

## Attitude of University of Uyo Staff towards Editorial Opinions in Select Nigerian Newspapers

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### Abstract

The researchers examined the attitude of newspaper reading staff members of university of Uyo towards newspaper editorial opinions. Specifically, the researchers studied the attitude of staff members of the University of Uyo, Nigeria, towards editorial opinions of *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Nation* and *Nigerian Pulse*. The data were obtained through a survey method and the instrument was the questionnaire. While the population of the study was 5,649, being the population of both the academic and administrative staff of University of Uyo; the sample size was 374. A major finding was that editorial opinions are not a significant factor in newspaper reading by staff of University of Uyo, as most of the respondents, among other things, rated editorials carried in the select newspapers as average in content.

**Keywords:** Editorial, Opinion, Newspaper, Journalism, News, Features, Agenda Setting, Readership, Attitude, Exposure

### Introduction

Newspaper contents, whether in hard or soft copies, are usually divided into three traditional forms, content categories or sections to help the readers easily locate their interests. The major forms are: news, features and advertisements. What may be regarded as the fourth form is the editorial- the opinion or position of the newspaper house on a topical matter of public importance (Udoh, 2021). While news contents, as the primary form, inform; features educate and entertain and while advertorials are purely commercial, the primary function of editorial opinions is that of persuading readers not just for such readers to keep patronising the newspapers, but for them to understand public issues the way the newspapers understand or view such issues. As a very important content of a newspaper, editorials are usually a must in newspapers managed by properly trained editorial personnel. This is because editorial is like a brain box, moderating the position of the newspaper organisation on a matter of public concern.

The editorial opinion unit of a newspaper comments on news and newsmakers to bring about desired changes in the society and from the editorial page, the readers are able to feel the pulse of the editorial board and get to know their views concerning societal issues (Udoh, 2021). Again, to Udoh (2021), editorial opinions are usually supported with facts because facts are vital to the development of a good newspaper and they set the tone or direction of the newspaper; in other words, a newspaper that is known for rumours is hardly patronised. Apart from persuading the reader, editorials perform other basic functions of attacking, teaching, defending and praising. This gives rise to different types of editorials, such as, persuasive, action, informative, interpretative and entertainment editorials. In order to guide the content of the editorial opinion, every newspaper organisation has an editorial policy which basically spells out the mission and vision of the newspaper. This policy dictates what a newspaper carries as news, feature, advertisement and importantly, what the newspaper carries as its own corporate opinion on a matter of public concern. It is pertinent to point out that influential to any editorial policy of a newspaper is the political and cultural environment. This means that a newspaper usually seeks to promote and sustain available political and economic community which will enable the people to live a free and reasonably

prosperous life. In other words, a newspaper gather, disseminate and comment on information truthfully and stand firmly between the people and the authorities of the same system. Editorials are fast becoming a standard feature on the editorial pages of Nigerian newspapers and in Nigeria, *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Nation* and *Punch* are some of the newspapers that feature regular editorials.

Again, newspaper contents are arranged according to the editorial policy of the newspaper house. However, news stories, features and advertisements remain the traditional newspaper contents. But within these broad contents, otherwise called media forms, are sub-contents which include editorial opinions. Whereas, news remains the primary content of a newspaper, features or opinions are the secondary newspaper contents, while advertisements are the tertiary newspaper or media contents or forms. What this analysis may mean is that while newspaper readers primarily look for news, first, when they get copies or access a newspaper, they usually relax or take time to peruse other contents such as feature stories and advertisements either placed or sponsored by them or those placed or sponsored by other people. However, this is not to say that newspaper readers do not select or patronise newspapers because of other forms or contents; such a content could be an editorial opinion. This is why this study has become necessary as it sought to know whether there are certain newspaper readers who would choose a newspaper and read it constantly not because of its major headlines, but mainly because of the editorial opinion that such a newspaper usually carries.

### Statement of the Problem

According to Udoh (2021), an editorial opinion page is the most important page of a newspaper as it gives the newspaper the opportunity to express to its readers an opinion or a position it feels is important to bring to public attention. From this premise, it could be said that through an editorial, newspaper readers are able to feel the pulse of a newspaper and get to know its views concerning societal issues that may be of importance to them. But in as much as some individuals may share similar attitudes, other individuals differ in many aspects and their exposure to newspaper editorials could be influenced by many factors. One of such factors could be the editorial slants, policies, other newspaper contents, rating policies, beliefs as well as philosophies of the newspaper, among others.

For instance, it may not be every newspaper reader that understands the editorial philosophy or slant of a newspaper. This is because of the demographic and psychological differences that may exist among newspaper readers. Similarly, because of individual differences, it may not be all readers of the select newspapers that would rate the editorial contents of each of the newspapers under review. The frequency at which each of the readers read the select newspapers is worrisome to this study too. A combination of the factors mentioned above, among others, summarises what worries these researchers; hence, it becomes expedient to investigate the extent to which newspaper editorial opinions influence or determine the attitude of staff of the University of Uyo towards the select newspapers. Arising from the foregoing, the question, therefore, is: what is the attitude of staff of the University of Uyo towards *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Nation*, *Punch* and *Nigerian Pulse* newspapers in Nigeria based on their editorial opinions?

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were:

1. Ascertain how often University of Uyo staff read editorial opinions of *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Nation*, *Punch* and *Nigerian Pulse* newspapers.
2. Identify the newspaper with the highest editorial readership by the staff members.
3. Find out the class of editorials mostly read by University of Uyo staff members.
4. Examine how such readers rate editorials in the select Nigerian newspapers.

## **Review of Related Literature**

According to Quinn (2005), newspapers are portable and flexible and give readers a chance to go into details about a subject and discover things they did not know about. They are among the most accessible texts available to the vast majority of people like the literate, illiterate, young and old, students, workers and elites in any community. Given a reasonable degree of education, there are easy to read and navigate. Using the perspective of their functions, Igbeka & Ola (2010) see newspapers as loose documents that provide up-to-date information on local, state, national and world issues. 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. Duyile (2005, p.63) says that editorial or leader is the "opinion of the newspaper simply written for the understanding of readers, leading them to take decisions on the issues being discussed." Hoffman (2007, p. 113) on the other hand, views an editorial, in its broad perspective, as a "statement of opinion from an editor or publisher about you and your business or media coverage generated by news staff." But in their views, Okoro & Agbo (2003, p. 125) capture the concept of the editorial as "a critical evaluation, interpretation and presentation of significant, contemporary events in such a way as to inform, educate, entertain and influence the reader."

Ukonu (2005) describes editorial as the melting pot for all kinds of journalistic writings. According to him, investigative, interpretative and hard news reporting are incorporated into editorials. Objectivity, precision, specialism and advocacy are also styles adopted in treating editorial topics. "An editorial also has some features of a story because of its subjectivity posture. In some cases, thought -provoking letters to the editor are often used to gauge public opinion. When critically exploited, letters to the editor could serve as useful raw materials in writing an editorial. This is because letters to the editor can give some useful insights into emerging controversial and topical issues of public significance" (Ate, 2006).

While the BBC English Dictionary defines attitude as one's way of thinking and feeling about something, Oyeyemi (2005) observes that reading is a means of tapping knowledge from superior minds. To him, reading involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall or meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader. The resulting meanings are thereafter organised into thinking process according to the purpose adopted by the reader, such an organisation leads to modified thought and/or behaviour or else leads to a new behaviour which takes its place either in person or in social development. Udoh (2021) notes that editorial opinions could be used as instrument of persuasion aimed at influencing public opinions on pertinent national issues. In the words of Lauterer (2006, p. 144), "nothing in the newspaper makes people madder than something on the editorial page with which they disagree." To some writers, it is important for a good editorial writer to imbibe certain guidelines on the concept of editorial writing. These guidelines will enable the writer to appreciate the qualities of a good editorial. Ate (2007); Onabajo (2000); Ukonu (2005); Okoro & Agbo (2003) captured the general hints guiding the concept of editorial writing. These are: institutional flavour, plain language, exactness, catchiness, human interest, originality, factuality and research based.

Using 348 members of staff, Gbonegun, Okoji & Oloyede (2016) in their study, adopted in-depth interview and cross-sectional survey to sample views of top management and members of staff of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria to examine the state of affair of editorials, especially on analysis of audience apathy towards newspapers' editorials in Nigeria. Findings indicated that management staff of the University of Ilorin were unanimous in their submissions that newspaper editorials are important to their office, but only to the extent that the commentators align with the institutions' tripartite mandate of teaching, research and community development. Findings showed that a greater percentage of staff read newspaper editorials frequently. Also, Jokodola &

Ekeanyanwu (2009) made use of content analysis to determine the content and treatment of Nigerian newspaper editorial. The population of the study was all the national daily newspaper published and circulated in Nigeria, with the exclusion of weekend and evening papers and all the editions of the *Guardian*, *Punch*, *Vanguard* and *This Day* newspapers published in Nigeria within the study period. All these aggregated to 512; that is, five issues per week per each select newspaper for a period of six months. The sampling technique was purposive sampling and the sampling size was 288 issues (editions) gotten from a total of 512 issues of the four selected newspaper. The results of the analyses showed that editorials concentrated most of its themes on economic issues and news editorials are commonly used to present these issues.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Miller (2005), theories help researchers to understand or explain phenomena they observe in the social world. Therefore, theoretically speaking, the individual differences theory suffices for this study. This theory was propounded by Melvin De Fleur in 1970. It is a theory of mass communication that proposed that individuals respond differently to the mass media according to their psychological needs, and that individuals consume the mass media to satisfy those needs. It believes that the pattern of understanding and interpreting of one person may be different from that of another, who is attending to identical media content.

This means that certain people are selective to what they read, since individuals differ in their personal psychological make-up. The result is different in perception, however, the psychological processes of selective attention, selective retention, selective perception and selective exposure helps an individual decide what to pay attention to (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008; Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). This theory is relevant to this study because University of Uyo Staff are composed of different individuals, so they respond differently to what they read and what they do not read in newspaper according to their psychological needs and desires. Also, it is relevant to this study due to the fact that University of Uyo staff who read newspaper editorials do so separately and thus cannot be influenced the same way on the message they received from newspaper editorials.

### **Study Design**

The research technique that was used for this study is the survey method. Survey involves a method in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few people or items, considered to be representative of the entire group. The population of this study comprises staff of University of Uyo. According to the institution's Directorate of Personnel, the academic staff members of University of Uyo are 1,521 while, the administrative staff members are 4,128, altogether, putting the total number of staff of University of Uyo at the time of this study at 5,649. Therefore, the population for this study is 5,649. The sample size of 374 was drawn using Taro Yamane formula. Sampling technique as noted by Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafu & Okpanachi, (2012) is that part of statistical practice concerned with the selection of a subset of elements from within a population to yield some knowledge about the whole population. Purposive sampling was used as the sampling procedure. Purposive sampling also known as selective or subjective sampling is a sampling technique in which a researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study. Since the sample size was 374, the researcher purposively selected 374 staff of University of Uyo who read newspapers to study. The research instrument used in gathering data for this study was questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 10 items and consists of information regarding the type of staff the respondents are, and information regarding the subject matter of the study.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 374 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the academic and administrative staff of the University. Out of the 374 returned, 370 copies representing 99% were found useful for analysis. However, 4 copies representing 1% could not be used, since it was not completed by respondents and so not suitable for analysis. The tabulated analysis presented below addresses the study objectives directly:

**Table 1: Frequency of Editorial Reading**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	150	40.5
Weekly	160	43.2
Monthly	45	12.2
Hardly	15	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents read newspaper editorials weekly, while few people hardly read newspaper editorials.

**Table 2: The Newspaper with the Highest Editorial Readership**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Punch</i>	108	29.2
<i>The Guardian</i>	66	17.8
<i>The Nation</i>	86	23.2
<i>Vanguard</i>	95	25.7
<i>Nigerian Pulse</i>	15	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100</b>

The data in the above table show that majority of the respondents read *Punch* newspaper editorials more than other newspapers.

**Table 3: The Class of Editorials mostly read**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sport	25	6.8
Political	80	21.6
Economic	130	35.1
Governance	115	31.1
None of the above	20	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100</b>

Majority of the respondents read editorials that centre on economic issues. This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents answered to that effect.

**Table 4: Rating of Editorial Contents**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Interesting	160	43.2
Very interesting	42	11.4
Average	168	45.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100</b>

Majority of the respondents rate Nigerian newspaper editorials as average.

## Discussion of Findings

Table 1 shows that more people read newspaper political editorials weekly. This table shows that respondents numbering 160 read newspaper political editorials weekly. This is because some newspapers do not carry political editorials daily, but weekly or two times in a week. So, since more people get to read the newspaper that carry their editorials weekly, they get to read political editorials only weekly. It also shows that 150 staff read political editorials daily, while 45 staff read political editorials monthly and 15 people hardly read newspaper political editorials, not because they do not read newspapers, but they read newspapers once in a while, and also the political editorials of those newspapers. This aligns with the study of Gbonegun, Okoji & Oloyede (2016), which found that a greater percentage of staff read newspaper editorials frequently.

Not only do University of Uyo staff members read newspaper political editorials weekly, majority of them, ranging from 168 staff, rate political editorials as a newspaper content to be average; that is, it is not very interesting and it is not bad, while 42 people rate it as being very interesting - these are people that understand what editorials are all about, comprehend the language used in writing it and know the worth of the knowledge they get from reading newspaper political editorials; and 160 respondents rated it as being interesting. This is because it is well researched and full of information. Some administrative staff while filling the questionnaire, said that political editorials are for the highly intellectuals, because of the technicality of words used in writing them. Thus, that is why most of them see it as being average because it is not fully understandable to them. This conforms to what Okunna & Onugha, (2002) said as one of the criticisms of editorial that some editorials are written with only the highly educated in mind. Gbonegun, Okoji & Oloyede's (2016) findings also revealed that audience apathy towards newspaper editorials could be linked to the extent of technicality in the use of language in editorial, the belief that editorials are meant for certain class in the society and the subject matter discussed in its content. Therefore, the finding of this study have revealed that more staff of University of Uyo read newspaper political editorials weekly and they also rate it as being average.

Naturally, when readers are exposed to reading more than two newspapers, there is a tendency for some of the newspapers to attract more readership than the rest. Therefore, with the assumption that the respondents actually read newspapers and for their individual editorial related reasons, it became natural to find out which of the select newspapers that they read most just because of the editorials contents of such newspapers. From table 2, it becomes obvious that the *Punch* was the most read newspaper among the four select news tabloids. For instance, the *Punch*, which, for some years now, presents itself as the "most widely read newspaper in Nigeria," attracted 108 (29%) readership, others, namely: *Guardian*, *Nation*, *Vanguard* and *The Nigerian Pulse* had far less readership based on editorial content. This result, apart from supporting the individual differences theory, also upholds the uses and gratifications theory of communication and media studies. While individual differences theory presupposes that human beings differ in their individual views of life, which include their individual views of media content, the uses and gratifications theory, on the other hand, presupposes that individuals expose themselves to objects and situations due to their needs. This means that the reason the newspaper readers differ in their newspaper choices is that they each find certain levels of satisfaction from reading certain newspapers. However, according to experts, an individual's needs, attitudes, prior beliefs and other cognitive and emotional states play an important part in screening and selecting media exposure and interpretation. This means that certain people are selective to what they read, since individuals differ in their personal psychological make-up. The result is different in perception, however, the psychological processes of selective attention, selective retention, selective perception and selective exposure helps an individual decide what to pay attention to (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008).

The study classified editorials into political, economic, sport and governance as the major editorial classes. The expectation was that readers have their classes of interest when it comes to selecting or reading newspapers and their editorials. Table 3 indicates that more people read editorials on politics, than other kinds of editorials. In other words, more respondents preferred editorials that are on political developments in the society to those in, other societal issues. The table shows that respondents numbering 130 read editorials on politics, 115 people read editorials on governance, 80 read on economy, 25 staff read on sports, while 20 staff of University of Uyo said that they read any kind of editorial presented by the newspaper. To this class of readers, they do not have any specific kind editorial they read, hence, they could read anyone on politics, economic, sport or governance. Again, this theoretically implies that people read different kind of editorials because of the wealth of information (gratifications) that they stand to gain. Hence, information requirement influences readership. The major finding in this aspect of the study has shown that majority of University of Uyo staff read editorials on politics. This means that if political editorials are published regularly, more readers might be attracted to newspapers.

Again, 20 respondents agree that they read newspaper editorials casually or as they are published. This means that some readers read editorials unexpectedly or unplanned. One of the administrative staff while filling the questionnaire said that some political editorials are written based on stale issues; so, it does not prompt her interest in reading it, except her attention is captured by the editorial's title. Again, this conforms to what the theory of individual difference, which says that certain people are selective to what they read since individuals differ in their personal psychological makeup. It also agrees to what the theory of uses and gratifications which holds that the more the contents meet the actual needs of the audience, the greater the chance that it will be chosen. That is why most staff of University of Uyo read newspaper political editorials because they read other newspaper contents that meets their actual needs.

By rating of editorials, the study examined the respondents' evaluations of both the content of editorials and their views about the newspapers' attitude towards editorial publishing. Importantly, the study took a look at how the quality of editorials in the select newspapers, especially in terms of how interesting and relevant the editorial topics were. This yardstick is in line with the position of Ate (2007); Onabajo (2000); Ukonu (2005); Okoro & Agbo (2003) on the centrality of editorial and the general hints guiding the concept of editorial writing. To them an editorial topic must be humanly interesting, must have institutional flavour, plain in language, exact, catchy, original, factual and research-based. From the angle of interest, majority of respondents (45.4 %) said that editorials carried in the select newspapers were average in content; while some of the respondents (43.2 %) rated the editorials as interesting in content. Only a negligible number of respondents (11.4 %) rated editorials carried by the select newspapers within the period of study as very interesting. While this finding affirms the theory of selectivity, it also shows that the respondents' attitude towards editorials carried in the select newspapers is not encouraging.

## Conclusion

This is an attitude study which was aimed at examining how often University of Uyo staff read newspaper editorials; identifying the newspaper with the highest editorial readership by the staff members; identifying the class of editorials mostly read by University of Uyo staff members and examining how such readers rate editorials in Nigerian newspapers. From the findings, it came to the fore that while most respondents read newspaper editorials weekly, most of them read editorials of *Vanguard* more than those of any other newspapers and while most of the respondents read economy-based editorials, most of the respondents rated editorials carried by the select newspapers as being average. From the above, it is hereby concluded that the attitude of the respondents towards

editorial opinions carried in the select newspapers is considerably low because most of the respondents do neither read editorial opinions on regular bases nor rate such contents to be very high in quality.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made based on this study:

1. Newspapers should conduct more readership survey to know how frequently they are being read.
2. They should be more competitive so that no single newspaper is more massively read.
3. Newspapers should cover a wide range of issues to give readers more areas of interest.

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