

Analysis of Thematic Highlights of Nigeria's Newspaper Editorials

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Abstract- One important way newspaper and magazines bare their minds on issues and challenges in a society is through editorials. The editorial is a potent channel through which public and community opinions are measured. It is based on this premise that this study examines the relatedness of the editorial contents and contemporary issues in Nigeria. The focus of the study is to assess editorials as an agenda setting device. The study analyzed the editorials of Nigeria's newspapers to determine the contents and themes of presentation. The study analyzed 228 editorials from six Nigerian newspaper spanning three months (April - June, 2019). Findings showed that themes of economy and politics attracted largest number of editorials with 23.68 and 16.22 percent respectively. It was further revealed that judiciary, tributes and human rights are the least recurring themes. The study concluded that newspaper editorial contents are based on the activities going on within the context of the society.

Index Terms- Editorials, Newspapers, Themes, Agenda Setting

I. INTRODUCTION

The newspaper genre is a valuable medium of mass communication in the contemporary world. It is a channel that facilitates social integration and cohesion in a society. The newspaper is structured into bits and sub-genres. One of the popular sub-genres that gives credence to the quality and acceptability of a newspaper is the editorial. According to Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, an editorial is "a newspaper or magazine article that gives the opinions of the editor or publisher". Similarly, American Heritage Dictionary cited in Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola (2009: 74) see editorial as "an article in a newspaper or magazine written by the editor, or under his direction, giving the opinion or attitude of the paper upon some subject". It is an article or a write-up that presents the idea of a newspaper on an issue. In other words, editorial is the official view-point of the newspaper and its proprietor(s) usually stated in accordance with the (editorial) policy of the newspaper.

Basically, editorials seek to influence actions of people, persuade them with an aim of redirecting policy decisions (Nnanyelugo and Obayi, 2013). In most occasions, the editorial plays the agenda-setting role to the people. In other instances, it serves as the medium through which public opinions are gauged by the political leaders and policy makers. This means that the editorial is an "eye-opener" that makes it possible for its readers not only to contribute to national discourse, but also to make them active and relevant in the developmental process of a nation. Therefore, analyses of editorial discourse always dwell on the strength of the editorial argument and the devices employed to convince the readers (Nnanyelugo and Obayi, 2013) which ultimately spurs them into action. Research findings have revealed that editorials have brought to the fore issues that are important to national development (Golan, 2010; Van Dijk, 2001; Pak, 2010). Additionally, editorial writers dwell on happenings in the society in the area of politics, economy, sports, health, culture and any other issues relevant in the polity of a country at a particular time or period.

Since editorials are written by experienced and seasoned journalists, the presentation is always precise and blunt. The commentary may however, be subjective because it is an opinion based write-up. The reasons behind writing of editorials are summarised by Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola (2009" 75) as follows:

Editorials provide the opportunity to help set the public agenda; editorial writers are getting the chance to have their voices heard in the making of policy. Editorial offers the newspaper the opportunity to have a well-informed subjective opinion on national and global issues that concern the public and, the editorial usually provides community leadership (in order) to reinforce and help clarify opinions that are already held, and to call the attention of the community to problems, projects and situations, and to press for community actions in such situations.

The inference here is that editorials are freely and authoritatively written to accommodate stories left uncovered by newsmen in their reportorial coverage of news and other assignments. This means that the “left-overs” can be brought to lime light and relevance through well-written editorials.

In addition to the agenda setting discursive role of editorial, it also has the freedom and opportunity to comment on actions and activities trending in the country. In line with this fact, recent developments in Nigeria have attracted editorial comments from different newspaper. For example, the imbroglio between the Islamic Movement in Nigeria and the Nigeria government been editorialized by several Nigerian newspapers such as Champion Newspaper on 22nd July, 2019, Daily Times (23rd July, 2019), Leadership (26th July), Vanguard (31st July), Daily Sun (August 5th), Nigeria Tribune (6th August), and The Nation (August 8th). Similarly, the ministerial nomination by President Muhammadu Buhari received editorial attention from ThisDay (28th July), Guardian (29th July), Tribune (30th July), Leadership (6th August), Vanguard (6th August) and Daily Sun (8th August). Also, the arrest and detention of the leader of Revolution Movement, Sowore received editorial attentions from the following newspapers: Daily Trust (8th August) and The Nation (9th August). In all these instances, the writers present different views ranging from advice suggestions, criticism, admonitions, warnings etc. In each case, the editorial is a follow-up to an earlier news story but the writers injected their objective or subjective opinions.

The newspaper editorial has become an attractive genre for researchers in language studies, mass communication, political science, sociology, etc. In this connection, there have been studies from different disciplines on the structure, language, findings, methods and relevance of editorials. For example (Pak, 2010; Takahashi, 2005; Lawrence, 2004) look at the discourse strategies of editorials. Also (Golan, 2010; Van Dijk, 2001) discuss on how editorials impact on public opinion. In other instances, Ani and Anyandike (2013) carry out a study on the contrastive study in newspaper editorials; Nnayelugo and Obayi (2013) examine the editorial behavior towards environmental disturbances in Nigeria; Farahman and Sanaz (2015) discuss the rhetoric of newspaper editorials; and Lawal (2015) research into pragmatics of truth and modality in newspaper editorials. None of the studies has shown interest in the theme and thematic patterns of newspaper editorials.

This study attempts to bridge the gap by looking at the thematic pre-occupation of newspaper editorials. It is meant to examine the thematic highlights (patterns) in the context of social, political, and economic situations in Nigeria. There have been happenings recently in Nigeria in the area of politics, economy, security, health, crime etc., thus making it ideal for such a study to be conducted. Understanding editorial thematic patterns of socio-political issues is imperative as it would educate newspaper readers on the need to depend on editorials for material agenda setting. Also, explication of the study may spur editorial writers into action to be more proactive, investigative, blunt, focused and objective in writing editorials.

Review of related literature

The review of literature for this study is done under two related sub-titles: roles of editorials and empirical review.

Roles of Newspaper Editorials

In historical precision, editorial stated to appear in newspaper in this middle of 18th century (Park, 1923). Specifically, according to Paul (1991), newspaper editorial was used in 1836 by James Gordon Bernet, the publisher of New York Herald. In the New York Herald at that time, he devoted some pages to his opinionated articles. Later in 1850, Horace Greenly replicated the experiment by setting aside one opinion page in “The New York Tribune” (Gartner, 2005). Right from its birth, editorial has revolutionalized the newspaper genre by shaping its structure, outlook and existence through the roles and functions that it has continued to play.

One major role of the editorial is its ability to express the opinion of the newspaper, its editors and management. In this regard, Van Dijk (1995: 243) says that “it is the function of editorials to formulate the opinions of newspaper editors... which are usually supported by a series of arguments...”

In another instance of editorial function, Gartner (2005) lay emphasis on the importance of editorials establishing and stabilizing the strength of the newspaper itself. In supporting this opinion, Park (1923: 281) says that “the power of the press is the editor and the editorial rather than the reporter and the news in which these writers are thinking”. Albright (2006) further his own view by perceiving the editorial as a way to change the especially in the face of modern technology. These opinions give credence to the fact that editorials is like sealing a bond with the readers by energizing their minds in order to express their own opinions.

Similarly, Omojola (2005) opines that the editorial could be an instrument of persuasion which ultimately influences public opinion on national issues. This view becomes realistic when a media organization feels that an event or situation deserves a change, and writes an editorial on such a situation thus making the medium to orientate the readers towards its belief or position (Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola, 2009).

Van Dijk (1995); and Belmonte (2008) in Elyazale (2014) present a more inclusive function of editorials thus: “editorials and comment articles play a definite role in the formation and altering of public opinion,

promote social interaction among journalists, readers and the rest of the participants in the language event and influence social debate, decision making..." The inference here is that editorial is a source of opinion formation to the reader and ultimately strengthens interaction between the reader and the writer.

Additionally, the editorial could give critical and in-depth analysis in national issues concepts and ideologies (Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola, 2009). Van Dijk (1995: 1) corroborates this view by saying that editors "try to reproduce their own (group) attitudes and ideologies among the public at large with the aim to legitimize the dominance and power of a specific group". It thus means that the editorial is a means to communicate certain ideology, concept and principle among the readers in an attempt to exercise some power on them. Conversely, the editorial can play the same role in which instead of speaking for the opinions of newspaper (the media outfit) it can speak for the ordinary citizen as Greenberg (2000: 1) cited in Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola (2009) clearly specified that "editorials assume an important communicative function by offering newspaper readers a distinctive voice that will speak to them directly". Here, "them" refers to the media men and women including editors, journalists, reporters etc.

To round off discussion on this issue, it is obvious that editorials display and perform diverse roles and functions as summarized by Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola (2009: 26) as follows:

... editorial might play an important (essential) role in maintaining the strength of the newspaper, through promoting and maintaining communication with the audience, and leading, the newspaper to take part in possible social change... These important functions seem to be gained through their argumentative nature and also through the language used in them.

II. EMPIRICAL REVIEWS OF EDITORIALS

Editorial discourse has become an attractive research area to scholars in the past decades. Scholarly works in different areas of editorials such as structures, strategies, functions, relevance, language, etc. Discursive dissect of editorial discourses as represented in studies (Van Dijk, 2001; Pak, 2010) have always emphasized the strength of the editorial argument and the devices used to convince the audience. Specifically, Pak (2010) conducted a research on three newspapers from three countries. The focus of the study was to examine source attribution as an argumentative device in newspaper editorials. Dwelling in a comparative approach, and collecting a sample editorial from three newspapers (New York Times, El Pais and El Universe), he examined the frequency of attributed statements, the typical source of attribution and the function of the year 1994. Findings from the study showed that while the American Newspaper (New York Times) placed high value on specialists and scientific reports, the Mexican and the Spanish newspapers (El Pais and El Universal) relies on other sources such as political figure to convince the readers.

The above study differs with the present study. For example, the present study examines editorial titles (subject matters) in relation to the socio-political and economic situations in Nigeria. However, the two studies are relevant to the understanding of the relevance of editorials.

Also, in an attempt to identify the persuasive strategies as well as looking at the rhetorical patterns and devices used in editorials, Fartousi (2012) carried out an analysis of the editorial discourse of the daily tabloid in Malasia. He tried to identify the element of generic structural abilities, their sequence and rhetorical figures used in the editorial. Findings revealed that there were a number of rhetorical devices/figures in the editorial, and that the devices were the ones influencing and persuading the readers of editorials. The study contrasts the present study in that while the above study focused on strategies used in editorials to help audience better realize and accept the intent of an editorial, the present study tries to draw the attention of the readers to the happenings and occurrences in the society.

In another study, Khan (2007) examined the theory that claims that the American mass media generally conform to the foreign policy of the US government; the study content analyzed the editorial coverage of Pakistan in the thace elite American newspapers between October 1999 and May 2007. The result showed that the theory of media conformity was not supported by available data bit rather, fall closely to the cultural difference theory advanced by Karim (2000) and Khalid (2001). The study concluded that there was a general bias against Muslims by American newspaper editorials (Nnanyego and Obayi, 2012).

Research has shown that newspaper editorials can be used as the voice of the community, the people and the nation in general. In this regard, Ekenayanwu and Jokodola (2009) carried out a study in which they analyzed the editorials of Nigeria's national newspapers in an attempt to determine their nature, content, type as well as quality of presentation. The main focus of the study was to assess the role of editorials in community conversation by analyzing their stand on community and national issues. Findings showed that the content of editorials most times depends on the issue pertinent in the country at a particular point in time, issues on the minds of the public and socio-economic issues challenging the society.

In another study, Farahman and Sanaz (2015) aimed at comparing the rhetorical devices employed in the editorials of the American newspaper. The New York Times, and the Australian newspaper. The Australian by using Richardson (2007) framework of rhetorical devices focusing on hyperbole, metaphor, and metonymy. The

focus of the study was to see the extent that language affects written conventions. The results showed that the editorials of the two newspapers employed the same rhetorical device categories; the categorical distribution of rhetorical devices was nearly the same in the two newspapers.

In summary, this review of literature has provided an overview of the existing literature on the area of editorials on issues of diverse importance and relevance. However, some gaps are identified. For example studies on editorial thematic patterns on highlights are absent. This study seeks to fill this gap and contribute relevant knowledge in this area.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyze the editorial content of Nigeria's daily national newspapers. Specifically, the objectives of the study include:

1. To find out the content (subject matter) of editorials in Nigerian newspapers;
2. To determine the frequency of editorial themes (subject matter) in Nigerian newspapers;
3. To examine the relationship between editorials in Nigeria's newspapers and the prevailing social, economic and political situations in Nigeria.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the contentual highlights of Nigeria's newspapers editorials?
2. Which subject matter(theme) is the most emphasised by the Nigeria's newspapers editorials?
3. To what extent does the editorials reflect the contextual realities of Nigeria?

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study makes use of content analysis, which analyses the manifest content of communication or text. In gathering data, the editorial headlines of the sampled papers were collated through the use of statistical tools such as frequency, percentages, SPSS and Excel. Content analysis is the best method to draw data in accordance to the objectives of the study.

Sample Size

The sample size for this study is 228 issues (editorials) captured from six selected newspapers. Data were collected from the editorial pages of the sampled newspapers. The researcher deliberately conducted an examination of the editorial page of each newspaper to see if there is an editorial comment from such a newspaper for a particular day. The result of the search yielded two hundred and twenty-eight editorials from the six newspapers between the months of April and June, 2019.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the six newspapers used for this study. Purposive sampling technique entails the researcher to deliberately select what constitutes his/her sample based on some predetermined purpose or aims which his study hopes to achieve (Ekeanyanwu and Olaitan, 2009, p.88). A census technique was subsequently adopted in which all the editorials in the sampled newspapers were examined. A systematic search of the editorial headlines of the 228 editions of the sampled newspapers was carried out to identify (and document) their contents. All the editorials were examined to assess and categorize their contents. The study performs a census of all the editorials in the Punch, the Vanguard, The Guardian, Blueprint, Nigerian Tribute and Daily Sun newspapers between April 1st and June 30th, 2019.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the study is the newspaper editorials of the sampled newspaper. The researcher developed some content categories (themes or subject matters) that are relevant to the prevailing conditions to the Nigerian nation. The categorization was done to determine and analyze the editorial contents in order to place the content under a theme. These content categories are politics, economy, security, education, crime, religion, health, judiciary, foreign affairs, infrastructure, sports, parliament, and human rights.

Findings and Discussions

To achieve the objectives of the study, the content categories were developed and subsequently analyzed to find out how the newspapers have used their editorials to capture them(the categories) within the context of the Nigerian nation's activities. Answers were provided for the research questions: Discussions on the answers gave insight to the findings of the study.

Research Question One:

What are the contentual highlights of Nigerian's Newspaper editorials?

Newspaper as a mass communication device is a gauge through which societal activities could be measured. Table 1 below is a catalogue of the contents (subject matters) of the editorials used for this study. The subject matter and its themes are the issues and activities taking place within the country. The editorial writers are Nigerians; they feel Nigeria, they think Nigeria, so they are aware of what goes on in the country. The major issues discussed in the editorials for this study are politics, economy, parliament, security, education, health, crime, human rights, religion, foreign affairs, tributes, judiciary, sports, and infrastructure. Other issues that cannot be clearly accommodated in these broad categories are put under miscellaneous issues. Table 1 shows that the researcher identifies fifteen (15) themes and ninety-three sub-themes from two hundred and twenty-eight (228) editorials used for the study.

Editorial Themes	Sub-themes										Total
Politics	Election (11)	Political party (05)	Governance (14)	2019 Inauguration (04)	Democracy day (01)	June 12 (02)	-	-	-	-	37
Economy	National Devt. (07)	Economic policy (17)	Tax (04)	Debt (06)	Budget (02)	Energy (Petrol) (04)	Poverty (05)	Banking (02)	Capital market (01)	Labour (06)	54
Parliament	Bill passage (03)	Leadership (04)	Performance (01)	8 th Assembly (01)	9 th Assembly (01)	Media Relations (02)	Crisis (01)	Administration (01)	Pension (01)	-	15
Security	Police (13)	Military (03)	Terrorism (02)	Security Threat (01)	Sea Piracy (01)	Govt. Policy (01)	-	-	-	-	21
Education	Govt. Policy (04)	University (03)	Reading culture (01)	JAMB (03)	Language use (01)	-	-	-	-	-	12
Health	Breast feeding (01)	Disease control (04)	Facilities (01)	Drug misuse (01)	Female circumcision (01)	Smoking (01)	Govt. Policy (04)	Hazard (01)	-	-	14
Human Rights	Violations (04)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	04
Crime	Prevention (02)	Killings (07)	Violence (02)	Banditry (01)	Drug trafficking (01)	Stealing (01)	Human trafficking (01)	Fraud (01)	Terrorism (01)	-	17
Religion	Easter (02)	Ramadan (01)	Leadership (01)	OIC memberships (01)	-	-	-	-	-	-	05
Foreign Affairs	Violence (03)	Leadership ouster (02)	United Nations (02)	Visa (01)	Hunger (01)	Diplomacy (01)	Democracy (01)	Econs Activity (01)	Political Crisis (01)	-	13
Tributes	Deaths (04)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	04
Judiciary	Performance (01)	Structure (01)	Perception (01)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	03
Sports	Chukwu's Illness (01)	Westernhorf Rewards (01)	Soccer (03)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	05

Editorial Themes	Sub-themes										Total
Infrastructure	Building collapse (01)	Ports (01)	Rail (01)	Road (02)	Electric meter (02)	Decay (02)	Refineries (01)	Steel (01)	Air-Ports (01)	-	12
Miscellaneous	Population (01)	Admonition (02)	Tech Transfer (01)	INEC (01)	Nigerian Passport (01)	Commentary (01)	Culture (01)	Public Probe (01)	Safety (02)	Fulani Radio (01)	12
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	228

Research Question Two:

Which theme(s) is the most emphasized by the Nigeria’s editorials?

Table 1 provides answer for this research question. Findings from the study as evident from Table 1 above indicates that the newspaper editorials used for the study focus more on economy than any other issues in Nigeria. This may be due to the fact that economy is the main yardstick used in measuring a nation’s development. Nigeria as a developing economy is battling with so many economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, infrastructure, power, etc. Since the newspaper is the voice of the people, editorials focus more on economic issues than any other content. Economy and its sub-themes appear in 54 (editorials (23.68%). Politics is the next most emphasized content with 37 sub-themes (16.22%). The reason for this may be as a result of centrality of politics as the driving force of any nation. Economic development of a nation is largely determined by the politics of that nation. The political machinery co-ordinate all other activities of a nation. The next emphasized contents are security, crime, parliament and health with 21, 17, 15 and 14 themes respectively. Other moderately emphasized contents include foreign affairs (13 themes), education (12 themes) and infrastructure (12 themes). The less emphasized contents are religion (5 themes), sports (5 themes), tributes (4 themes), and judiciary (3 themes).

Emphasis on the editorial contents is determined by the centrality, sensitivity or importance of the issue in focus to the nation and its people. Issues that have to do with the progress, stability and development of a nation will definitely attract attention from newspaper editorials. It is for this reason that issues such as judiciary, human rights, religion and tributes attract little attention from the editorials used for this study.

Table 2: Level of Emphasis of the Editorial Contents of the Newspapers

Content (Theme)	Number of Appearance	Percentage
Politics	37	16.22
Economy	54	23.68
Parliament	15	6.57
Security	21	9.21
Education	12	5.26
Health	14	6.14
Human Rights	04	1.76
Crime	17	7.45
Religion	05	2.20
Foreign Affairs	13	5.71
Tributes	04	1.76
Judiciary	03	1.32
Sports	05	2.20
Infrastructure	12	5.26
Miscellaneous	12	5.26
Total	228	100

Research Question Three:

To what extent do the editorials reflect the contextual realities of Nigeria?

Based on the result of the study, the editorials in Nigerian newspapers are reflections of the socio-economic activities in the country. Each of the themes and sub-themes says one thing or the other about the political, economic, social or religious situations in Nigeria.

Table 1 presents the picture of these realities, and this answers the research question under review. Starting with the theme of politics which has 37 sub-themes adequately reflect the political setting of the period which the study covers (April – June 2019). For instance “election” as a sub-theme has 11 editorials to its credit; the same goes for governance with 14 editorials. The study was conducted during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Newspaper editorials like any other mass communication channel have a lot of things to say about the elections. Governance equally reflect the contextual setting of the period.

Economy as a theme in the editorials is another theme that reflects the setting of the period. The large number of sub-themes under economy fits into the words of Karl Mart who believes that the economy of a nation is the infrastructure while other things are superstructure (Ekeanyanwu and Jokodola, 2009). Two sub-themes; economic policy and national development, which jointly account for 44.4 % of the entire sub-themes under economy is a perfect reflection of a nation yearning for development.

The issues of security and crime that attract relatively high comments from the editorials truly reflect the security situation of Nigeria. There are a lot of security challenges in the country that justify the number of editorials. The 13 editorials for police as a sub-theme shows that the internal security (kidnapping, banditry, violence, etc.) of a country rests on its police.

The number of sub-themes under “health” (14) is abysmal considering the poor state of the health facilities in Nigeria. The attraction that “disease control” and “government policy” has is tolerable. However the focus of the editorials on “facilities” does not reflect the health needs of the country.

The issues of religion (5 themes), tributes (4 themes), judiciary (3), and to some extent human rights (4) could be assumed to be tolerably accepted within the context of the prevailing situations in Nigeria during the period of the study. Unlike the parliament (legislative), the judiciary is supposed to be a silent institution that does not need undue attraction. Similarly, religion is a personal affair between an individual and God and since Nigeria is not a highly fanatical nation editorial attraction may not be voluminous. The same view could be expressed for tributes and human rights.

The sizeable number of editorials that “parliament” attract is a reflection of the structure, leadership, performance and posture of 8th National Assembly that ended in June, 2019. The activities of that assembly is responsible for editorials and comments from newspapers and other channels.

The number of editorials on infrastructure does not negatively reflect the Nigerian infrastructure situation. Nigeria is in need of rapid infrastructure development. However, the number of editorials for each of the following sub-themes: ports, rail, steel does not represent the infrastructural needs of Nigeria.

On education, the available editorials do not reflect or justify the centrality and importance of the sector to the overall development of the country. As a pivotal sector of any nation, education ought to have attracted more editorials than what it got. The few ones that are available do not reflect the broad nature of the sector. For instance no editorials on facilities, administration, primary education etc.

In terms of volume (number of editorials), foreign affairs has 13 editorials; this is tolerable. When we look at sub-themes these editorials do not represent the reality of our diplomatic relations. For instance there is no editorial comment on the challenges faced by Nigerians in South Africa.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The focus of the study was to look at how the editorials of Nigeria’s newspapers reflect the socio-political realities of the country. A period of three months (April - June 2019) served as the study period. A total of 228 editorials were collected from six national newspapers. Findings showed that the categorical distribution of editorial contacts (themes and sub-themes) were nearly the same in all the newspapers used for the study. The study further revealed that economy and politics attracted more editorial comments from all the newspapers. It was noted in the study that economy, politics and security are the front runners in terms of editorial appearances, while judiciary, tributes and human rights were the back benchers.

Similarly, it was revealed that the Nigerian newspapers exhibit functional values of editorials in projecting the views of the people, that is, acting as the voice of the people of a nation. Finally, it was noted that, most often newspaper editorials base their contents and opinions on contemporary issues (and challenges) in the country at a particular period of time.

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