often so complex that they require extensive examination to find their real meaning". Speaking before the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1948, Roscoe Drummond, then Washington correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*, said the news of the world, even in the best newspapers, is like:

The separate pieces of an immense jigsaw puzzle. The newspaper reader cannot normally put the pieces together and see the picture. He may be able to do so, on a few subjects about which he himself already knows a lot. But by and large the news stories do not, and I think cannot, alone present an intelligible picture of events. If the picture is to be intelligible, what happened yesterday has to be fitted in with what happened



last week and long before that, and with what could happen, and what may happen tomorrow and in the future.

Felix R. McKnight, Managing Director, Dallas News, in the August, 1953, *Quill*, said that "people are comment-hungry, world problems are so complex that the reader, hurried and confused, needs a page which interprets what's happening" and thus, the editorial page. From the above analysis from different practitioners of old, it can be vividly depicted that the need for an editorial page is very important and the place of the editorial page in a newspaper cannot be overemphasized. Various studies have been carried out on the readership of the editorial page, the editorial page itself and the debate inbuilt within it. It is the intention of this study to examine the conclusions drawn from those studies and analyze their implications for this particular study.

A lot has been written and said about the editorial, the editorial page and its readers. Many editors and editorial writers in recent years have been thinking, talking, and writing about the editorial page, of how it is of use to the reader, of how it is of use to the newspaper as well. Joseph Pulitzer sees the editorial page as the expression of the paper's conscience, courage and convictions. The test of excellence set up for the award of the Pulitzer prize in editorial writing add to this definition: clearness of style, moral purpose, sound reasoning, and power to influence public opinion in what the writer conceives to be the right direction (see Waldrop, 1955, p.53). According to Arthur Capper (also cited in Waldrop 1955, p.53), the editorial is more than the published expression of the opinion of an editor:

There is an error in the common conception of the newspaper editorial as the medium merely for expression of opinion of the editor. The modern editorial is not opinion only. It includes analysis and clarification, often with no opinion given. To expound, to interpret, to clarify what is obscure, to abstract patterns, significance and meaning from the chaotic medley of seemingly unrelated events—all this and more is part of the function of modern editorial.

From William Allen White's perspective, an editorial is more than "a mere literary impulse", it is a free expression upon the news or the tendencies of the

day, written briefly and bravely by a wise kind-hearted man. Bitterness, bias and fear have no place in an editorial: they make for weakness, no matter how much they bluster...." A newspaper has one obligation and one only-"to print the truth as far as it is humanly possible, and to comment upon the truth as candidly and as kindly as is humanly possible, never forgetting to be merry, for after all, the liar and the cheat and the panderer are smaller offenders than the solemn ass" (Waldrop, 1955,p.54).

Editorial scholars have also said that an editorial adds to the personality and prestige of a newspaper. From the perspective of Chapin Collins of the weekly Montesano (Washington) *Vidette*: "A man without a backbone and a country, a colonial house without shutters, a Christmas tree without tinsel-that's a newspaper without editorials.... Without an editorial page, a newspaper is French dressing without salt and pepper". John M. McClelland, Jr., editor, the Longview (Washington) News, past national president of Sigma Delta Chi, puts it less figuratively and more bluntly thus:

Your readers have a right to expect a newspaper that has some personality and it won't have any more personality than the courthouse bulletin board if all you do is report facts and have nothing to say about them. To have a personality a paper must have strong convictions and opinions. And it must support those opinions and convictions consistently. The reader must disagree with nearly everything the editor says. But he is going to have respect for that newspaper if it has convictions-if it takes stands and courageously stands by them.

One of the major functions of the press is to report, to criticize, to clarify, to unify and this is where the social responsibility function of the press come in to play. The press cannot serve as the voice of the people only through the everyday news published in the dailies. The editorial page is therefore needed to analyze in details what the government is not doing right and also to serve as a means of airing the views and grievances of members of the society, thereby serving as a voice of the people. Supporting the above view, Herman Ullstein, cited in Waldrop (1955,p.6), says "It is the business of the press, after all, to act as a mirror to public life, to expose corruption, to criticize government and society at large," "Newspapers should be the guardians of order, the servants of the

state and of its citizens. The moment they start printing nothing but news-abandoning comment and criticism-they lose half their importance, and become shadows of their former selves."

Charles Merz also describes four significant trends of editorial pages: interpretation, specialization, independence, and the necessary assumption of a larger measure of responsibility. Furthermore, some groups of scholars have also explained the role of the editorial as one that sets the minds of members of the public into thinking deeply about societal issues and looking at such issues with a critical eye. Corroborating this view is Vermont Royster, Pulitzer Prize winner and senior associate editor, *Wall Street Journal*:

People read editorials, first, to get arguments to support their own opinion. A good editorial presentation serves to focus their thinking. It serves to give them a rationale for what they instinctively feel. Occasionally a reader will adopt an editorial point of view when it is on some subject with which they are unfamiliar and where they have a general confidence in the editorial writer or the paper's opinion, but very rarely do we actually change a person's point of view, certainly not with any one editorial.

Norman P. Scott, editor-publisher of the weekly Johnstown (Colorado) *Breeze*, told his readers: "An editorial column should be written so as to provoke thought. Whether or not the thoughts provoked are in agreement with those of the editor actually has no bearing on the case.... One of the duties of the conscientious editor is to make people think". Another weekly editor, John P. Lewis of *Journal-Transcript*, put it in these words: "The first purpose of editorials and editorial pages is to start people thinking what the news means. It isn't important that people agree with an editorial, if it makes them think-even if they come out on the opposite side-it probably is a good editorial.

The salutatory editorial of the *New York Times* under the management of Adolph S. Ochs, August 18, 1896, included this "earnest aim": "To make the columns of the New York Times a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance, and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion". Robert J. Blakely, of the Des Moines dailies and then chief

editorial writer of the St. Louis *Star-Times*, maintains that:

The editor's primary concern should not be with the reader's opinions but with his processes of thought. Does the reader know the essential facts concerning the event? Is he familiar with the issues and the arguments? Is he continually growing more respectful of reason and more suspicious of appeals to passion? Is he being helped to apply sound tests of logic and authority? These are the concerns of the editor, not attempts to support or oppose a party or class, not a pride in always having the answers, always being trenchant, always being "right".... This conception of the editorial page does not preclude an occasional "crusade" and vigorous "stands." He who is for the free and rational debate of public issues must do battle in the service of his environment in which this kind of debate can be conducted.

It has also been pointed out that the editorial writers have a lot of role to play in influencing public opinion and serving as a voice of the people through their editorial writing. Editors and their newspapers have some responsibility along with everyone else in a democracy to use their voices and their influences on the side of what they believe to be right and decent. Kenneth (1994, p.300) posits:

If the editorial pages are going to provide leadership in the coming years, editorial writers will have to possess some other qualities more difficult to identify than the skills of obtaining information and putting words on pages. They will need insight, if they are to perceive what is really going on in the world. They will need vision, to help them see what the future can be. They will need optimism, for surely one of the roles of the editorial page is to remind readers that solutions can be found for problems. They will need to retain their faith in the "self-righting" process that John Milton wrote about in his defence of press freedom, *Areopagitica*, and maintains a conviction that, if all facts and viewpoints are allowed to come forth in the marketplace of ideas, the right decisions will be made and the

right actions will be taken.... Perhaps, the editorial page, with its emphasis on analyzing problems and seeking solutions to them, is an antique left over from the age of reason. Perhaps this page is one of the last voices of reason and enlightenment crying out in a dark, irrational world. But if it is, that is all the more reason for holding firm to the pursuit of truth.

These views by the scholars cited are further supported by the perspectives offered by social responsibility and agenda setting as theories of media practice. According to Miller (2005), theories help us understand or explain phenomena we observe in the social world. They are "nets with which we catch the world" or the ways in which we make sense of social life. Thus, a theory is necessarily an abstraction of the social world. A theory is not the communicative behaviour itself but an abstract set of ideas that help us make sense of that behaviour. These theories assist in examining how editorials should perform the function of acting as a voice of the people and how the press should help to set agenda for members of its immediate community via its editorials and editorial page.

Social Responsibility media theory owes its origin to the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the press, set up in the United States of America in 1947 to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the Libertarian press theory. As a normative theory, it explains how media ideally should operate in a given system of social values. This theory asserts that media must remain free of government control, but in exchange media must serve the public and be socially responsible for all her actions to the public. The core assumptions of this theory are at cross between libertarian principles of freedom and practical admissions of the need for some form of control on the media (McQuail, 1987 as cited in Baran, (2002, p.449). This theory states that the media can be used by anyone who has an idea to express but they are forbidden to invade private rights or disrupt social structures. The chief duty of the media operating according to this theory is to "raise conflict to the plane of discussion" (Folarin, 2005, p.39). It emphasizes the freedom of the press and places responsibility on the media practitioners to abide by certain social standards. It opposes media regulation but believes that the press is automatically controlled by community opinion, consumer protest and professional ethics. It calls on the media to be responsible for fostering productive and creative "Great Communities" and

that media should do this by prioritizing cultural pluralism-by becoming the voice of all people and not just elite groups or groups that had dominated national, regional or local culture in the past (Baran and Davis, 2003,p.109).

The Social Responsibility theory postulates six specific functions for the press:

- To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible.
- To inform the public to enable it take self-determined action.
- To protect the rights of the individual by acting as watchdog over the government.
- To serve the economic system: for instance by bringing together buyers and sellers through the medium of advertising.
- To provide "good" entertainment, whatever "good" may mean in the culture at any point in time.
- To preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences (Folarin, 2005, p.41).

The second theory that will help in examining the power of the press in forming public opinion via editorials is the Agenda Setting theory. According to Miller (2005), the modern concept of agenda setting is often attributed to Walter Lippmann who argued that the mass media create images of events in our minds and that policy makers should be cognizant of those "pictures in people's heads". Furthermore, Cohen (1963) cited in Ekeanyanwu (2005) notes that the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this argument that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors and publishers of the papers they read.

Folarin (2005,p.95) supports Cohen's view saying that agenda setting implies that mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. It does not ascribe to the media power to determine what we actually think, but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about. Agenda setting is the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues (Zhu & Blood, 1997 as cited in Miller, 2005, p.271).

Based on their study of the media's role in the 1968 presidential election,

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw wrote in 1974, in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.... The mass media may well determine the important issues.

The elements involved in agenda setting include:

1. The quality or frequency of reporting
2. Prominence given to the reports-headlines display, layout, timing on radio and TV set
3. The degree of conflict generated in the reports
4. Cumulative media-specific effects over time

The agenda-setting power of the media resides in more than the amount of space or time devoted to a story and its placement in the broadcast or on the page. Also important is the fact that there is great consistency between media sources across all media in the choice and type of coverage they give an issue or event. This consistency and repetition signal to people the importance of the issue or event. Sandman et al (1976,p.19) cited in Ekeanyanwu (2007), see agenda setting as the editorial decision that a particular event is not news if the news media ignores it or says so. Globally any event given major emphasis in the mass media ultimately becomes a major event. This is referred to as agenda setting, which gave birth to the Agenda Setting theory of the press.

Folarin (2005), citing Kunczick (1988) points out that the opportunity for agenda setting by the mass media becomes enhanced when the value structure of a society is in a state of flux. Kunczick further posits that the appropriate procedures for examining agenda setting involve comparisons between media content over a certain period and the subjects that most people in the society are discussing at the time. The extent to which there is similarity between the two will confirm the agenda setting hypothesis. The greater the consonance, the more the agenda setting hypothesis is confirmed.

In the light of this study, the Nigerian press serves as the eyes and ears

of members of the community by publishing editorials that air their views and also speak their mind as well. By the social responsibility and agenda setting function of the Nigerian press, they determine important issues to be published as editorials and ensure that such editorials portray the voice of individuals in the society. Failure to address these issues which affect the community may be regarded as press irresponsibility. Therefore, editorials in this context must and should address topical issues that concern the society at large. Agenda setting on the other hand suggests that the press also has a responsibility to keep the public informed and better educated on topical national issues. Even if some of these issues are not regarded as important, it is the duty of the press to let the public see such issues as important by making them agenda for discussion in the community conversation.

Shaw (1983, p.132) reaffirms this view when he posits that the media, by "focusing repeated and major attention on an event or set of related events, can transfer that event into an issue." Umechukwu (2001, p. 148-150) and Folarin (2005, pp.75-76) also agree that the "mass media have an impact on agenda setting in that they have the ability to choose or emphasize certain topics thereby causing the public to perceive the issues or topics as important." This implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are considered as important at a given time in a given society (Ekeanyanwu, 2007).

**Study Design:** This study made use of content analysis to determine the content and treatment of Nigerian newspapers' editorial. According to Dare (1991, p. 6) cited by Ekeanyanwu (2005), content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. With the objective of this study in mind, content categories or themes were identified. These include: Politics, Education, Economy, Sports, Religion, Disasters, Science & Technology, Conflicts/War, Personality/People, Commerce/Industry, Culture/Ethnicity, Health, Corruption, Crime, Foreign issues and others. These categories formed the units of analysis and measurement. The content categories were analyzed to determine the type of editorial mostly used by the newspapers, the quality of such editorials, the category or theme that is frequently reported and the stand of the newspapers on specific issues reported in the editorials.



**Population of Study:** The population of this study includes all the national daily newspapers published and circulated in Nigeria with the exclusion of weekend and evening papers. According to Doghudje (2006), there are over 90 newspaper titles in Nigeria among which are dailies, weeklies, sports and business. However, the secondary population of this study includes all the editions of the Guardian, Punch, Vanguard and *This Day* newspapers published in Nigeria within the study period. These issues all aggregate to 512. That is five issues per week per each selected newspaper for a period of six months.

**Sample Size:** The sample size for this study is 288 issues (editions) gotten from a total of 512 issues of the four selected newspapers. To arrive at this sample size, three issues were selected per week, and then multiplied by four weeks to arrive at twelve issues per month. Twelve issues per month were also multiplied by the six months of study thus arriving at 72 issues per newspaper. The 72 issues were now multiplied by the four newspapers to be studied to arrive at a sample size of 288. Below is the sample of the issues studied for the four newspapers:

January 2005 issues: 3,5,7,10,12,14,17,19,21,24,26,28=12 days

April 2005 issues: 4,6,8,11,13,15,18,20,22,25,27,29=12 days

May 2005 issues: 2,4,6,9,11,13,16,18,20,23,25,27=12 days

July 2005 issues: 4,6,8,11,13,15,18,20,22,25,27,29=12 days

October 2005 issues: 3,5,7,10,12,14,17,19,21,24,26,28=12 days

December 2005 issues: 5,7,9,12,14,16,19,21,23,26,28,30=12 days.

### **Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique used in selecting the four newspapers is purposive sampling. This technique entails the researcher deliberately selecting what constitutes his sample based on some predetermined purposes or aims which his study hopes to achieve. The purposive sampling method is used in selecting these newspapers due to the following reasons:

1. Wide and national readership
2. Country wide acceptance
3. Editorial independence
4. Large circulation rates
5. Consistency in the use of editorials to address national and international,

political, socio-cultural cum economic issues.

#### 6. Availability of the copies of the newspaper for analysis

However, the simple random sampling technique was used to select the three issues to be studied per week because the technique gives all the units of the population equal chance to be selected into the sample. Based on the days and months selected, all the days in a week from Monday to Friday for which editorials are published in newspapers were assigned on identical cards. The identical cards were placed in an enclosed container with a lid whenever the cards were reshuffled. As the container was opened after being shuffled, the days: Monday, Wednesday and Friday were picked at different times. The same technique and process were used to select the months for study. The months selected are: January, April, May, July, October and December. This process ensured that there was no bias or preference in the days and months studied.

#### **Units of Analysis/M Measurement**

The Units of Analysis or measurement refers to those benchmarks used in analyzing and evaluating the data collected. This study developed some content categories to determine and analyze the nature of editorial contents. These content categories or themes include: Politics, Education, Economy, Sports, Religion, Science & Technology, Conflicts/War, Personality/People, Disasters, Commerce/Industry, Culture/Ethnicity, Health, Corruption, Crime, Foreign Issues and others. The types of editorials published by the newspapers are classified as News, Policy, Tribute, Speculative, Social and Special editorials. The meanings of these types of editorials have already been explained earlier. They are, however, summarized below:

**News editorials:** These are editorials based on a news peg. They focus on issues already raised in the news of the day.

**Policy editorials:** These are editorials that focus on government policies.

**Tribute editorials:** These are editorials on important personalities who died in incidence of significance.

**Speculative editorials:** These are editorials that project into the future on certain issues of public interest.

**Social Editorials:** These are editorials that focus on socio economic issues.

**Special Editorials:** These editorials do not fall into any of the aforementioned category and based on this study, they are classified as special.

For the quality of the editorials, four labels were developed for this level of analysis based on Ekeanyanwu (2007) thus:

**Very High:** These are editorials considered by the researcher as outstanding in quality with regard to the content and the language of presentation of the issue being discussed.

**High:** These are editorials considered by the researcher to be very good in quality with regard to the content and the language of presentation of the issue being discussed.

**Very Low:** These are editorials considered by the researcher to be very poor in quality with regard to the content and the language of presentation of the issue being discussed.

**Low:** These are editorials considered by the researcher to be poor in quality with regards to the content and the language of presentation of the issue being discussed.

The slant/direction was determined by the stand taken by the newspaper concerning the issue under discussion. To achieve the objective of this study with regard to the direction, the following divisions were developed:

**Supports The Issue (STI):** This implies that the editorial in question is favourably disposed to the position canvassed by the topic or policy under analysis. For instance, if the Nigerian Government plans to privatize National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), an editorial that supports such privatization is regarded as "Supports the Issue" (STI).

**Against The Issue (ATI):** This implies that the editorial in question does not support the position expressed by the policy, issue or topic under discussion. In the example above, an editorial that criticizes Government's plan to privatize NEPA falls under this category.

**No Stand Taken (NST):** This is an editorial which ends without taking any position regarding the issue under discussion. NST editorials are neutral in perspective and do not betray the newspapers' preferences or stand. Such editorials merely analyze issues in an informative manner and allow the reader to take his/her position. This type of editorial is easily reflective of tribute editorials.

### Methods of Data Presentation and Analysis

Statistical tables, which contain percentages, were used to present the findings of the study. Bar charts were also used for clearer and visual presentation of data. These tables, charts and figures and their percentages were generated through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program software to ensure accuracy of results and analysis. The result of the analysis subsequently formed the basis of the discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

### Results

To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher developed content categories which include Politics, Education, Economy, Sports, Religion, Science & Technology, Conflicts/war, Personality/people, Disasters, Commerce/Industry, Culture/Ethnicity, Corruption, Crime, Health, Foreign issues and others. These categories were specifically aimed at finding the depth and nature of treatment given to editorials. Fig.1 below presents the result of the analysis and Table 4.1 compares the type of editorial with the content distribution.

FIG 1

### Distribution of Editorials According to the Content Categories

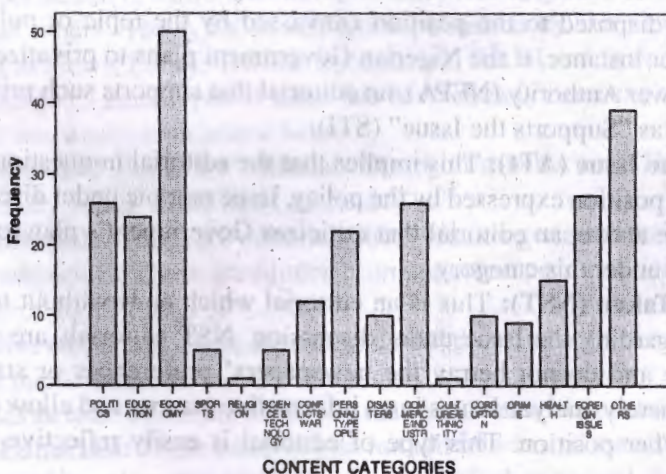


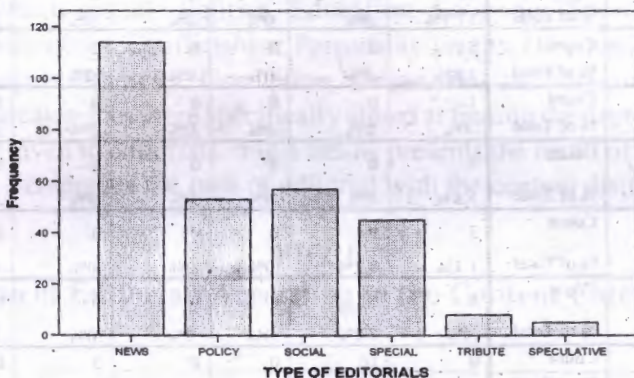
Table 1

## Types of Editorials Published In the Nigerian Press by Content Categories

CONTENT CATEGORIES		TYPE OF EDITORIAL						Total
		NEWS	POLICY	SOCIAL	SPECIAL	TRIBUTE	SPECULATIVE	
POLITICS	Count	26	0	0	0	0	0	26
	% of Total	9.2%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	9.2%
EDUCATION	Count	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
	% of Total	8.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	8.5%
ECONOMY	Count	50	0	0	0	0	0	50
	% of Total	17.7%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	17.7%
SPORTS	Count	5	0	0	0	0	0	5
	% of Total	1.8%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.8%
RELIGION	Count	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	% of Total	.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.4%
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY	Count	5	0	0	0	0	0	5
	% of Total	1.8%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.8%
CONFLICTS/WAR	Count	3	9	0	0	0	0	12
	% of Total	1.1%	3.2%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.3%
PERSONALITY/PEOPLE	Count	0	22	0	0	0	0	22
	% of Total	.0%	7.8%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	7.8%
DISASTERS	Count	0	10	0	0	0	0	10
	% of Total	.0%	3.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	3.5%
COMMERCE/INDUSTRY	Count	0	12	14	0	0	0	26
	% of Total	.0%	4.3%	5.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	9.2%
CULTURE/ETHNICITY	Count	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.4%
CORRUPTION	Count	0	0	10	0	0	0	10
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	3.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	3.5%
CRIME	Count	0	0	9	0	0	0	9
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	3.2%	.0%	.0%	.0%	3.2%
HEALTH	Count	0	0	15	0	0	0	15
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	5.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	5.3%
FOREIGN ISSUES	Count	0	0	8	19	0	0	27
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	2.8%	6.7%	.0%	.0%	9.6%
OTHER	Count	0	0	0	26	8	5	39
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	9.2%	2.8%	1.8%	13.8%
Total	Count	114	53	57	45	8	5	282
	% of Total	40.4%	18.8%	20.2%	16.0%	2.8%	1.8%	100.0%

The results of this study also show that News editorials are common in the Nigerian newspaper industry. They were used most times than any other editorial type. This information is better explained in Fig. 2 below.

**Fig. 2**  
**Distribution of Editorials According To Types**



A major objective of this study was to discover the quality of editorial content of Nigerian national newspapers. The data gathered show that the editorials were of good quality. This information was cross tabulated by the type of editorials published. Table 2 contains this result.

TABLE 2

TYPE OF EDITORIAL		DIRECTION OF EDITORIAL			TOTAL
		SUPPORTS THE ISSUE	AGAINST THE ISSUE	NEUTRAL	
NEWS	Count	67	47	0	114
	% of Total	23.8%	16.7%	.0%	40.4%
POLICY	Count	0	53	0	53
	% of Total	.0%	18.8%	.0%	18.8%
SOCIAL	Count	0	57	0	57
	% of Total	.0%	20.2%	.0%	20.2%
SPECIAL	Count	0	19	26	45
	% of Total	.0%	6.7%	9.2%	16.0%
TRIBUTE	Count	0	0	8	8
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	2.8%	2.8%
SPECULATIVE	Count	0	0	5	5
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	1.8%	1.8%
TOTAL	Count	67	176	39	282
	% of Total	23.8%	62.4%	13.8%	100.0%

As part of the objectives of this study, the direction or stand taken was determined. This stand could be in support of the issue, against the issue and no stand taken. Editorials which are in support of the issue are favourably disposed to the position canvassed by the topic while editorials that do not support the position expressed by the topic under discussion are considered to be against the issue and editorials which end without taking any position regarding the issue under discussion are neutral. This information is presented in Fig. 3 and cross tabulated with the type of editorial and presented in Table 3.

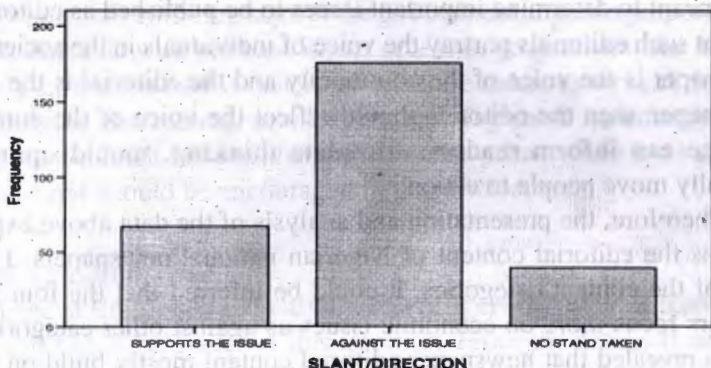
TABLE 3

TYPE OF EDITORIAL		QUALITY OF EDITORIAL				TOTAL
		VERY HIGH	HIGH	VERY LOW	LOW	
NEWS	Count	97	17	0	0	114
	% of Total	34.4%	6.0%	.0%	.0%	40.4%
POLICY	Count	0	53	0	0	53
	% of Total	.0%	18.8%	.0%	.0%	18.8%
SOCIAL	Count	0	57	0	0	57
	% of Total	.0%	20.2%	.0%	.0%	20.2%
SPECIAL	Count	0	20	1	24	45
	% of Total	.0%	7.1%	.4%	8.5%	16.0%
TRIBUTE	Count	0	0	0	8	8
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.8%	2.8%
SPECULATIVE	Count	0	0	0	5	5
	% of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.8%	1.8%
TOTAL	Count	97	147	1	37	282
	% of Total	34.4%	52.1%	.4%	13.1%	100.0%



Fig. 3

### Distribution of Editorials According to the Direction of Story



### Discussion

The impact of newspaper editorial is in the expectation that they come out with solutions to problems facing the society. Most news stories warrant only the coverage of the issue. This implies that there is no availability of time to delve deeply into the analysis of news events. As such, the news concentrates on important issues on the surface without probing the problems these issues are posing or may pose and the necessary solutions to them. Individuals in the society also believe that there are solutions to the problems affecting them and that these solutions will only have immediate results, usually without much cost or pain if there is a way they can convey these solutions, their problems and views especially about government to the same government. Furthermore, people believe the government is so complex and there is no way they can understand what is happening if there is no avenue through which societal happenings can be explained to them and a medium through which they can also express their own views about such problems. This leaves them feeling frustrated and angry because they feel helpless.

This is the point where the editorial in newspapers comes to play a

vital role to serve as the voice of the voiceless in the society. The Nigerian press has a role to play to serve as the eyes and ears of members of the community by publishing editorials that air their views and also speak their minds as well. By the social responsibility and agenda setting function of the Nigerian press, they are meant to determine important issues to be published as editorials and ensure that such editorials portray the voice of individuals in the society. Since the newspaper is the voice of the community and the editorial is the voice of the newspaper, then the editorial should reflect the voice of the community. This voice can inform readers, stimulate thinking, mould opinion and occasionally move people to action.

Therefore, the presentation and analysis of the data above explains in clear terms the editorial content of Nigerian national newspapers. From the analysis of the content categories, it could be inferred that the four national newspapers focus more on economic issues as against other categories. This study also revealed that newspaper editorial content mostly build on existing news and focus on socio economic issues and sometimes on government policies. From the data gathered, the quality of editorials by the four national newspapers was high and okay. The conclusion here is that Nigerian newspaper editorials are of high quality with regard to the content and language of presentation of the issue under discussion.

Furthermore, the data analyzed also indicates that more than half of the editorials are critical editorials as they took positions against the issue under analysis. This is a pointer to the fact the editorials did not support the position expressed by a particular policy or issue under discussion. The data presentation, analysis and discussion has also aided in answering the research questions and satisfying the study objectives.

### **Research Question One:**

#### **What Is the Content of Editorials of Nigeria's National Newspapers?**

Table 1 and Fig.1 provide answer to this research question. It is evident from the findings that newspaper editorials focus more on economic issues than any other issue of public interest in Nigeria.

In the words of Karl Marx, the economy of a nation is the infrastructure while other things are the superstructure. Thus, if the economy is bad, other things are affected as they all make up the economy. Nigeria is a country ravaged

by economic problems and battling daily with economic instability. Citizens of the country are in turn affected by the resultant effect of the dilapidated economy and are faced by problems such as poverty, unemployment, hunger, lack of infrastructures, etc. The individuals in this society look for means through which they can voice their suffering state to the government and also propose possible solutions. Since they do not have direct access to government, the newspaper medium is the nearest means. Since editorials are meant to serve as the voice of the voiceless in the society, newspapers focusing more on economic issues than any other content indicate that they play this primary role to a large extent. Thus, this trend should be encouraged in the newspapers.

#### **Research Question Two:**

##### **Which Type of Editorial Is Mostly Used By Nigerian National Newspapers?**

Table 2 and Fig. 2 help answer this question. From the data gathered, it was observed that most national newspapers focus more on news editorials. They dwell on issues already raised in the news of the day and build on already existing news pegs. This trend is followed by social editorials and subsequently policy editorials..

#### **Research Question Three:**

##### **Is The Editorial Content of Nigerian National Newspapers of Very High Quality?**

The results of this study as analyzed and presented in Table 2 answer this question. The editorials in Nigerian national newspapers were found to be of high quality with regard to the content and language of presentation.

#### **Research Question Four:**

##### **Do Nigerian National Newspaper Editorials Always Take Stand in Support of the Issues of The Day?**

Table 3 and Fig. 3 help answer this research question. Based on the result of the study, the editorials in the Nigerian national newspapers usually take stand against the issue of the day. The implication of this result is that most of the editorials were critical in nature. Second, taking stand against negative vices ravaging the society is a phenomenon that should be encouraged and sustained

in the Nigerian press.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

With reference to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested and directed to the Nigerian press towards ensuring and maintaining quality performance in the use of editorials as effective means of reaction on contemporary national and international issues of great public importance.

It is evident that the press as the major voice of any society has the power to mould public opinion through their various publications and writings. Thus, if editorial pages are going to provide leadership in the coming years, editorial writers will have to possess some other qualities more difficult to identify than the skills of obtaining information and putting words on pages. Corroborating this view, Kenneth (1994, p.300) notes:

They will need insight, if they are to perceive what is really going on in the world. They will need vision, to help them see what the future can be. They will need optimism, for surely one of the roles of the editorial page is to remind readers that solutions can be found for problems. They will need to retain faith in the "self-righting" process that John Milton wrote about in his defence of press freedom, *Areopagitica* and maintain a conviction that, if all the facts and all the viewpoints are allowed to come forth in the marketplace of ideas, the right decisions will be made and the right actions will be taken.

We will, therefore, like to recommend a solution proposed by Sevellon Brown, editor-publisher, *Journal-Bulletin*, towards the effectiveness of the editorial page. He believes that the journey to the outstanding and distinct nature of the editorial page begins with the editorial staff. He posits thus:

But the importance of the editorial staff and the editorial conference to the whole newspaper operation today goes deeper than the traditional reason for the pursuit of excellence in the editorial page. No newspaper today can be first-rate news medium without the support of a first-rate editorial staff. This

is because the coverage and presentation of news cannot be just a mechanistic process... Men of a different point of view and with the quite separate responsibility of the editorial writing staff are needed to steer the whole newspaper operation to the course that will give the reader the fullest understanding... What I hope for is that an increasing number of publishers will accept the proposition that the auxiliary service of an adequate editorial staff and the effort to produce a sound and creditable editorial page will prove a leaven and a guide to the whole newspaper operation... (Cited in Waldrop, 1955, p.18).

Over the years, most Nigerians lost hope in the editorial page of our daily newspapers because they were not able to help in conveying their heartfelt feelings to the government. Thus, the readership of the editorial page diminished drastically, whereas, from the findings of this research it is very much obvious that the newspapers are doing a lot to make the editorial take its place as a voice of the voiceless. In restoring the hope of Nigerians in editorials and the editorial page, editorial readership can also be greatly expanded and intensified if editors and publishers will take interest in developing strong editorial columns and pages. This could only be achieved if the right kinds of professionals are hired on the editorial team and board.

Furthermore, some individuals in the society believe that most of the newspaper publishers and editors are the same people who collaborate with top government officials in ruining the economy. In correcting this notion, publishers and editors must give up, not only outwardly but in their heart all evil liaisons with economic and political groups. They must be seen to be non partisan in socio political affairs of the nation. They could be advocates of mass oriented issues but must do this with intelligence, finesse, fairness and journalistic objectivity in mind. For no reason must ethics of media practice be jettisoned for cheap popularity gotten from unnecessary mass sympathy and support. Sound journalism should be above parochial and petty individual interests.

To be above board as suggested above, the editors and publishers must professionally inspect the basis of their own editorial policies. Editorial independence must as well take top priority. The first requisite feature of editorial

independence is that the newspapers must abandon their allegiance to political parties and fly the flag of freedom at their masthead. Nigerian newspapers should also note that objectivity in opinion is achieved not by emasculating editorials, but by directing every possible ounce of missionary zeal and hellfire to the service of the entire community rather than merely to a part of it.

Furthermore, all national newspapers in Nigeria must dedicate their editorial page to the welfare of all the people, not merely to the interest of one exclusive and fortunate class and there must be a renewed emphasis upon the importance of the editorial page. Again, more money will have to be spent on the editorial page, and more talent allotted to it. Through this, readers will turn to it with the expectation of being informed, stimulated, or amused, not in the confidence that they will find there the same old sloppily-written public relations pieces associated with partisan editorial boards.

Newspaper editorials should also promote socialization. Okunna (1998, p.108) cited in Ekeanyanwu (2007) notes that through the process of socialization, the individual is made aware of and internalizes the values, norms and acceptable behaviour pattern of the society. They provide a common body of knowledge, the internationalization of which enables people to operate as effective members of their society.

Editorial independence most of time is subjected negatively to ownership influence. Most of the thriving newspapers in Nigeria are individually owned. Some were even established to achieve political and economic ends of their publishers. The defunct National Concord of MKO Abiola was established primarily for political reasons. This is the major reason for the argument of the authors in support of people ownership of media industries in Nigeria. People ownership encourages corporate ownership as against individual ownership. This way, many more persons are in control of the media industry. The present situation in Nigeria where only individuals own and control the media industry has given rise to many unprofessional conducts and abuses on the part of media professionals (Ekeanyanwu, 2007). This will curtail or totally eliminate the

undue pressure put on media professionals by their publishers.

The point here is that apart from private ownership, the public should also get involved through joint ownerships, corporate ownership, and group ownership to avoid the excesses of the private media moguls who may be hell bent on pursuing partisan political interests through their media houses. It is also the argument in this paper that more media houses owned and run by corporate individuals will ensure more access, more analysis of issues, better coverage, more reportage and more presentation of all sides of a controversy, conflict or crises.

In conclusion, the study has revealed that the Nigerian newspapers exemplify the functional value of editorials in acting as a voice of the people of a particular society. It was also noted that the editorials written and published by these newspapers most of the time are based on the news of the day. In other words, the content of the editorials most times, depends on issues pertinent in the country at a particular point in time, issues on the minds of the public and partly socio economic issues challenging the society.

Since the newspaper is the voice of the community and the editorial is the voice of the newspaper, then the editorials in Nigerian national newspapers should reflect the voice of the community.

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