

Is news all about politics?

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Abstract

News covers information on all aspects of society that are worthy of publication, following a strict observance of the media's social responsibility. However, in recent times, these general-interest newspapers have become narrow-spectrum in their interest. This study seeks to ascertain the level of coverage of different issues in general-interest newspapers and compare it with political news; the reason for the possible slant and the impact on the audience and society in Nigeria. The research employs the explanatory mixed method, using content analysis of two newspapers- *Guardian* and *Daily Sun*, interviews of experts and surveys of readers. The findings show that out of 2862 news articles 644 were related to politics. The survey methods affirmed the restive situation in the country as one of the major reasons for high coverage, adding that the increasing reports on politics have crippled the awareness to the needs of other aspects of the society but has sensitized the Nigerian society to the occurrences in leadership positions.

Key words: *News, Politics, Nigeria*

Introduction

"At the beginning, mass media (newspaper) was society's primary instrument of mass communication and till today it is the log book of human affairs more than any other means of communication." (Hynds as cited in Daramola, 2003, p.120). Bako (2000, p.54) as cited in Omenugha and Oji (2008) further explains this, "the average

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Nigerian regards whatever emanates from the press as the 'gospel' truth, which he swallows hook, line and sinker. For any reader, it would be difficult to convince him not to believe what they read in the papers. Not even when an apology is made for an incorrect publication could such a reader be convinced..." This shows the place of the mass media (especially the newspaper) in Nigeria. In such a developing country with a renascent democracy, the press is believed to be the voice of society, the watchdog of the government and the bridge between the government and the governed. Brown and Udomisor (2015) added that 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.

Even the Nigerian 1999 Constitution reiterates this responsibility when it states in section 22 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, p.59). As a result, Ndolo (2006) asserts that it is the job of all the news media to tell people what is going on in their community- locally, nationally or globally. According to Ebo (1998, p.14), in respect to this responsibility, the mass media should serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas, comments, even criticism (in features, health, politics, science and technology, crime, arts and culture, women affairs etc.), as well as, give a balanced viewpoint of the constituent groups in society.

Then, why has there been a steady rise in the reportage and assessment of the political aspect of the country to the detriment of other aspects of the society? A glance at the TV during news hour or the headlines on the newspapers screams one theme: politics. Addressing this issue, Golding and Elliot (1979) as cited in Oso (1991) remarks that the origin of the press in Nigeria is enmeshed as an organ of political agitation. And so, this legacy has continued to influence the practices and outlook of the Nigerian press. They were not wrong.

So, is news only news about politics? With the reports on politics swallowing up a lot of 'eye-time', what is the frequency of political news reportage as compared to other sector's coverage? What are the reasons for the imbalance of reports? What are the influences of these overt political scoops on the audience and society? This research is an attempt to understand the dynamics involved in framing news as only news about politics.

This study employs two research designs- content analysis and survey. Content analysis is limited to the manifest content of the two Nigerian newspapers- *The Guardian*, common amongst the elites, and *Daily Sun*, common amongst the masses. The survey, though covering Nigeria, is limited to the South-East region of Nigeria where responses from newspaper readers and news analysts are collated.

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 (Agbese, 2007). 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 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, AlhajiShehuShagari, decided to stop reading Nigerian newspapers and magazines in order to "enjoy the peace of mind" that he had "longed for all his life".Shagari was overthrown in a military coup only four months after 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).

A far cry from the days of the town-crier and the village gossip, news today is illimitable and is rather global in its dissemination, in its bid to satisfy a teeming public hunger for information. It has become an integral part of the morning rituals in modern society.

Categories 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 Fenton (1954), "one important set of category is the somewhat natural division of geographic territories." This means that news is covered based on activities or situations that are local, regional, national or international. Hence, division of labor 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, p.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."

However, Shoemaker (1996) expanded Hemingway's division and placed a lid on the cover when 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.”

Okunna (1999) divided news (medium) along general-interest and special-interest lines. In this study, all the newspapers are general-interest. General-interest, according to her, refers to a wide variety of reading materials that are intended for a majority of the public. These include entertainment, opinion, news (various kinds), interpretation etc. Following this backdrop, it is an anomaly to see the so-called general interest papers projecting predominantly one aspect of news (politics). This study would be used to find the reason(s) behind the increase of political news reports in Nigeria (to the detriment of other aspects).

But first, what is political news? Political news is the publication bordering on political information passed on to whom it may concern by those assigned or who assume such responsibility, usually between the government and the citizenry. 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 human development. However, this doesn’t make other sectors unimportant. Nwabueze (2011) saw this coming when he specifically explained the significance of reporting other sectors of society. This shows a rather responsible press.

Social responsibility of the Nigerian press

One of the duties of the press to the public is “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 promote and militate 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, and mobilize on all aspects of the society. Yet, how would these things be attainable in the Nigerian society, with media organizations, especially the newspaper, housing a tilting majority of their coverage to political news?

Power of the Press

The power of the press cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria, it has championed the nationalist movements of the 1940s; it was the voice that compelled soldiers to stand their ground during the Nigeria-Biafra war of the 1960s; it saw to the toppling of governments such as Shehu Shagari’s during the 1980s; it brought military regimes to its knees during the 1980s and 1990s which brought about the murder and incarceration of good journalists like Dele Giwa, NdukaIrabor, Ken T SaroWiwa, Tunde Thompson etc. The Nigerian government saw this power and during that period brought different measures to gag the press such as military decrees that restricts press freedom, clamping down of press stations, undue imprisonment of pressmen,

retroactive laws enacted to victimize pressmen, monopoly of the electronic media etc.

The powers of the press have resonated from just mere information to agenda-setting and then opinion-molding. Cohen (1963) understood these powers when he said “the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion...” (p.13). Most of the decisions people take are from the commentaries of the press men especially in a slow, education-budding society as Nigeria where the vast majority is ignorant and somewhat clueless. The press is not just seen as a purveyor of information but also a carrier of decision.

Batta, Ashong & Bashir (2013) while quoting a BBC report (2008) on media reporting of climate change and its influence on the audience acknowledged this power of the press when they said “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 picture of the media as a final source of information in the Nigerian society and decision-making. Therefore, in 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. However, what happens when there is over-reportage of a sector of the society? Imagine its influence on the audience and ripple effect on the society to the detriment of other sectors of the society.

Olayiwola (1991) and Oso (2012) listed certain factors that might have influenced this increased rate of political reportage. According

to them, 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.

Apart from outright ownership, there is the presence of knowledge-gap 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 the words of an official, "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, according to Blumler and Guretvich (1995, p.66), is "the degree of political affinity and socio-cultural proximity that is obtained by the media personnel and the political elite." Oso (2012, p.7) explained this when he said, "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 organizations." Yet another reason is the parlous economic situation of many media organizations. Many of them cannot adequately take care of the welfare of their workers in terms of payment of salary; training etc. and this has whittled down professionalism among journalists. It has made them less responsible 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 impact and long-term implication would it have on the audience and society? This research would seek to provide answers. Conversely, the findings of Brown and Udomisor (2015) on their study of political news reportage in Nigeria's *Vanguard* and *Guardian* newspapers found a low rate of political news coverage in the newspapers especially in comparison to other sector coverage but it was observed that the period of study 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 necessitated an unusually high coverage of a subject matter and a blackout of others. To further trump Brown *et al's* findings, Fadairo and Aminu's study on the coverage of corruption news by major newspapers in Nigeria in 2014 recorded 57.2% of the total news stories to be bordering on political news stories while agriculture was at the bottom rung of the ladder.

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. 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 the magazine's 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.

Quoting 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 the stretching powers of the press. This shows that audience-members get information based on the discretion of the media gatekeepers. Remember that gatekeeping is not restricted to accepting and rejecting of information but it also involves shaping, display and timing, repeating the message for emphasis and so on (Folarin, *Ibid*). The media holds such tremendous power but as Oso (2012) pointed out, various reasons bend their hands to report more political news above other aspects of the society which should not be so. With such powers indiscriminately employed in Nigeria, the focus is to know the extent of the damage this wrong

use of power has caused in the society.

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 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... 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. This further belabors the media effects in the Nigerian society and dares to deduce a directly proportional relationship between increase in political reports from the media and increase in political discussions among the populace.

Research methodology

The triangulation method was applied in this study with the content analysis and survey research method. This was done to increase the validity/reliability of the study. Content analysis was chosen in order to examine the frequency, magnitude and prominence given to different news aspects of the society, particularly political news. The survey method includes the questionnaire, which was used to extract information on the feelings and opinions of respondents to unearth the impact of this political news coverage on them, and the interview which was used to determine the reason behind the political news reportage and its influence on society.

The population of study for the content analysis covered all the news articles 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 and the interview covered media experts in the field and academia.

For the content analysis, systematic random sampling (see Ohaja, 2003) was used to pick 12 issues for the first six months of 2014 (two publications per month). Therefore, 24 issues were studied for the

two newspapers, in all 182 days in the first six months of 2014. This was divided by 12 (number of issues under study). Days were used in calculation because the newspapers are dailies, so one daily newspaper after every 15 days was selected:

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).

This was done to eliminate bias in the study. The selection was used for the two newspapers.

In the survey, purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from 15 news analysts for the interview and the Australian calculator by the National Statistical Service (NSS), was used to automatically generate the sample size for the copies of the questionnaire to literate newspaper readers. 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 code sheet for content analysis divided the content into newspaper, genre, magnitude and frequency. The categories are as follows:

A. Media

1. *Guardian*
2. *The Sun*

B. Genre

1. Column
2. Letters 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. Placement: upper half or lower half

A total of 76 questionnaires were administered by hand to the selected sample. Also, the aided interview was used to elicit more precise responses to the questions.

Data presentation and analysis

Analysis from the code sheet

Table 1: Newspaper-wise 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 1 shows the number of news stories contained in the two newspapers for the dates chosen for study. It turns out that *Guardian* had 1444 news stories excluding advertorials and photo news while *Daily Sun* had 1418.

Table 2: Frequency of Issues covered in the newspapers

(A) Media		Politics	Science & technology	Foreign	Arts & life	Business and economy	Sport	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 2 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 issues, within the period studied. *Daily Sun* had 334 (23.6 percent) news stories covering politics while the outstanding 76.4 percent was spread across the other eight sectors.

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 3 shows that 56.2 percent of these reports on politics were news reports (hard news) and 18.9 percent were letters to the editor.

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

Table 4 shows that 19 (7.5 percent) of the stories occupied 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

Frequency of political news reports: Out of the fifteen persons

interviewed, 60 percent stated that political news reports dominate most of the news reports covered in the newspapers but 40 percent maintained that political news coverage is moderate as it should be. They stated that most newspaper readers are opinion leaders. Hence, they share information during discussions with mostly non-readers who are usually not exposed (or choose not to be exposed) to any mass medium.

Reasons for the possible increase in political news coverage in newspapers: 26.7 percent suggested better political communication geared towards development as a reason especially between the government and the governed; 33.3 percent argued media ownership and the newspaper history in Nigeria as influencing factors; 13.3 percent claimed that the brunt rested on the interest of the gatekeepers especially the advertisers; 66.7 percent opined that politics is a “money-making” beat especially in this era of brown-envelopes and news commercialization which is further encouraged by the poor state of living of journalists. Such that even human-interest stories are linked to political issues to “touch it up a bit”; however, 86.7 percent reiterated that the restive situation in the area of politics in the country is one major reason for the focus on political beat.

Extracts from the copies of the questionnaire:

Table 5: Level of exposure to news details on various sectors from the newspapers

Aspects of society	Very much	Not much	Not at all	Not answered	Total
Education	12	53	7	3	75
Entertainment	32	26	10	7	75

					respondents
Economy	29	39	4	3	75
Health	18	49	0	8	75
Politics	58	12	0	5	75
Sports	43	29	3	0	75
					respondents

Table 5 shows that respondents receive more information on politics from newspapers than any other aspect: 58 respondents affirmed this by ticking ‘very much’ when asked how much information on political news they get from news magazines.

Level of influence of news coverage on the populace: Trending sector of society most discussed: 43 percent (politics), 28 percent (sports), 27 percent (fashion/music), 3 percent (business) and 1 percent (health)

Reasons why politics is most discussed: 44 percent stumble upon the discussion amongst friends, 47 percent said it is topical (thanks to the agenda-setting function of the press), 6 percent discuss it because others are discussing it and 3 percent did not answer the question. However, in administering the questionnaire, one of the copies of questionnaires was unaccounted for. Hence, 75 questionnaires data was collected.

Discussion of findings

RQ 1: What is the frequency of political news reportage as compared to other sectors coverage?

The data in Table two shows the frequency of the coverage of political news as well as other aspects of the society. It revealed that 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 coverage of news reports is quite unbalanced, with coverage on politics taking twice that of any other sector.

Also, details from the interview show 60 percent of interviewees concurring that reports on political news is high as against the 40 percent saying it is moderate. From 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 findings support the argument of Haque cited in Udomisor (2002) 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 any sector in the newspapers.

RQ 2: What are the reasons for the imbalance of reports?

The responses from the news analysts suggested possible reasons for this imbalance of coverage. The most common reason given is 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.” Other reasons include, the need to improve political communication between the government and the governed for development as well as to keep the government accountable; media ownership and the newspaper history in Nigeria as influencing factors. This is in tandem with Golding & Elliot (1979) as cited in Oso (1991) that 'Nigerian journalism was ... created by anti-colonial protest, baptized in the waters of politics, and matured in party politics'. Oso (2012) again added that the Nigerian mass media system has developed within the dynamics of the country's political economy and almost all newspaper owners are affiliated to one party or the other, hence, the affinity to political reports.

The interest of the gatekeepers especially the advertisers is another factor. Okunna, (1999) explains that advertisers and government subventions are major means of revenue for newspapers in Nigeria. Therefore, in order to keep the money coming, editors could publish stories that they feel would sell or those that would favor the advertiser or government in question.

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.

The restive situation in the country as a result of issues like the centenary celebrations, national conference and oppositions that came with them, the Nigerians' demonstration for the abducted Chibok girls, scandals and corrupt practices amongst politicians, the Boko Haram menace, the upcoming general elections of 2015, the mass decamping of political party members et cetera. These have been coming up and coverage of them has overshadowed other areas.

RQ 3: What are the influences of these overt political scoops on the audience and society?

Bad perception of politics in Nigeria: data from the questionnaire shows that 90.7 percent had negative perceptions about politics in Nigeria, 8 percent said Nigerian politics is progressive while 1.3 percent were undecided. This was borne out of the predominant coverage of political news in bad light. This exposure has corrupted the average Nigerian's mind concerning politics. To him, politics is a 'dirty game' of manipulation and embezzlement of public funds. This negative mindset has caused extensive damages to the system. This re-emphasizes not just agenda-building but opinion-molding powers of the press;

Ignorance of activities in other sectors of society: Information in Table three shows 122 letters to the editor based on politics out of 236 letters. This is 51.7 percent of the total number of letters to the editor. It shows that the readers have little interest in other areas;

Full-blown awareness of the political arena: The continual reports on politics have aroused certain political awareness in Nigerians. This is shown from the prevalence of politics in discussions. This has led to a somewhat ardent citizenry. This was

manifested in the just-concluded 2015 elections where Nigeria recorded a high voters' turn-out in the elections. One news expert revealed that the society is on the brink of a revolution, thanks to the constant prodding of the press on 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.

Decay in various sectors of society: Newspapers, through their agenda-setting function, have managed to shift society's attention to just politics. Every other person is discussing politics and maybe sports but as they muse, child labor 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 benefitting from the Agricultural scheme under President Goodluck Jonathan, which includes access to fertilizer, seedlings, incentives etc., human rights are being abused by the military in North-East, Nigeria, people are dying in hospitals because of the moribund facilities available, the education sector is dying fast with universities churning out unemployable youths every year. The decline is huge and cancerous.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusion can be drawn, that newspapers report political news at least twice as much as they do the coverage of other sectors. There is a need for better political education, the restive state of the country, the sorry standard of living of journalists and media ownership are some of the factors that are causing this increase in political news reports.

There is a prevalence of unethical practices by journalists and in newspaper houses thanks to news commercialization and the brown envelope syndrome. Omenugha and Oji (2008, p.17-18) captured it clearly when they said, "Publishers in Nigeria, rather than pay attractive wages to the journalists, refer to their identity cards as a meal ticket. In other words, the journalists are encouraged to make money on their own in whatever manner they deem fit..." This is in line with Oso (2012) of the poor standard of living of journalists that have pushed them to follow the beat that gets them paid.

Newspapers are vital channels of communication and opinion-molding in Nigeria, therefore, what they report is usually taken as final and is used to make life decisions (Ekwo, 1996). Society is ignorant of growth in other aspects of the nation because the newspapers have failed to capitalize on them. Citizens are more politically conscious as a result of constant exposure to political news (in newspapers, gatherings and discussion amongst friends).

Newspapers lack proper investigative background of news details, abounds in grammatical errors and information inaccuracies although they are viable platforms for exchange of ideas and expression of dissatisfaction with the system of government which is in line with their social responsibility. News is widely misinterpreted for politics only because the supposed general-interest newspapers are not 'generally-interested' in discussing societal issues.

Suggestions for further research

Future research can be on media ownership in Nigeria. How government dictates society's outcome (opinions, reactions) through ownership of the media? Furthermore on the reasons for the decay in

Nigerian journalism, and who is to blame?

First, the press should strive towards near equal representation of all aspects of the society in the media especially newspapers. It would help the audience to be equally informed in news concerning all segments of the society. They should engage in serious developmental journalism: they should report government's efforts alongside their faults especially in political news coverage. 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-public examples should be made of defaulters to deter other.

Also, government 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. Ministers and ministries of these other sectors should be charged to take responsibility or be kicked out. The national assembly should get active in carrying out their oversight functions and anti-corruption agencies alike.

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 avid reading. They should pick interest in other

sectors of society and demand information on them. 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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