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**NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF COMMUNITY NEWS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
THE PUNCH AND VANGUARD NEWSPAPER (JANUARY – JUNE, 2018)**

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Abstract

The study aims at newspapers coverage of community news. This study has established the fact that the newspaper can achieve its purpose if it adheres strictly without bias to its ethical standard; by giving adequate coverage to grass root stories with equal importance to its counterpart (Status-quo media) in its features, editorial and news stories. The major crux of this study is to examine the degree of coverage cum prominence given by the national dailies in galvanising community news. Two newspapers were studied; the Punch cum Vanguard. The two newspapers have national focus. The Punch and Vanguard newspapers are privately owned and they both helped to answer the research questions raised. The edition of both papers (January - June, 2018). The purposive sampling method was used to content analyse. Hence, content analysis was the instruments used for data gathering. The gatekeeping and development media theories were adopted; the findings revealed that, national dailies in Nigeria have fallen short of their responsibilities by giving more prominence to national issues than the supposedly locus of development (community). Hence, no nation can be said to be developed without incorporating those at the periphery or grassroots adequately in the scheme of things. Based on the study; the researcher believed that, the media should jettison the urban centrality syndrome, by fostering a perfect equilibrium in the content of news stories reported in their mediums; that media contents are too elitist and foreign to serve the grassroots needs, hence, it should be discouraged to give rural dwellers a sense of belonging.

Keywords: *Newspapers, Community News, National dailies, Community development.*

Introduction

Traditionally, the role of the mass media (Newspaper) in any nation is to entertain, educate, inform and campaign for positive change. These roles are geared towards national development. At the same time, 70 percent of the Nigeria population resides in the rural area, Okunna, (2019) in Onosu and Umolu (2016:9). Therefore, any government that does not take the rural dwellers into consideration in her programs is grossly inadequate.

According to Folarin (2019) in Onosu, and Umolu, (2010:8) Thus;

“The community or Local government Area is the Ultimate Locus of national development. If there is no development at the community level which is politically? Demarcated at world level. Any claim of development at the national level will be a sham.”

Newspaper coverage / reportage of Community news in national development is an articulated goal which is derived from the enduring values and aspirations to which the citizens of any nation are committed. The major concern of any government is based on pursuit, achievement of the realization of national development and interest. Newspaper belongs to one of the classes of the print media. In all countries of the world, the newspaper has come to occupy a prime place in the society, economic and political realm. Newspaper also is an instrument used by those who possess and operate apparatus of power to elicit the people's co-operation.

Orhewere, (2014:1) posit that newspaper as purveyor of news and events, it helps individual to formulate opinions on a particular situation. Besides, the newspaper (print medium) is regarded as one of the biggest industries in Nigeria today. The reason is that despite constant assaults by successive despotic regimes, it has been able to survive, and currently serves as employer of myriad of workers. Therefore, the constant political decision in form of draconian laws promulgated to stifle the development of the newspaper industry has only left it stronger than ever. The newspaper as an agent in community development has to perform its watchdog function by upholding the ideals of publicizing development activities in the rural communities; enhance adult literacy; promote government image and patriotism; provide an important publicity instrument to district development communities and create and preserve positive social and cultural values among the people, to fill the gap left by the national newspapers which mostly cater for the urban elite.

However, this research study also looked into what a community is and its roles in nation building, and as a locus for grass-root development which Falorin, (2019) posited in Onosu, and Umolu, (2010). According to Macbride Commission (1917:115), the community is in fact an aggregate of groups which vary in social class, economic status, often in political or religious affiliation and also in outlook and opinion. Any community, large or small, is held together by a nexus of communications.

Communication links are vital for the promotion and development of a national entity. In any social set-up exchange of information is necessary for persuading citizens to

accept the roles of social and political life, if possible to join in pursuing agreed goals, or at the minimum to live together in peace. But if communication power is used to repress and silence minorities, or to conceal divergences that actually exist, the effort must be to alienate a section of the citizens and thus to weaken the national community.

Dimgba (2000:175) in Onosu, and Umolu, (2010:1) further stated clearly that a Community could be described as "a body of persons in the same locality," a cluster of villages or Communities in a geographical location with distinguishable Socio-cultural and economic characteristics. A community could also be seen as any group of people outside the urban mainstream which is usually characterized by low economic activities, low literacy. Poor infrastructure and low purchasing power. To further buttress what a community is Aluyor, (2017:2) opines; Community means people who live in the same area and share common interests and goals. A community is also a human group of any size whose members have consciousness of living a common life and sharing community destiny. Longman (2000:295) defines a community as "a group of people or an ecological group comprising all the interacting populations of various living organisms in a particular area or a group who adopt common policies.

Another Scholar; Adeola et al (2015:3) in Aluyor, (2017:2), described a community as a group of people living in a given area of land. It varies in size and purpose. A person is a member of a community if he is born in the community and lives within it or if he joins the community from elsewhere. The membership of anyone joining the community from outside may be approved if he or she accepts the way of life of the new community and secure a shelter. However, the urgent need for community development initiatives led to the launching of the new Rural Development Strategies by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo; with the hope to alleviate poverty and encourage more participation in rural development activities thereby creating a greater sense of ownership among the poor in the community. These are programmes and projects geared towards Community development. Some are still on. Among others are:

Source: Statement of the President of (IFAD), International Funds for Agricultural Development Strategy December 11, 2001. In Aluyor, (2017:31). In a bid to get support and enthusiasm for the aforementioned Programmes, the government has been consistently using the mass media. Prof. Jerry Gana (2010:8) and Ralph (2001:41) in Imharalu, (2004:4), say the Nigeria mass media have played, are playing and will continue to play crucial roles in Nigeria's development.

Under this research, the main focus is on the print media with reference to newspapers. The approach is to attempt to define its role in the coverage of community news events as well as grass-root development. It is on this background that efforts will be made to really ascertain if the print media have pierced into the rural areas by virtue of granting some prominence to community news like its counterpart the urban news event and if not what are the reasons for the malady. This would pave way for the panacea and strategies required to intensify the contribution which the print media (newspapers) can

provide toward national cum grass-root development.

Statement of the Problem

As stated by Gana, (2010:8) and Ralphel, (2001:41) in Age, et al (2007), the print media has been discharging its duties and playing its role effectively. According to Idemili (2018), the Nigerian press neglects the rural areas in its news coverage and is primarily concerned with reporting activities in the urban areas in spite of the fact that more Nigerians live in rural areas.

More so, Omu, (2018) in Imade, (2001:10) while addressing Nigerian mass media: *"...steeped in the tradition of nationalist and oppositionist politics, many Nigerian mass media tend to concentrate on the activities of government and political leaders And since the national scene is the main focus of political activity, the mass media published in state capitals have tended to assume the stature of national institutions catering to a national audience. In their hierarchy of interest and priorities, the affairs of the rural areas occupy a very low position even though the developmental role of the press is advertised as the main justification for government ownership of mass media"*.

There are promotions by several scholars for community journalism. However, what most of them actually advocate is the sitting of media outfits in the rural communities; such as rural community newspapers, radio and television. Although the idea of rural community media is good, our focus here is on the coverage and reportage of rural communities.

Currently, the Nigerian broadcast media place emphasis on municipal areas. High premium is placed on urban areas to the impairment of rural areas. Omeje, (2004) notes that by concentrating their activities at the urban areas, the media have succeeded in creating inequality, devaluation and a gulf between urban and rural dwellers. Today in Nigeria, the only mass medium that is accessible to both urban and rural dwellers is the radio. This is so because; it has the capacity to cut through barriers of illiteracy and poor infrastructural facilities which could limit television Okunna, (1999) in Idemity, (2018) posited.

Objectives of the study

1. To know the level of prominence given to community news by the Punch and Vanguard newspaper.
2. To know how the Punch and Vanguard newspapers direct their reportage of community events towards favourable. Unfavourable or neutral stories.
3. To ascertain the contents of news stories reported about rural areas in the Punch and Vanguard newspapers.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of prominence given to community news events by the punch and Vanguard newspaper?
2. Did the Punch and Vanguard newspapers direct their reportage of community events towards favourable. Unfavourable or neutral stories?
3. What are the contents of news stories reported about rural areas in the Punch and

Vanguard newspapers?

Literature Review

According to Oserogho, (2020:6) "rural reporting constitutes the locus of development journalism". It also entails events that concern the rural people. These events are centered on enhancing and improving their way of life. Community news reportage entails the following; news/information interpretation and evaluation; people's involvement in the Agenda-Setting role of the press; including programmes on education, health, social welfare; Programmes for Promotion of finance and loan facilities; agricultural development and sustainable village community initiatives.

However, Folarin (2019), in Onosu and Umolu (2010) "this political demarcation which existed at the world level" can prevent inhabitants of the rural areas from pursuing common goal/objectives. If peasants act politically at the national level at all, they do so independently without recognition. They are thus barely able to contest urban leadership which is a symbol of gross relegation and neglect by an amalgam of national dailies, Local/ State Government, and the apex government (Federal).

Fred (1993:8), in Imharalu, (2004:16), holds that newspaper is best suitable for mass education in general enlightenment of illiterate and semi-literate population because, print is permanent and can be re-read at convenience and for making future reference. Also, the Macmillan Dictionary (2015:682), posits that Newspaper is a printed medium of communication, issued at regular intervals and providing diversified information on current events, opinions columns, and advertising.

Orhewere, (2014:1), "The 1958 Newspaper Act described in details what a newspaper in Nigeria is. In section (2) of the Act, a newspaper is any paper containing public news, remarks, observation and comments, there on printed for sale and published in Nigeria, periodically or in parts or numbers but does not include any newspaper published by or under the authority of the government." Thus, newspaper is any periodical publication printed with the assistance of a mechanical device and which carries timely variegated event for the consumption of the general public. According to McBride (1979), "he highlighted a number of press responsibilities. These roles are general. They are:

1. Promotion of ultimate and immediate goals of each society and the stimulation of personal choices and aspiration; the fostering of individual community activities which is geared towards the pursuit of agreed aims.
2. The provision of common fund of knowledge which enables people to operate as effective members of the society in which they lives and which fosters social cohesion and awareness, thereby permitting active involvement in public life.
3. Collection, Storage, Processing and dissemination of facts, news data, pictures and messages, opinions and comment required in order to understand and react knowledgeable to personal, environment and national conditions etc.
4. The dissemination of cultural artistic products for the purpose of perceiving the heritage of the past, the development of culture by widening the individuals horizon, awakening

his imagination and stimulating his aesthetic needs and creativity.

5. The provision of exchange of facts needed to facilitate agreement or to clarify different viewpoints on public issues.

Shrivastava, (2015), "a good newspaper that wants to cater for the enlightened readership should keep this expectation in mind. The coverage should be detailed and superficial. A newspaper should go deep into the subject and interpret trends where necessary. Then only can the paper retain its essence or potency. Therefore, following the various contributions made by the above scholars, it is evident that the newspaper has to play a major role in enhancing community growth cum development by virtue of its messages via the print (Newspaper) media.

Theoretical Framework

This section attempts to review the relevant theories which could serve as a basis for the accomplishment of this study, and they include the following:

The Gate keeping theory of the mass media: White (2000), in Ikechukwu, (2007:29) "full Justice cannot be done to any discussion of the power of the Mass Media and the professionals without examining the lessons and practical application/implications of the Gate Keepers' theory. It therefore means that any story or media out is like any other manufactured product that passes through many "hands" or "gates" before it is published or broadcast and each of these "gates" or professional handlers [reporters, sub-editors, proof-readers, editors etc contribute significantly in determining what the target audience read, view or listen to as news or other media fares.

Babatunde, (2019:121), the term "gate-keeping" was coined by Kurt, (1951, 1958) to describe those individuals who control food channels and use within groups during the World War I and later to describe those who control the transmission of media fare generally. No media establishment can transmit all the messages it receives in the course of a day's routine. Some individuals have to decide which information to transmit, which to defer, which to modify, which to delete entirely. Hence, the theory (Gate keeping) becomes appropriate too to buttress the position of the newspaper in reporting communal events i.e. favorable or unfavorable etc.

Development media theory as summed up by Denis. (1987:121), in Babatunde, (2019:48), are as follows:

- The media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy or national ideology, without prejudice to their traditional functions of information, education, and entertainment of the public.
- Media should also accept and help in carrying out the special development task of national integration, socio-economic modernization, promotion of literacy and cultural creativity.
- This theory (Development Theory) is also connected especially to the Mass Media structure and performance in the third world countries which covers a great variety of social-cultural, economic and political conditions which helps to cover primary

assignment using the media for the purpose of development.

Methodology

This research adopted content analysis method to get relevant data:

Content Analysis was chosen because of its appropriateness in analysing communication content. This method adopted is effective with the aid of the coding sheet and a coding guide where the various subject categories, that is: story position, prominence, nature of stories, content categories and story direction will be further content analysed following the various units of analysis, that is: front page, back page, centre spread, editorial, full page, top half page, bottom half page stories etc will be examined accordingly.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Presentation of Quantitative Data

Two Nigeria newspapers were purposively selected for this study. Both papers - The Punch and Vanguard are based in Lagos. They are both privately owned and have nationwide circulation. The two newspapers are tabloids. Only weekday's editions were examined. The study period span six months (January-June, 2018). Minus Saturday and Sunday's editions, the total newspapers population was (104) issues, that is, (52) issues for the Punch and Vanguard respectively. To this end, below are the following dates of the weeks picked among other dates of each week of the months which were content analysed:

January, 2018

Friday	Monday
1 st Week 5 th	1 st
2 nd Week 12 th	8 th
3 rd Week 19 th	15 th
4 th Week 26 th	22 nd

March, 2018

Friday	Monday
1 st Week 2 nd	--
2 nd Week 9 th	5 th
3 rd Week 16 th	12 th
4 th Week 23 rd	19 th
5 th Week 30 th	26 th

May, 2018

Friday	Monday
1 st Week 4 th	--
2 nd Week 11 th	7 th
3 rd Week 18 th	14 th
4 th Week 25 th	21 nd
5 th Week --	28 th

February, 2018.

Friday	Monday
1 st Week 2 nd	--
2 nd Week 9 th	5 th
3 rd Week 16 th	12 th
4 th Week 23 rd	19 th
5 th Week --	25 th

April, 2018.

Friday	Monday
1 st Week 6 th	2 nd
2 nd Week 13 th	9 th
3 rd Week 20 th	16 th
4 th Week 27 rd	23 rd
5 th Week --	30 th

June, 2018.

Friday	Monday
1 st Week 1 st	--
2 nd Week 8 th	4 th
3 rd Week 15 th	11 th
4 th Week 22 nd	18 th
5 th Week 29 th	25 th

A total of one hundred and four (104) editions of each of the newspapers i.e The Punch and Vanguard within this period of study as the newspaper population, while fifty two (52) forms its sample size. The following are the various subject category and

code used in this study:

Subject Categories

- 1. STORY POSITION/ LOCATION CODE**
 - a. Full Page 1
 - b. Top half of the Page 2
 - c. Bottom half of the Page 3
 - d. Centre part of the Page 4
- 2. PROMINENCE CODE**
 - a. Full Page 5
 - b. Top half of page 6
 - c. Bottom half of page 7
 - d. Centre part of the page 8
- 3. KIND/NATURE OF STORIES CODE**
 - a. Feature Article 9
 - b. Letter to the Editor 10
 - c. Straight News Stories 11
 - d. Opinion/Editorial/Article 12
- 4. CONTENT CATEGORIES/ CONTENT OF THE STORY**
 - a. Community Development 13
 - b. Social Unrest /Crime /Vandalization 14
 - c. Environmental Pollution 15
- 5. STORY DIRECTION CODE**
 - a. Favorable Story 16
 - b. Unfavorable Story 17
 - c. Neutral 18

RQ1: What is the Prominence given to community news events by The Punch and Vanguard newspapers?

Prominence	Code	No. of Stories Vanguard	Total	Percentage %
Full page	5	1	5	7.2
Top half of page	6	3	18	26.1
Bottom half of page	7	2	14	20.3
Centre part of page	8	4	32	46.4
TOTAL	26	10	69	100

The above table 1: showed the prominence given to community news covered by the Punch and Vanguard newspapers. The Punch had 4.9% for full page, 43.9% for top half of the page, 23.9% for bottom half of the page, while 27.3% for center part of the page.

The above table 2: however revealed that Vanguard gave 7.2% for full page, 26.1% for top half of the page, 20.3% bottom half of the page, and 46.4% for centre parts of the page. The two tables showed that Vanguard had 46.4% as against its counterpart with

43.9% (The Punch).

Prominence	Code	No. of Stories Punch	Total	Percentage (%)
Full page	5	2	10	4.9
Top half of page	6	15	90	43.9
Bottom half of page	7	7	49	23.9
Centre part of page	8	7	56	27.3
TOTAL	26	31	205	100

RQ2: Did The Punch and Vanguard newspapers direct their reportage of community events towards favourable, unfavourable or neutral angle?

Story Direction	Code	No. of Stories Punch	Total	Percentage %
Favorable story	16	2	32	7.3
Unfavorable story	17	24	408	92.7
Neutral story	18	0	0	0
TOTAL	51	26	440	100

The above table 3: showed the story direction which The Punch and Vanguard newspapers tint Community stories towards. The Punch had 7.3% for favourable stories, 92.7% unfavourable stories, while 0% was analysed as neutral story.

RQ3: What are the contents of community news stories reported about rural areas in the Vanguard and Punch newspaper?

Story Direction	Code	No. of Stories Vanguard	TOTAL	%
Favourable story	16	1	16	9.4
Unfavourable story	17	8	136	8
Neutral story	18	1	18	10.6
TOTAL	51	10	170	28

Punch cum Vanguard newspapers? Table 4: above showed that favourable stories for Vanguard were 9.4%, unfavourable 8%, while neutral stories were 10.6%. The tables also revealed that The Punch newspaper gave more reportage on its story direction than the Vanguard newspaper. This is because; The Punch had 92.7% as against.

Content Category	Code	No. of stories Punch	Total	Percentage %,
Community development	13	2	26	7.1
Crime/social Unrest	14	22	308	84.6
Environmental pollution	15	2	30	8.2
TOTAL	42	26	364	99.9

The above table 5: showed the content of community events reported by the Punch cum Vanguard newspapers. The Punch had 7.1% for community development stories, 84.6% for crime/social unrest issues, and 8.2% for issues on environmental pollution.

Content Category	Code	No. of stories Vanguard	Total	%
Community Development	13	1	13	9.3
Crime/Social Unrest	14	8	112	8
Environment Pollution	15	1	15	10.7
TOTAL	42	10	140	28

The above table 6: revealed that Vanguard gave 9.3% for Community Development Stories, 8% for crime/Social unrest issues and 10.7% for environment pollution. The two tables have showed that the Punch newspaper gave more reportage on community issues than Vanguard newspaper. This is because; The Punch had 84.6% as against Vanguard newspaper's 10.7%.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is guided by the research questions based on the data collected from the quantitative investigations conducted.

That Vanguard gave more prominence to community news events than The Punch. That the punch gave more reportage on favourable, unfavourable and neutral angle than Vanguard newspaper.

That, the Punch carried more content of community news than Vanguard newspaper. That The Punch gave more coverage to the nature/kinds of stories published in its medium about community issue than Vanguard newspaper.

That the amount of coverage ascribed to rural news in Nigeria Newspapers was very low. It could not even make a significant number. This was also an indication that Nigeria newspapers do not see community news as important to the public cum the nation.

The content analysed showed that community stories featured by the punch and Vanguard newspapers are directed at unfavourable stories. This was obvious from the coding sheet. In the same vein the content analysis revealed that the content of community stories in the Punch and Vanguard newspapers was on crime/social unrest.

More so, the content analysed revealed that the story position granted community news is mainly on the front pages. This showed how the manifest content analysed explicitly revealed that straight news reports are the nature/kinds of stories report about rural milieus in Nigeria newspapers.

Conclusion

The significance of adequate news coverage of community events in national dailies cannot be over-emphasised. For there to be development at the nucleus, the rural dwellers must be well mobilised and allowed full participation in a nation polity. This means that, it is not enough to inform the ruralites by the use of radio, television, film, newspapers, magazine, billboards or the use of town criers etc. there is more to it.

According to Soola, (2002) in Onosu, (2018:5) that development must be without bias, permeating the entire spectrum and starter, touching on the lives of the poorest of the poor, lifting them up as it were, from the hands of poverty, ignorance, disease, squalor, human right abuses cum similar deprivation.

From the instruments used for this research, it was obvious that the print medium (newspaper) has failed yesterday and today, by not living up to expectation in its watchdog function of the press, and by not giving equal degree of coverage to community and national news. Hence, it is also responsible for the retrogressing state that has characterised the rural areas.

Gana, (2010:8) and Ralphel (2001:41) cited in Imharalu, (2004:4) posited that "the Nigeria Mass Media have played, are playing and will continue to play crucial roles in Nigeria's development." This statement again was mere propaganda, because, this research study has showed obviously that the newspapers as a part of the mass media has failed, not only in galvanising negative community issues on the few stories reported about the rural areas but, it has failed in upholding those ethical expectation cum functions which is her sole obligation to the society, and nation at large.

From the use of coding sheets, it was also lucid that most community stories were either stories on crime/social unrest or environmental pollution, which obviously informs the public that nothing good has ever or can ever happen in the rural areas. Meanwhile, we see and read local, state and federal projects/programmes done in community areas by the mass media, yet, the rural communities are still characterised by low purchasing power, low infrastructure, poverty, draught and starvation, to this end, it is justifiable to state categorically that, the national dailies in Nigeria have not helped in any way to foster or galvanise grass root events to the public.

Recommendation

Founded on the findings of this research, the following commendations are hereby proffered.

- That, the media should jettison urban centrality syndrome, by fostering a perfect equilibrium in the content of news stories reported in their mediums.
- A policy can equally be made by government that each of the state owned press establishments should publish a daily and or a weekly newspaper, which will cover, first, news originating from community in the States; Second, developmental oriented information on Agriculture, Health, Community change, home management etc. Third, significant national and international news stories which have some bearing on the lives of the people in the state. Such news and information must conform to the style cum language which is appropriate for the average literate Nigerian.
- Media contents are too elitist and foreign to serve grass roots needs, hence, it should be discarded to give rural dwellers a sense of belonging.
- The media should learn to tell the obvious about claim by local, state and federal

government official on project cum programmes done rural communities as part of its corporate social responsibilities for her citizens.

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