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3WS: THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF NEWS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS[1]

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Abstract

Journalists produce the news based on certain established routines and values. Through these conventions, journalists ask, and answer questions based on the 5Ws and H. Answering these questions determines whether an event or issue is newsworthy and the facts to be included and/or played up. The interplay of these routines and values tends in a very subtle manner, makes the news ideological product in addition to the information it provides. Based on the theory of organisation of news and using content analysis, this study investigates the social composition of the news in selected Nigerian newspapers to examine the issue of bias in the news. Our findings show that based on three of the five 'W's (Who? What? and Where?), there is an element of structural bias in the news which, simply put, means the news net tends to capture the prominent, big, and powerful not just in terms of personalities but even concerning geography and locations.

Introduction

> *... media bias derives not from intentional ideological perversion but from professional achievement under the constraints of organisational routines and pressures ... A news story is supposed to answer the questions "who," "what," "when," "where," and "why" about its subject, but understanding news as culture requires asking of news writing what categories of people count as "who," what kinds of things pass for facts or "what" what geography and sense of time are inscribed as "where" and "when," and what counts as an explanation of "why."* (Schudson, 1995, pp.9-14).

It is probably at its earliest history that the news media could be defined as mere courier of significant events – the arrival of ship and the goods and people on board, an earthquake, and other natural occurrences, a summon from the emperor, among other significant occurrences. But at the onset of competition and the struggle for audience attention, news media actually made news to happen through interviews, investigative and interpretive reports. Bias – intended and unintended, found its way into the news mix. Even in those seemingly pristine

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times in news reporting, the choice of what occurrences to report over another is an overt demonstration of bias.

Hence, in that early history of the news media, not all newsworthy happenstances could be guaranteed coverage. According to Galtung and Ruge (1982, p. 56), "since we cannot register everything, we have to select, and the question is what will strike our attention. This is a problem in the psychology of perception." But beyond psychology, they note that some culture – bound factors may influence transition of an event from event to news.

> *These influences are seen to be mutually reinforcing as they play out in some twelve sub factors. Hence, events become news to the extent that they satisfy the conditions of frequency, threshold, absolute intensity increase unambiguity, meaningfulness, cultural proximity, relevance, consonance, predictability, demand, unexpectedness, unpredictability, scarcity, continuity, composition, reference to something negative* (Galtung and Ruge, 1982, p. 60).

The necessity for selection by reporters and editors from the myriad of events that occur on daily basis was noted by Walter Lippman when he wrote "without standardization, without stereotypes, without routine judgements, without a fairly ruthless disregard of subtlety, the editor would soon die of excitement" (Lippman, 1965, p. 222).

It is more so in the present age with the explosion in information and communication technologies when torrents of information are easily accessible. Thus, a sifting process became more urgent, and parameters ought to be more stringent but fair, inclusive, utilitarian, and seen to be so. It is the harsh reality of the impossibility of the above ideals that has spurred debates on the role of the news media in public discourse especially on whether they are disinterested purveyors and conveyors of news and whether they ought to be or could be. The pioneering works of Lippmann (1965), to other scholars like Herman and Chomsky (1988, 2000), Cohen and Young (1982), Schudson (2000), McQuail (2005) set the research agenda for evaluating the role of the news media in society.

The mass media are especially important and powerful as a social institution that provides the popular knowledge and images that most individuals base their opinions and even actions on what is happening around them. But there are a lot of limitations on the way the media select and process information they daily provide to the public. In carrying out this function, what Harold Lasswell (1948) called the surveillance function, the media not only provide information, but they also define and frame issues and set agenda for the public. In doing this, they "focus attention on a few public issues to the virtual exclusion of all others" (McCombs, Danielian & Wanta, 1995, p.282). As the American journalist and writer, Walter Lippmann once rightly said the individual on his or her own cannot grasp all the events and issue going on in the society. He or she depends on the media. According to him:

> *For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. To transverse the world, men must have maps of the world* (Lippmann, 1965, p.11).

Many studies have also shown that women are under-represented as sources in the news (Zoch & Tuck, 1998, Tuchman, 1991, Tijani Adenle & Oso, 2014). If the news is elite oriented, it appears women as not part of that class. In the news, women are largely invisible. The mass media are not just mere channels or conduit for passing information to the public. From what they publish they confer status on persons, issues, and events. They define and provide salience and meanings of those information they provide. As Shaw and McCombs have noted, the media "in the process of transmitting others' concerns and issues…reworks and translates them to focus attention and structure cognitions" (Shaw & McCombs, 1977, p. 9.151).

While it is generally assumed that the media provide a window through which we see the world, what we see is not an objective account of the happenings and those involved. In the opinion of a scholar, the "… news may be viewed as a window that reflects largely the media's own construction of reality" (Turk, 1985, quoted in Zoch & Turk, 1998, p. 763).

In news reporting sources are very important. They provide the raw materials from which reporters select the facts they put together as news. According to Turk,

> *The sources of the raw material of information upon which journalists rely and from which they choose what to use may ultimately have as much to do with the media's agenda as the selection processes of the journalists themselves. News is not necessarily what happens but what a news sources says has happened because the news doesn't 'happen' until there is an exchange of information"* between journalists and their sources (Turk, quoted in Zoch & Tuck, 1998, p.763).

The need for continuous evaluation of the role of the news media would appear self-evident given their importance in surveillance, correlation, education, and entertainment in an increasingly complex world order on one hand and the needs of the local setting on the other. As a prime site for signalling not only what is happening but the importance and prominence of who and what are centres of activities, the news media deserve critical analysis. Thus, through process sourcing, selection, omission, placement, choice of words or by angle of reporting, newspapers express some noticeable level of structure and unwitting bias. Based on the social construction of news perspective, this study seeks to investigate the claim that there is bias in the news especially with emphasis on *who, what* and *where* (3Ws) in the news.

Literature Review
News is a product of journalistic convention and professional and organisational routines and values. Though it may be the case Feston once asserted that "News is...what journalists make of it" (Feston, 2010, p.3), they do so under the constraints of professional routines. Hall and his colleagues have noted this structural fact:

> *The media do not simply and transparently report events which are "naturally" newsworthy <u>in themselves</u>. 'News' is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories* (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts, 1978, p.53).

The structural or unwitting bias in news production starts from the selection of the events to cover, the sources to contact and the places that are considered to be not only productive in supplying the "news" but are legitimate. By its process of selection and composition, the news tends to reflect the social hierarchy, privileges, and inequalities as they exist in the society.

News is about people and events; what people do or/and say. News is largely event driven. Schudson describes journalism as "an event-centred discourse…news like bread and sausage is same thing people make" (Schudson, 2008, p. 55). In writing the news, journalists ask, and answer questions based on the 5Ws and H: who? what? where? when? why? and how? The answers to these questions structure the news story and how it is written, defining whether the event or issue being reported is newsworthy and what facts and voices to be included (news judgement) (Harrison, 2020). But at a deeper level, news creates meanings, hence, it is an ideological product. For instance, not just anybody can make news and not all events make news. In the words of Lippmann: "newspaper do not try to keep an eye on all mankind" (Lippmann, 1965, p.214). Reporters select, thus allocating importance and visibility to those who have the privilege of access to the news space. Prominence is an important news value. For instance, through what Hall has called "the politics of signification" (Hall, 1982), some people, their events and statements enjoy habitual access while many others are excluded. Tuchman has argued that the news net is thrown to catch the big fish. She explains further,

> *The news net imposes order on the social world because it enables news events to occur at some locations but not at others. Obviously, reporters cannot write about occurrences hidden from view by their social location, that is, either their geographical location or social class…Accordingly, the news net is flung through space, focuses upon specific organisations, and highlights topics* (Tuchman, 1978, pp. 21-25).

Studies (Tuchman, 1978, Golding & Elliot, 1978) have provided empirical evidence of the process of making news and that the news is seen as the 'social construction of reality'. To these scholars, "news is not something tangible out there that good journalists know when they see it" (Berkowitz, 1997, p. xi). News in the words of Berkowitz is a human construction that gains its characteristics through the social world from which it emerges

From the era of the 'Gatekeeping study' to the present, scholars have been able to identify the social, political, cultural, and economic factors which influence the news production process. Schudson (2005) identified four approaches to the sociology of news: economic, political, social organization and cultural approaches. Many critical and neo- Marxist scholars often treat the first two as one - the political economy approach (Murdock and Golding, 2005) which was what Schudson did in the earlier original version of his article published in the 1989 and 1991 before the 2005 review. News is the product of:

> *…social forces that influence and limit how journalist gather and assemble news from raw materials into a journalistic product. News becomes the product of economic systems and political systems, and the press systems that result from them. And it becomes the product of unspoken cultural values and belief by which people manage their daily lives* (Berkowitz, 1997, p. xii).

Though each of these approaches emphasizes various aspects of the news making process, certain points seem to be common in their findings. Apart from the fact that the news is not a neutral product, they also point to fact that news "evinces the power and point of view of the political and economic elite" (Gamson, Croteau, Hoyness & Sasson, 1992, p.374).

Many of the studies show that news is mainly the product of the interaction between journalist and sources who in the main are bureaucratic elite. Fishman has argued that the recent studies show that "news workers detect occurrences primarily through legitimated institutions of the society, which is to say, through such bureaucratically organized agencies… (Fishman, 1997, p.226). In line with these arguments, Molotch and Lester have argued that the news does not reflect "the world out there, but the practices of those who have the power to determine the experience of others" (Molotch & Lester, 1997).

These approaches also reinforce each other. For instance, news production routines and values have been shown to have been forged within the commercial and economic imperatives of media production. In this view Schudson has posited that '' an emphasis on the social organization of journalism and the interaction of journalist and their sources has reinforced economic and political perspectives that take news making to be a reality – constructing activity governed by elites'' (Schudson, 2005, p.181).

Either through the beat system or working through their diary of events, journalists rely on bureaucratic organizations which provide them a steady supply of materials for news. By their social, legal, and constitutional responsibilities, … extensive and far-reaching activities and the resources at their disposal, the state and its agencies constitute the major sites of news generation and thus command the attention of journalists. For publicity, visibility and influential state officials cultivate the attention of journalists who also need the officials as sources. To journalists, nothing is as important as news sources. So, there is a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between reporters and sources. The relationship is both social and economic (Gandy, 1982). This serves the news organization very well in the sense of efficiency and cost of production. This is part of Gandy's theory of information subsidy (Gandy, 1982). From a culturalist perspective, the reliance on bureaucratic and powerful elites shows the adherence to what is termed the hierarchy of credibility which finds resonance in Africans difference to those in positions of authority. They are also relatively easy to reach, i.e., available, and accessible to reporters. Those in authority are not just seen to be credible, they are perceived to provide useful and factual information. The taken-for-granted assumption is "they are in the position to know. As Gandy puts it, "it when the factual nature of information is not questioned, journalists need not invest valuable time in an effort to obtain verification" (Gandy, 1982, p.12).

Gandy explains further,

> It is clear that journalists and other gatekeepers benefit from the relationships they establish with sources best able to meet their needs. It is also easy to see how they come to favour those bureaucratic sources who can provide a regular, and ultimately usable flow of information, insight, and imagery with which to construct the news (Gandy, 1982, p.13).

Gans has also argued that the most powerful sources are also the most efficient; the two are intertwined. He goes further to argue that "efficiency and source power are parts of the same equation, since it is efficient for journalist to respect the power of sources" (Gans, 1979, p.283). In summary, reporters choose sources based on four main criteria, authority, credibility, availability, and efficiency (Ginnekan, 1998). Access to the media space as sources also reflects "broader social and political hierarchies." Schlesinger refers to this as "cultural capital of the news sources – perceived legitimacy, authoritativeness, and respectability – (which come) from the location a source has in the institutional field…official sources may not always have to be believed, but they do have to be taken seriously" (Schlesinger, 1990, p.81).

The point is that the reliance of journalists on the bureaucratic and economic elite has given such people a privileged access to the news. An outcome of this privilege is that such people have or are invested with the social and cultural power as 'primary definers' of issues (Hall, et al, 1978).

Despite the criticism of the concept of 'primary definers' (Schlesinger, 1990). Deacon and Golding have described it as perhaps the most powerful concept "developed in the attempt to understand the determinants of political news" (Deacon & Golding, 1994, p.9). Though the concept recognises the autonomy of journalists, it however points attention to the fact that the dominant forces in society are able, through the structure of news production to ensure that news reflects the interests of the powerful (Deacon & Golding, p. 9. In this context, through the choice of sources, the media also provide frame, defined as a "schemata of interpretation" through which news consumers understand the information journalists provide. The choice of sources by journalists is a very important variable in the construction of reality that news making is all about. Shoemaker and Reece in their notion of hierarchy of influence in the news argue that,

> *Sources have tremendous effect on mass media content, because journalist can't include in their news reports what they do not know…(sources) may also influence the news in subtle ways by providing the context within which all other information is evaluated…* (Shoemaker & Reece, 1991, p.150)

Previous Studies

The study of news has attracted the attention of scholars from different perspectives for decades. It could be said that Manning White's study of Mr. Gate (1997) opened the flood gate for the study of news. This was followed by Breed's 'Social control in the newsroom' (1955). Others followed later.

Prominent among such studies is the one by Galtung and Ruge (1965) which was able to identify some news values based on content analysis of the news reports of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire), Cuba and Cyprus crises in the 1960s. Apart from identifying the news values and factors that determine the news selection process, they also concluded that these values provide a coherent frame which has a lot of ideological implications.

The 1970s witnessed the emergence of many studies based on critical/Marxist paradigms. Based on the premises of sociology of knowledge and the social construction of reality and the theory of ideology, these studies marked a decisive break from previous ones based mainly on pluralism and behaviourism (Hall,1982). One of the central arguments of most of these studies is that the news is neither a natural product nor is it neutral. News is based on selection, abstraction, and interpretation by journalists who apply some socially defined criteria. Definition of what is news "are historically derived and embedded" (Tuchman, 1978, p.209). To the scholars involved news is socially constructed, a manufactured product (Cohen and Young, 1973, Golding and Elliot, 1978, Tuchman, 1978, Fishman, 1980). This is of course not saying that reporters fake the news or exhibit deliberate bias or partisanship. According to Tuchman,

> *To say that a news report is a story, no more, but no less, is not to demean news nor to accuse it of being fictitious. Rather, it alerts us that news, like all public documents, is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity (Tuchman, 1976, p.97).*

It has also been shown that the news "is a product of the practicalities and constraints of the process by which it is created "(Berkowitz, 1997, p. xii) These "practicalities and constraints" stem from the economic and political system and the cultural values and belief operating at a particular moment in a society.

One of the main findings of studies of news concerns actors mentioned in the news. News is mainly about individuals "who play a role in national activities" (Gans, 2004, p.8) Gans study further shows that those he refers to as 'known' i.e., the well-known people "and for the most part those in official positions "dominate the news. Such people led by the US President and other government officials took up between 70 and 86 percent of all domestic news (p.8-10). The study also indicates that activities connected to government were quite prominent in the news.

Gans' conclusion is worthy of note:

> *Journalists report the actions and statements of those claiming to represent nation, and, to a lesser extent, society, thus constantly reminding us of the reality and power of these constructs, Journalist do so, moreover, not only to serve interested sources whose legitimacy is enhanced by representing nation and society, but also to inform an audience which live in micro societies that are often far removed from nation and society* (Gans, 2004, p. 298).

Other studies after Gans have established the bureaucratic elite orientation of the news. Schudson has in this vein said that "Journalist are not free agents. They are constrained by a set of complex institutional relations that lead them to reproduce day after day the opinions and views of establishment figures, especially high government officials" (Schudson, 2008, p. 61).

Molotch and Lester were able to identify those who enjoy "habitual access" to the media, which according to them, "is generally found among those with extreme wealth or other institutionally based sources of power" (Molotch & Lester, 1997, p.201): poor and habitual access are linked together, each reinforcing the other. They emphasized that "routine access is one of the important sources and sustainer of existing power relationships" (201). To these two scholars the reality, depicted in the news is the political work of those with power.

Gaye Tuchman who describes objectivity as a strategic ritual (Tuchman, 1972) has also shown centralized and bureaucratic institution and location of the society thus privileging the voices and activities of the elite (Tuchman, 1978). One of the main findings of a study of the media coverage of a largely local issue in Britain, the poll tax, was that:

> *Despite the policy's explicitly local implications, the views and activities of national politicians were favoured over local politicians by a ratio of more than two to one. Furthermore, attention focused on the elites of the two main political parties, and conspicuously marginalized representatives from other political parties. Non-partly political actors were also infrequently featured* (Deacon & Golding, 1994 p.125).

In a study based on the content analyses of health pages of selected Nigerians newspapers, Oso and Odunlami found that health experts dominate as sources of health news while there is also "heavy reliance on statements, reports, publications, news releases and press conferences" (Oso & Odunlami, 2008, p.12).

In another study Oso (2001) has also argued that the Nigerian press is subordinated to dominant interests in the Nigerian society. Similarly, Twumasi in a Ghanaian study concluded that the two national newspapers he studied "are used mainly to cover the activities of urban social classes" (Twumasi, 1985, p. 219).

The only known Nigerian study that has focused mainly on the depiction of 'known" and 'unknown' in the news was carried out in the late 1970s by Bisi Aborisade. Aborisade's findings and conclusion are in line with those of the studies mentioned above. The known personalities not only receive more attention in the news media, but they are also noteworthy. First, that the Nigerian media see themselves as part of the establishment and identify with the aspiration of the power-that-be and perpetuate it. Second, that the press "follows the tradition of the press of the developed countries – the north American in particular

(Aborisade, 1977). Based on the objectives of this current study, has there been any change in the orientation of the Nigerian press?

Objective

The main objective of this study is to ascertain the type of people that make the news as sources and social actors. The study is also interested in the locations from where reporters source for the news, i.e., the institutional and geographical sites of the news.

Method

The study uses content analysis to examine the front pages of five major Nigerian newspapers – *Punch, The Nation, The Sun, Guardian,* and *Daily Trust* in the attempt to examine this claim.

According to Berelson (1952:14) content analysis is the "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." Explaining further, Babbie (2007, p. 320) notes that it "is particularly well suited to the study of communications and to answering the classic question of communications research: 'who says what, to whom, why, how and with what effect?"

Based on our central objectives of identifying whose voices are privileged by Journalists on the front pages of Nigerian newspapers, the adoption of content analysis and the social construction of news perspective should be able to indicate "not only source-communicator relationship but also source-power and power in the public space" (Hansen & Machin, 2013, p.102).

The choice of the newspapers fulfils two major criteria—national spread and location. The newspapers are regarded as having national spread in terms of circulation. Furthermore, geopolitical location was also taken into consideration.

Profile of the Newspapers

While *Punch, The Nation* and *The Sun* are located in Lagos, in the southern part of Nigeria, *Daily Trust* is located in Abuja, Federal Capital in the northern part.
Daily Trust was established in January 2001 by investors from the Hausa/Fulani and other Northern Nigerian ethnic groups. From inception, it established a reputation as a counterforce to the Southern Nigerian dominated media landscape. *Daily Trust* is the largest circulating newspaper in the North and has significant presence in the Southern parts of the country. In its official profile, *Daily Trust* frowns at the practice of journalists receiving gifts and gratifications:

> *It is the policy of media Trust that its editors and reporters should not solicit for gift or gratification either through begging, flattering, cajoling or blackmailing those they encounter in the course of their work. Where a gift can be graciously declined, we expect our staff to do so. However, where it is pressed on them, they will declare it so that the company can write a letter thanking the giver and donating the gift to charity. However, we expect those who sincerely patronize our publications as readers, advertisers, and newsmakers, not to seek to influence our reporters and editors with bribe, gratification and gift.*

The Punch is published in Lagos by private investors of South-West Yoruba ethnic origin. Established in 1976 it has consistently maintained a reputation as the widest circulating newspaper in Nigeria with correspondents spread across *The Nation*. Apart from the general Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists, *The Punch* subscribes to a corporate code of ethics "guided by the principles of factual, balanced and fair reporting and commentaries (which) are the basis of public trust and confidence." The newspaper also publishes on the back page of every edition an ethical statement forbidding its staff from accepting gifts or gratification thus, "We, Punch Nigeria Limited, do not demand or accept gifts or gratification to publish articles or photographs, neither do our journalists. Therefore, we implore you not to offer any to our journalists."

Established in 1983 by Alex Ibru, an Urhobo from South-South Nigeria, The Guardian is regarded as a quality newspaper and it prides itself as "The Flagship" of the Nigerian press and "an independent newspaper, established for the purpose of presenting balanced coverage of events, and of promoting the best interest of Nigeria. "It owes allegiance to no political party, ethnic community, religious or other interest group" (www.guardian.ng). Published in Lagos, *The Guardian* has correspondents in all states and major cities in Nigeria and is reputed for its in-depth coverage of national and international issues.

The Nation is a daily newspaper published in Lagos, Nigeria. It was first published 2006. According to its website (thenationonlineng.net), it stands for freedom, justice, and the market economy. The paper is linked with All Progressive Party (APC)Chieftain, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, former Governor of Lagos State.

Another newspaper published by a former governor is The Sun owned by Dr Orji Uzor Kalu, former governor of Abia State, Southeast, Nigeria and now a Senator under the platform of APC The Sun was incorporated in 2001 but started production in 2003 according to information available on its website (http://www.sunnewsonline.com/). Like *The Sun* in the UK, it follows the classical tabloid format in design and content, featuring screaming headlines and salacious contents. It is one of the highest circulating newspapers in Nigeria. It prides itself as "King of tabloid." The website claims that as of 2011, The Sun had a daily print run of 130,000 copies and 135,000 for the weekend titles with an average of 80% sales making it "the highest selling newspaper in Nigeria." However, no updated figures are available on the website as of April 2020.

Findings

Four hundred and sixty-eight (468) news stories on the front pages of these selected newspapers were content analysed. *Punch* newspaper and The Sun accounts for 118 (25.2%) and 101 (21.6%) of the news stories sample respectively, while *The Nation*, *Daily Trust* and *Guardian* front page stories account for 88 (18.8%), 82 (17.5%) and 79 (16.9%) in that order.

One of the findings of this study is that the "symbolic annihilation" of women that Tuchmann (1982) identified a long time ago is well and alive in contemporary Nigeria. Of the 468 voices used by the newspapers in the period of study, 407 (87%) were male voices while 34 (7.3%) were female. Institutional and other unidentified sources account for 27 (5.7%).

Who?
The continued relegation of female voices in national discourse reflects the structure of the Nigerian society and politics which the media uncritically reflect. The finding is consistent with other studies on the status of women in Nigeria as reflected by the media. For example, as part of a study on crisis management, Jimoh (2017) found that 88% of voices reflected on the Jos crisis in Nigeria were male while only 5.9% were female. The study noted that "the

exclusion of female voices by the media is another blind spot for the media that is largely owned and controlled by men" (Jimoh, 2017, p. 215).

This study also found that preponderant sources used by the media in their stories are mainly from statements/speeches, publication, and press releases to the detriment of reporter's interviews or investigations. Statements and speeches account for 238 (50.6%) of the total sources of 468. This was followed by publications/press releases with 109 (23.3%) while reporter's interviews and investigations had 80 (17.1%) shares. Another 18 (3.8%) were sourced from press conferences. If we combine sources not initiated by reporters (statements, press releases and press conference) it will mean that 77.7% of the reported stories emanated not from reporters' initiatives but entrenched sources outside the media. This has serious implications for the media that are expected to set their own agenda for society through investigative and interpretative reporting. It is even more indicting when viewed against the fact that "spin doctors" stage events for media to report and government narratives are sometimes at variance with expectations and experiences of the electorate.

A further breakdown of the official sources used by reporters indicated that federal government officials dominated the front-page discourse of the 468 sources, 131 (28.0%) are from federal government officials apart from the Presidency and Ministries, while state governors and security officials tied at 38 (8.1%) each, ministers have 36 (7.7%) while the presidency, had 34 (7.3%). Political party officials accounted for 30 (6.4%). Other state government were sourced 26 (5.6%) times followed by Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Representative with 22 (4.7%). Other significant sources are businesspeople/top company executives 19(4.1%), VIPs 18 (3.8%), Politicians 16 (3.4%) and traditional rulers 8 (1.7%). Other unspecified sources accounted for 30 (6.4%) as shown in the table below.

The dominance of governmental and political spokespersons at the federal and state levels is evident in this study. This result is consistent with the assertions made by Fletcher and Taras (1984, cited in Fischer, 1991) that reporters need information and quotes for their stories while politicians need publicity to promote themselves and their programmes.

Thus, other critical shareholders like civil society organisations which had no mention in the period of study and religious leaders with a scanty seven (1.5%) count are relegated to the backwaters. A vibrant media would be expected to feature investigative and interpretative reports in fulfilling their role as watchdogs of society. Oso (2014 p 202) emphasised this expectation when he observed that, "the news media do not just provide information. They are a cultural institution providing people with meanings. Through such meanings people acquire social knowledge, define social realities, and understand the world around them. The power to define issues, set agenda and promote a particular frame and meaning has, without doubt shifted to the control of media space by contending social actors."

The findings so far indicate that the allocation of space in the news to diverse groups, institutions and individuals in society is unequal and reflects the relations of power and privileges and the inegalitarian social order existing in the society. In this vein, Gandy has observed that "there are vast inequities in ability of groups and interests within and between classes to control the flow of information" (Gandy, 1982, p.5).

These new privileged news sources provide facts that are seldom questioned by journalists. Scholars have also noted the implications of the privileged access the powerful social and bureaucratic elite enjoy. For instance, Daniel Berkowitz has shown that:

> In most societies, fact bearers live in the ideology dominant mainstream, representing that mainstreams dominant ideological institution and presenting their dominant frame (Berkowitz, 2009, p.109)

In this context through the journalistic paradigm of news sourcing, the news media tend to legitimize the society's power structure.

Where?

The geopolitical location of news was also of concern in this study. The 468 front page stories gave prominence to stories emanating from North-Central Nigeria which include the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). More than half of the stories emanated from this zone with 252 (53.8%). An analysis shows that the figure was largely driven by stories from the FCT, the seat of government. This confirms the fact already established in previous studies that the media follow power, and the public officials are often the main sources and focus of the news. This was followed by Southwest with 111 (23.7%), Southeast 31 (6.6%), South-South 17 (3.6%), Northeast 15 (3.2%), foreign 4 (0.9%) and while the location of 21 (4.5%) was not stated. The low score of the Northeast where there is a resurgence of Boko-Haram crisis is particularly significant since conflict is regarded as a determinant of news. It would seem that even for stories on the crisis, the reporters depended on statements and press conferences from the seat of power in Abuja more than investigative or on-the-spot reporting from the theatre of crisis. So, on the score of independent, investigative, and interpretative reporting on issues, the media rate low. Therefore, the over dependence on releases from governmental and institutional sources is another low point in the fulfilment of their correlation function.

Significantly, the Southwest also showed strong presence. Traditionally, the southwest hosts the largest number of newspapers and accounts for four of the five national newspapers selected for this study. Lagos which is part of the Southwest is simply the nation's media capital. Events and activities in Lagos, due to the fact of proximity, a major news value easily gets the attention of the media. We must also note that due to their political and/or economic status, Abuja and Lagos are better served by the "beat system" through which reporters are allocated and stationed to places considered as important in terms of their ability to generate news stories on almost daily basis. Lagos is also the epicentre of the country's economic and business activities. But more importantly, Lagos in the Southwest had two security issues during the period. They were the issues of the *Badoo* boys, a popular cult gang that terrorised Ikorodu area of the state and the arrest of a kidnap kingpin, Chukwudumeme Onwuamadike, also popularly known as Evans, which provided salacious stories for the media. In keeping with proximity as a determinant of news and an upsurge in crime, the high number of stories can be understood.

What?

Economy and business stories dominated the discourse during this period of study with 106 (22.6%) on the subject matter. This is quite explained by the state of the Nigerian economy which has been officially acknowledged as being in recession. Issues surrounding the economy like inflation, job creation, unemployment, poverty, and hunger were prominently discussed. Governmental activities followed closely at 100 (21.4%) while insurgency/militancy/defence/security matters came third with 56 (12.0%).

We should not be surprised about the top three areas. The issues of the economy and insecurity and how government has been handling them have been of major concern to Nigerians in the last few years.

Other significant issues were political party activities 48 (10.3%), politics 41 (8.8%), health/social welfare 40 (8.5%), Education 15 (3.2%), transport 12 (2.6%), culture/tradition 7 (1.5%) while other issues accounted for 43 (9.2%).

Conclusion

The figures above give indications of the score card of the media in the period of study. The framing of news by the media follows a pattern that is tilted in favour of predictable paths: relegation of female voices to the back waters, dominance of official sources hence towing governmental agenda setting as against investigative/interpretative reports.

While the data and analysis presented above agree with the position that "news is the result of an organised response to routine bureaucratic problems" (Rock, 1973, p.73), we do not discount the possible influence of journalistic agency through which journalists may exercise some degree of professional autonomy.

The media and journalists may be accused of being biased, but more often than not, this is not deliberate or planned. The problem is itemised more from the adherence to their routines of practice. Thus, to many critical scholars of journalism, professional norms and its under-guarding philosophy of objectivity are the disease and not the cure to the problem of news bias (Schudson, 1995).

Though there are occasional 'openings' for oppositional and dissident discourses in the news media, the predominant position is that the news "reinforces more than challenges" the existing social hierarchies and inequalities (Schudson, 1995).

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