

## Coverage of Foreign News by Nigerian Newspapers A Content Analysis of This Day and Nation

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examined the coverage of foreign news by Nigerian newspapers. The study is anchored on the background that qualitative and quantitative imbalances in the information flow are not restricted to the Western media. Relying on the agenda-setting theory, framing analysis, and the gate-keeping media theory, the paper used Thisday and the Nation newspapers to ascertain the prominence given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers. The study also ascertained the direction, the depth and the frequency of publication given to foreign news by the selected newspapers. The study adopted the content-analytical method, and drew a sample of 220 editions of the two selected newspapers over a one year-study period. Using the coding guide and the coding sheet as the instruments for data collection, the paper ascertained the inter-coder reliability of the two coders trained for the exercise. The data gathered from the study revealed that Nigerian newspapers did not give prominence to foreign news. Results from the study also showed that the frequency of foreign news was low while the depth of foreign news was shallow. The paper concluded that the issue of news imbalance was a universal phenomenon and recommended that journalists should be guided by their ethics and social responsibility to the society in their reportage.

Keywords: Coverage, Foreign News, Nigerian Newspapers

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### INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Communication Scholar, Harold Lasswell, in a classical paper, titled "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," published in 1948, identified three functions of mass media (the press) as surveillance of the environment, correlating parts of society into responding to the environment, and transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next [1]. [2] informs that these three functions mainly focus on the perspective of political science. [3] corroborate this view and add that in 1959, Wright added the "entertainment"

function from the perspective of sociology. Thus, the formation of the classical four-function communication studies in mass communication is finished [4]. Although communication theorists later expanded these four-function-model, they still form the basis of any discourse on the functions of the press (mass media) in the society.

According to [5], an important function of the media is to keep up a surveillance of all the happenings in the world and provide information to the human society. [6] adds that the media have the responsibility of providing news and

cover a wide variety of issues that are of some services to the society. In his own idea, [7] explains that the media help maintain social order by providing instructions on what have to be done in times of crisis thereby reducing confusion among the masses.

Under the "correlation" function, [2], explains that this function relates to how the media's selection of certain news and its interpretation affects how society understands and responds to it. [8] argues that people's attitudes towards political issues, events, public policy etc, are influenced to an extent on how the media frame and present the issue in the discussion/presentation.

Providing explanations to the cultural transmission, [9] explains that it refers to the ability of the media to teach the various norms, rules and values that exist in a society and ensure its transfer from one generation to the next. For entertainment function, [9] informs that this popular function of the mass media refer to the ability of the media to help relax people and create a means of escape from the stress of everyday life.

A critical examination of the above functional paradigm will reveal that the journalists (pressmen) who provide most of these reportages, determine to a very large extent what is published in the print media or what is broadcast in the broadcast media. The way and the manner an issue is framed, primed and/or schemed determine the audience perception of that issue. On the other hand, the decision of the journalist

(pressmen) to report a particular issue and not to report the other one equally influence the knowledge, understanding, opinions and attitudes towards the issue not reported vis-a-viz the issue reported.

Thus, the issue of information flow imbalance becomes rife in the journalism parlance. There are urban-rural information flow imbalance, regional imbalance, national imbalance and international imbalance. Aside from geographical information flow imbalance, there is also content imbalance in the mass media. For example, the issues and happenstance in the rural communities of Anambra State are relatively lower in the news media than the happenstance/issues in the cities like Onitsha, Awka and Nnewi. This formed the background for the study: "Coverage of Foreign News by Nigerian Newspapers - A Content Analysis of *ThisDay* and *The Nation* Newspapers.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

That there is less than perfect parity in the coverage of news among the international media is not surprising, nor is it contestable. What is open for debate however is, the motion that the developed world is consistently biased against the Third World countries. A point often overlooked is that the Third World countries are probably equally biased against the developed world. At the level of international news flow, news reporting of international events and personalities has never served the diverse interests and perspectives of the

peoples. In other words, a particular international issue that may not be important to a particular country may not find news value in the media of the country with less news value.

In line with the above analogy, this study sets to evaluate the coverage of foreign news by Nigerian Newspapers, using *ThisDay* and *The Nation* newspapers. It is not known to the researcher the direction of coverage given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers. Again, the prominence given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers is still not known to the researcher. Furthermore, the depth of the coverage given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers is yet to be ascertained. These are the gap in knowledge which this study intends to fill.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to evaluate the coverage given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers. The specific objectives of the study are as stated below:

- i. To ascertain the general pattern of newspaper reportage of foreign news by Nigerian newspapers.
- ii. To ascertain the prominence given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers.
- iii. To ascertain the volume of foreign news vis-a-viz local news by Nigerian newspapers.
- iv. To ascertain the dominant direction given to foreign news by Nigeria newspapers.

- v. To ascertain the frequency of coverage given to foreign news.

#### **Research Questions**

The under listed questions are posed to further guide the study?

- i. What is the general pattern of newspaper reportage of foreign news by Nigerian newspapers?
- ii. What is the prominence given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers?
- iii. What is the volume of foreign news vis-a-viz local news by Nigerian newspapers?
- iv. What is the dominant direction of foreign news in Nigerian newspapers?
- v. What is the frequency of coverage given to foreign news by Nigerian newspapers?

#### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Agenda setting, gate-keeping and framing analyses provide theoretical backing to this study. This section starts with an analysis of the agenda-setting theory of mass media. It is then followed by an examination of gate-keeping process of news selection and with an examination of how news media frame events and news reports. The notion of agenda setting started with [10] observation that the mass media mediate between the "world outside and the picture in our heads". [11], reinforced this view by asserting that the press is "significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion". Cohen submitted that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is

stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about" [12] submissions were mere expressions of personal observations which lacked empirical foundation. It was [13]study which established an empirical link between media agenda and public agenda. Based on the outcome of their study, McCombs and Shaw stated that:

*Mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda for the public agenda. We judge as important what the media judge as important...by deciding what to emphasize in their news page, the media set agenda of the day. (1974, p. 28)*

Since McCombs and Shaw used the outcome of their study of an American presidential election to advance the argument that the mass media set agenda for public discussion, the theory has received critical and sustained attention from researchers. Central to the agenda-setting theory is the idea that the media influence the level or importance that people attach to what they see, read or hear from the mass media. This suggests that the mass media shape how audiences construct social reality. For example, by selecting certain events and ignoring others and by determining how the selected events are reported, journalists influence the way the public perceive social reality. Agenda setting theory is quite relevant to this study because if the media set the agenda of public discussion, we

assume that sustained media coverage of issues will directly influence the level of importance the Nigerian public attaches to the issues. Therefore, the more attention the mass media devote to an issue, the more likely the public will consider them to be important. [13], for example argued that "...the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interest, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers they read".

Closely related to agenda setting is the notion of media framing. There is abundant literature on how (no news media frame news events which substantially affects how the public perceives news events [14], [15], [16]; [17]. According to [14]: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (italics maintained as in the original). [4] states that frames provide an organizing framework' for journalists who report news events and the public who consume the news. News reporting styles and conventions (e.g. space and time allocation, headline size, placement or positioning of news stories, use of quotations, etc.) are reporting devices used by journalists and editors to increase or reduce the salience of a news report.

In this case, salience means "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" [13]. Therefore, the level of importance which news media attach to an event could be determined by looking at what is included, excluded or suppressed in the news story. Thus, [5] describes framing as "a process of inclusion and exclusion". Similarly, [14], suggests that "frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions". It is not in doubt therefore that what the media in Nigeria include or exclude in the process of framing foreign news issues will determine to a large extent how the audiences will perceive the issues.

Gate-keeping theory also lends support to this study. The origin of the theory is traceable to [18], a psychologist who studied how 'theory of channels and gate keepers' affect social change. The study which was carried out in the domain of psychology no doubt suggests that Lewin's "theory of how 'items' are selected or rejected as they pass through 'channels' could be applied to the flow of news" [19]. Since [20] adapted Lewin's theory to the study of what guides newspaper wire editors' selection of news, several studies on gate-keeping have followed. Many of them sought to establish the degree to which journalists' subjective judgment

influences news selection and whether there were in reality, well defined and consistent objective (rather than subjective) patterns of news selection [5]; [7]; [9]; [13]; [21].

In the context of mass communication, gate-keeping emphasizes the existence of a number of stop gates in lire media which potential news events or items pass through starting from the sources (who decide what to share with others via the media and what to conserve to themselves) to journalists (series of reporters, sub-editors and editors) before such news events or items can be accepted and published as news or rejected and thrown into trash can as unusable materials. The fact is that a number of events (scheduled and unscheduled) compete for coverage by news media on a daily basis. In the same way, field reporters are faced with the challenge of what to cover in preference to several other events. In the newsroom subeditors, editors and editors-in-chiefs are also confronted with the challenge of choosing from an array of news items a few of which can make news of the day. By deciding whether foreign news should scale through several gales in the media and what aspect of the issues should be allowed to pass through the gates, the media by implication, influence Nigerian audience members' construction of reality as regards the issues.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Before 1438 when a German metallurgist, Johann Gutenberg invented

Printing press, write-ups were only hand written, the idea of a mass circulated

newspaper followed the invention of that printing press. According to [6], printers began turning out what was called corantos or currents of news in Holland around 1630. Shortly, corantos spread to Britain. After twenty years, they were replaced by Diurnals which were daily reports of domestic and local events usually concerned with the doings of the king and parliament. In 1690, Benjamin Harris published the first American newspaper called Public Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestic. Significant advances in printing technology resulted in setting up of a newspaper for a mass audience. In 1833, Benjamin Day founded the New York Sun. This newspaper for the masses became possible following Fredrick Koenig's invention of a two cylinder press in 1814. The press printed both sides of the paper at once and could turn out copies at the rate of 1100 per hour. The other impetus needed at the time was to harness an outside power source to the press to increase its speed. In 1822, Dan Treadwell achieved that feat by harnessing a real horse to his machine, thereby creating a true one horse power printing press. It was later replaced by steam power.

The origin of newspaper in Nigeria can be traced to 1859. According to [5], it was in that year that a European missionary, the Revered Henry Townsend established a printing press at Abeokuta, with which he printed Africa's first vernacular newspaper called IweIrohin [16], noted that the

history of the Nigerian press (newspaper) could be studied by breaking it into periods. She said that the first period is from 1859 to 1920, the second period is 1920 to 1937, the third era of the development was between 1937 and 1947, and the fourth era started from 1947 and stretched to 1960, while the fifth and final era came into being from 1960 to the present day. These periods were marked by progressive indications of development ranging from publication regularity, format, scope in terms of news coverage, circulation and readership, to design.

The media has become an essential part of our lives; an average Nigerian has at least daily inevitable contact with the media at any of the levels. Going by [6], the media played most significant roles towards promoting the political, social and economic aspirations of the nation [9]. In the context of sustainable development, the press or mass media remains a vital instrument in realization of nations' goals. It is believed that the media motivate the people as well as ensure participation in the growth and developmental process apart from informing and educating members of the society.

As part of her surveillance' role in respect to information and news, the media being instrument of development is expected to inform and educate members of the society on specific areas of development which ordinarily includes agricultural activities.

Specifically, agriculture has provided employment platform for majority particularly people living in the rural areas. Agriculture by estimation, accounted for over 80% of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) prior to the discovery of crude oil [7]. By 2005, the percentage has reduced to 41% [5] as cited by [13]. In addition, agriculture has been considered as the backbone for rural, social and economic development. Rural development is a direct function of agricultural development without which the later becomes a mirage [5].

However, beyond information and transmission role of the media, the newspaper provides to a large extent background details relevant to the news, explanations of related events, analysis of their importance and implications. The newspapers possess the capacity to do this better than most other media [16].

The foreign press, particularly the Western press, is often willified for the perceived poor image of the development countries in the eyes of the World [6], [11]. The Western media are often accused of distorting events in the developing countries to suit the prejudices and stereotypes of Europeans and Americans [8]: [4]. Foreign journalists sometimes are alleged to fabricate stories about the goings on in a developing country either from scanty information gathered from capital cities or sometimes from their own imaginations conjured in their hotel rooms [19].

Available evidence does not appear to justify the verbal assault against the Western Press for its "negative" coverage of Third World countries. Empirical evidence in this regard is rather scanty while many studies about the volume of news flow between the advanced and the developing countries (between the North and the South in the parlance of the New World Information and Communication Order, NWICO) exist [4]; [8]; and [19], there is little to suggest that sufficient evidence has yet been gathered on the qualitative nature of the imbalance.

Accusations of both quantitative and qualitative imbalance in the news flow between the North and the South have featured not only in the popular media but have dominated discussions at learned conferences. In fact, UNESCO has devoted considerable time, energy and resources to debates on this subject [2]; [4]; [7].

Nigeria is chosen in this study to examine how a country that is claimed to be poorly represented in the eyes of the world mirrors the world to its citizens through its mass media.

#### **Empirical reviews**

In a study on the Nigerian Press Coverage of the Arab Spring: A content Analysis of Six national newspapers, [12], examined the Nigerian Press coverage of the Arab Spring. The paper analyzed the content of six Nigerian Newspapers in their coverage of the Arab Spring for a period of one year, January 1st to December 31st, 2011. The major findings of the study are that the

direction of news coverage of the Arab Spring is unfavourable and the Nigerian press still depends on the foreign media and the international wire services for coverage of events in Africa and other developing countries of the world.

In a related study on the Images of the world, through the eyes of five Nigerian Newspapers, published in the *African Media Review*, [4], questions the popular view that Western media negate the image of the Third World through unprofessionally acquired reports that concentrates on negative activities while ignoring the positive ones. The paper claims that there in no empirical

validation of the view that there is an imbalance in news coverage between the West and the Third World. By content-analysing a sample of Nigerian Newspapers, the author arrives at the conclusion that these papers not only do not have a better balance than the Western ones in reporting world news, but they do not even give more prominence to Third World news.

These two studies failed to address the quantitative and qualitative imbalances in the volume, frequency and placement of foreign news in the Nigerian newspapers, hence the need for this study.

#### METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was used in this study because it enabled the researchers to investigate how Nigerian newspapers reported foreign news. Given that the subject of inquiry cuts across diverse socio-cultural, ethnic, political and economic interests, two national newspapers were selected by means of random sampling without replacement. The newspapers were not selected on the basis of ethnic leaning or background. The researcher wrote down names of national newspapers in circulation within the period of Study in separate sheets of paper; folded the papers and put them inside a sack: the papers were shuffled and the three newspapers were then selected randomly without replacement. Through this means, *ThisDay* and the *Nation* are the newspapers selected for this study.

The study was limited to a period of one year 2017 with a view to establish a concrete pattern and trend of coverage given to foreign news by the selected newspapers. The first month of each quarter of the year was sampled. This meant that the January, April, July and September editions of the randomly selected newspapers were studied while Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday editions were purposively selected and examined every week. Overall, 120 editions of each of the selected newspapers were nominated. This gave rise to a total of 240 copies of newspapers within the period of study. Coding guide and coding sheet were used to obtain data for the study. To control the study and to further enhance the validity of the expected results, two research assistants were engaged in the coding. Coded items were tested for



reliability and validity. This was done by finding out how many times the coders agreed or rejected agreement in coding. To ascertain the reliability of the coding process therefore, the researchers engaged two independent coders to code a sub-sample of 13 units and the coders were found to code in similar way up to eleven times. The inter-coder reliability was determined by using Holsti's formula cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2003, p. 157) thus:

$$\frac{\text{Reliability}}{N1 + N2} = 2m$$

$$\frac{2(11)}{13 + 13}$$

$$\frac{22}{26}$$

$$= 85\%$$

Coding agreement was therefore judged to be reliable given that the inter-coder agreement was 85%. Impliedly, the coders were able to code in similar ways up to 85% of the time; hence the outcome of the coding was taken as a reliable instrument for informed analysis.

- The units of analysis, which are the manifest contents to be examined in the selected newspapers and their corresponding attributes, were:
- Frequency of coverage of foreign news- with the number of mentions of the issues in the selected newspapers categorized as (i) 1 - 2 times: (ii) 3 - 4 times; and (iii) 5 mentions and above.

- Story placement was categorized as (i) from page (FP) (ii) inside pages (IPs); and (iii) back page (BP). In the process of grading and framing the news, most times media men tend to increase or reduce the salience of news item through the positioning or placement of the story. In this case, stories placed in the front page are usually considered most important by both the editors and the audiences followed by those placed in the back page and next, the inside pages.
- Form of coverage was categorized as: (i) straight news story; (ii) editorial; (iii) feature story; (iv) opinion articles/columns; (v) letters; (vi) photo news; (vii) advertorials/supplements (viii) public enlightenment campaign; and (ix) cartoons.

#### **Analysis of Data and Results**

Data for the study were collected based on the stipulated units of analysis. Coding guide and coding sheet were used to collect data for the analysis. Simple percentages and tables were used to analyse data collected for the study and to provide answers to the research questions. Before analysing the data, it is instructive to clarify that contrary to the 120 copies of newspapers originally proposed to be studied not all the editions that fell within the sample period were found

due largely to perennial poor record keeping in the libraries. This shows that though scholars like [14] have reported that this nagging poor record keeping problem facing content analytical studies in Nigeria has improved tremendously, the syndrome has not been completely overcome. Following the system of selecting samples from the sampling frame therefore, the researcher obtained a total of 111

copies and 109 copies of The Nation newspapers yielding a total of 220 copies of newspapers as against 240 copies proposed earlier. This final figure was used in the analysis because it was considered to be a fair representation of the original sample size. Details are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Newspapers and Total number of editions studies

Newspapers	No. of Newspapers proposed	No. of Newspapers found within sample frame
ThisDay	120	111
Nation	120	109
	240	220

Source: Researcher's 2018 content Analysis

Based on the data shown in table 1, answers to the research questions are presented in tables below.

Table 2: Total number of news and other editorial matters found on the papers

Newspapers	No. of Editions	No. of News items	No. of Articles	No. of Features
ThisDay	111	1221	1665	122
Nation	109	1308	1635	119
	220	2529	1802	241

Source: Researcher's 2018 content Analysis

A total of 2529 straight news was published by the 220 editions of the newspapers selected over a period of one year. A total 1802 articles and 241 features were published.

Table 3: Comparative quality of foreign news versus local news in the selected newspapers

Newspapers	No. of Local News	No. of Foreign News	Total News
ThisDay	1074(88%)	147(12%)	1221
The Nation	1076(82%)	232(18%)	1308
	2150(85%)	379(15%)	2529

Source: Researcher's 2018 content Analysis

The data on table 3 above indicate that 85% of the news published by the 2 selected newspapers over a period of one year was local while 15% (37%) was foreign news. This revealed that local news dominated the news carried by the two selected newspapers.

**Table 4: Frequency of foreign news in the Nigeria newspapers**

Frequency	Foreign News	Local News
1 - 2 times	340	860
3 - 4 times	39	753
5 and above	06	537
	379	2150

*Source: Researcher's 2018 content Analysis*

In the table above, 340 news items appeared between once and 2 times for the foreign news. This represented 90% of the total foreign news (379). For the local news, there is almost an even distribution of frequency of occurrence.

**Table 5: Approximate depth of foreign news in Nigerian Newspapers**

Column Inch	ThisDay	The Nation
1sq Inch	136	210
2sq Inch	08	13
3sq Inch	03	07
4-5sq Inch	-	02
	147	232

*Source: Researcher's 2018 content Analysis*

In the table above, over 90% of the foreign news in the 2 selected newspapers measures approximately 1square inch.

**Table 6: Placement of foreign news by the selected newspapers**

Newspapers	Front Page	Inside Page	Back Page
ThisDay	06	140	01
The Nation	10	207	15
	16	347	16

*Source: Researcher's 2018 content Analysis*

In the table above, most of the foreign news was found inside the pages of the selected newspaper.

**Table 7: The Direction of foreign news in the selected Newspapers**

Newspapers	Favourable	Neutral	Unfavourable
<b>ThisDay</b>	20	13	114
<b>The Nation</b>	31	26	175
	51	39	289

*Source: Researcher's 2018 content Analysis*

In the table above, 76% of the news items on foreign affairs were unfavourable. This revealed unfavourable direction of foreign news in the selected newspapers.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the findings of this study is that most of the news items on foreign issue took the pattern of straight news - out of a total of 4572 editorial matters in the two newspapers under a one year study period, there was only 379 foreign news. This represents 15% of the total number of news items (2529) in the selected newspapers and 8% of the total editorial matters. This finding is consistently with the gatekeeping theory of the press. The decision to allow certain news items to be published while others are not published is the prerogative of the journalists/editors.

Our second finding revealed that foreign news did not receive prominence in the Nigerian newspapers. Out of a total of 379 foreign news only 16(4%) appeared on the front page while 347 (92%) appeared inside pages. This finding is in tandem with the study by [7], images of the world through the eyes of five Nigerian Newspapers. [7], arrived at the conclusion that the study papers not only did not have a better balance but

they do not give prominence to third world news.

Our third finding revealed a very low frequency of the occurrence of foreign news in the Nigerian Newspapers. Furthermore, our finding revealed that the depth of foreign news reportage in the selected newspapers was too shallow. Most of the foreign news identified in the studied newspapers measured one square inch and they did not appear more than two times in the newspapers. These findings are in line with the theory of agenda setting.

Finally, our study revealed that most of the foreign news in the selected Nigerian newspapers was unfavourable dealing mainly with catastrophes rather than development. This finding is in tandem with the study carried out by [12] titled "Nigerian Press Coverage of the Arab Spring" and found out unfavourable coverage of the issue.

## CONCLUSION

Local Nigerian affairs dominated newspaper editorials in Nigerian newspapers. The coverage Nigerian newspapers gave to foreign news was poor. This showed a demonstration that Nigerian newspapers hardly gave adequate attention and prominence to world events. This study reveals that

Nigerian Journalists' Orientation might not have been too different from their Western Counterpart.

It is therefore recommended that journalists should be guided by their ethics and the social responsibility to the society in their profession

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