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THE NEED FOR NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS TO RE-DEFINE NEWS VALUES

Anthony Garison[1], Yakubu Debora Dangana[2], Jacob Plangnan Dapar[3]
[1,2]Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria; [3]University of Jos, Nigeria
garisonanthony@gmail.com; Deborahdangana3@gmail.com

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Abstract

Recent surveys show a decline in public interest in traditional news outlets like newspapers and television, possibly due to the constant exposure to negative stories that can lead to compassion fatigue. The major challenge is constituted by the adopted western news values which neglect our norms and focuses on praise singing the ruling elites. This article argues that, in order for Nigerian Journalists to effectively serve the nation's distinct socio-political context, traditional news ideals need to be redefined to fit our societal realities. Sensationalism and elitism are frequently given precedence over people-centered reporting in the current news values, which are primarily derived from Western media. Because of this misalignment, there is a gulf between the public and the media, which upholds social inequities and under-represents voices from marginalized groups. Nigerian Journalists should prioritize topics, stories and events that are important to their communities, support developmental or solution journalism, and hold authority figures accountable by reframing news principles. Adopting contextualized news values that represent Nigeria's political, cultural, and economic realities is necessary for this redefinition. The study suggests a framework for redefining news ideals that focus on social responsibility, local relevance, and people-centered

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reporting. Nigerian Journalists can recover their position as advocates for social change and catalysts for national advancement by implementing this approach. This would enhance development and audience engagement. Otherwise the public often diverts and avoids news when it makes them feel negative. And most of the western news values adopted relegate and places the masses in disadvantage disposition.

Keywords: Need, Journalists, Redefine, News Values

Introduction

Journalism is a craft profession that involves gathering, processing and dissemination of information about events, issues and happenings in the society. Journalism focuses on informing, educating and entertaining the general public. Various works inherent in journalism include and not limited to news writing, investigations, research, feature writing, editing, reporting, publishing and broadcasting. It promotes transparency, accountability, checks and balances, public discourse as well as keeping people informed, updated and engages the audience with the world around them.

News as one of the cardinal functions of journalism can be defined as the report or account of unusual events in the society. It could also be described as the newly received worthy information about happenings, events or developments that are disseminated through various media channels. It is served fresh. According to Asemah (2022), News is any event, happening, idea or opinion that is timely, which interests or affects society members and that is capable of being understood by them. News is what newspapers print and radio or television stations broadcast. News have criteria for selection, such criteria that determines what makes news are referred to as news values.

News values are the characteristics or principles used by journalists or media organizations to determine the relevance and significance of a story and to decide whether it is fit for publication/broadcasting or otherwise. Jim Walsh (2017), says news values are the elements of story that Journalists have used for decades to quickly assess and determine whether an idea or event is worth sharing - and if so, how prominently. News values are criteria that influence the selection and presentation of events as published news. These values help explain what makes something "newsworthy".

News values are not universal and can vary between different cultures. Among the many lists of news values that have been drawn up by Scholars and Journalists, some attempt to describe news practices across cultures, while others have become remarkably specific to the press of particular (often Western) nations. Galtung and Ruge (1965) posit that in the Western tradition, decisions on the selection and prioritization of news are made by editors on the basis of their experience and intuition, although analysis by Galtung and Ruge showed that several factors are consistently applied across a range of news organizations. Their theory was tested on the news presented in four different Norwegian newspapers from the Congo and Cuban crisis of July 1960 and the Cyprus crisis of March–April 1964. Results were mainly consistent with their theory and hypotheses. Johan Galtung later said that the media have misconstrued his work and become far too negative, sensational, and adversarial.

Methodologically and conceptually, news values can be approached from four different perspectives: material (focusing on the material reality of events), cognitive (focusing on people's beliefs and value systems), social (focusing on journalistic practice), and discursive (focusing on the discourse). A discursive perspective tries to systematically examine how news values such as Negativity, Proximity, Elite-ness, and others, are constructed through words and images in published news stories. This approach is influenced by linguistics and social semiotics, and is called "Discursive News Values Analysis". It focuses on the "distortion" step in Galtung and Ruge's chain of news communication, by analyzing how events are discursively constructed as newsworthy.

Theoretical Framework

Kerlinger (1964), as cited in Baran (2009) is a set of constructs, concepts and postulations that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting such phenomenon. Based on the above clarifications, Agenda Setting Theory will be used to guide the article.

Agenda Setting Theory

According to Asemah (2022), the theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973. An agenda is a subject or an issue of discussion. It is a hot topic that draws remarks from the general public, both positive and negative. Setting an agenda, however, is a way to reflect what is going on in our society. The theory says the media, especially the news media, are not always successful at telling us what to think, but

they are quite successful at telling us what to think about. The theory's main premise is that the public follows the agenda that the media sets. According to the notion, majority of the images we retain in our minds, most of the thoughts and anxieties we have, and the topics we debate are derived from the things we have read, heard, or seen in various forms of mass media. We are influenced by the media to think or feel a certain way that certain issues are more important than others in our society.

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw wrote in (1972) that: In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue but, how much importance to attach to the issues from the amount of information in a news story and its positions.

According to Ugande and Asemah (2014) and Santas, Asemah, and Jumbo (2020), the media brings up important concerns in our society, and people have a tendency to think about these topics. This suggests that the media influences our thoughts on particular subjects. The audience is expected to follow the agenda set by the media.

According to Wimmer & Dominick (2000), the theory on agenda setting by the media suggests that the public agenda—that is, the topics people choose to debate, consider, and worry about—is strongly influenced and guided by the news that the media chooses to report on. This implies that if the news media decides to devote the greatest amount of time and space to reporting on HIV/AIDS, this problem will take precedence among viewers' concerns. The concept of agenda setting dates back to Walter Lippman (1922), cited in Asemah (2022), who argued that our mental images are shaped by the media.

Cohen (1963), who made the argument that although the media may not always be successful in telling people what to think, they are successful in giving them what to think about, further developed the concept forty years later. This idea was furthered by Lang & Lang (1966), who noted that the mass media frequently presents items, highlights particular topics, and makes suggestions about what people should think and feel. This suggests that the media "plays drums and when they play their drums," we start following along with their song. However, it is important to remember that because society is dynamic, the concerns that the media raises alter from time to time. Every day, a great deal of things happens in our society. Thus, the issues that the media raises shift as events take place at

different times. The agenda-setting theory posits that the mass media predetermines what issues are deemed essential at any given period in a given culture, according to Folarin (1998).Although agenda setting theory gives the media the ability to influence our thoughts, it does not give them the authority to decide what we truly think.

Public Agenda, Media Agenda and Policy Agenda

These agendas interact and influence each other, but they are not always aligned.

Public Agenda: This is actually what the public cares about, it could be based explained thus:

- Refers to the matters that the general public finds most essential.
- Reflects the priorities and values of society as a whole.
- And it is shaped by societal norms, cultural values, and public opinion.
- It is influenced by social media, personal experiences, and community conversations.

Media Agenda: This means what the media chooses to report to the society (news values), it sets agenda for the public resulting to the public considering it important. It could be further explained thus:

- Refers to the issues and stories that are selected and highlighted by media outlets.
- Reflects the media's perception of what is newsworthy and important.
- Shapes public awareness and attention through selective reporting and framing.
- It is influenced by editorial biases, ratings, and commercial interests

Policy Agenda: This has to do with what policymakers decide to act on. It could also be understood thus:

- Refers to the issues and proposals that are being considered and addressed by policymakers and governments.
- Reflects the political priorities and goals of elected officials and government agencies.
- Shapes laws, regulations, and public policies through deliberation and decision-making.
- It is influenced by political ideologies, special interest groups, and bureaucratic processes

Necessities for Re-defining Nigerian News Values

Inclusion of our Diversities: When you look at media contents critically, the rural dwellers and common people are not inclusive. Journalists dominates contents with, "the President said, the Governor said". While the ordinary man who may have something of value is being out-ruled. Minority views are doused and that of the ruling class are propagated thereby promoting hegemony to maintain the status quo at the detriment of national development. Udoakah (2004), notes that by redefining news values, we may address the under-representation of marginalized groups in Nigerian media and encourage different perspectives and inclusive representation.

Cultural Relevance: The field of journalism is always changing due to new techniques and developments in research. Western media often focuses more on negative than positive information. Soroka (2014), notes that this trend is increasing. Our culture is different from that of the western nations who propounded the news values we religiously adopted. As such, practicing those adopted news values may downplay and relegate some of our important culture. Edeani (1993), argues that Nigerian cultural norms and priorities may not coincide with traditional news values, which were developed in Western environments.

Development/Solution Journalism: Developmental journalism does not look at "he said, she said" type of journalism; but it focuses on reporting and analyzing issues related to social, economic and political development especially in developing countries or marginalized communities. The goal is to inform, educate and empower audiences, solely facilitating positive social change and development outcomes. Development journalism often centered on human-centered storytelling, solution-oriented reporting, local relevance and context, in-depth analysis and investigative reporting as well as collaboration with NGOs; which the adopted western news values imbibed in Nigeria do not take in to cognizance. Ibelema (2008), observes that in order to foster national development, Nigeria requires news values that give developmental concerns like infrastructure, healthcare, and education top priority.

Contextualization: This has to do with the process of understanding and interpreting newsworthiness and information within the specific cultural, social, economic, and political context of Nigeria. This involves considering the unique characteristics, challenges, and values of Nigerian society when selecting, evaluating and reporting news. Hence, adopting and practicing journalism in Nigeria with western news values can never achieve this. News

values that address regional issues like corruption, insecurity, and economic development are necessary due to Nigeria's distinct sociopolitical setting (Oso, 2006).

Conflict Sensitivity: Here, media have to be sensitive of conflicts in a way that; avoids exacerbating tensions, promotes understanding and empathy, supports peaceful resolution, respects diverse perspectives and avoids harm to individuals or groups. This could be achieved through using balanced and neutral language, avoiding sensationalism and emotive reporting and focusing on peaceful resolution and solutions. Nigeria's diverse and sometimes volatile environment requires news values that prioritize conflict sensitivity and responsible reporting (Ogbondah, 2004).

Accountability and Transparency: Accountability and transparency are essential components of good governance. Redefining news values in Nigeria can empower or pave way for journalists to hold government and public office holders accountable for their actions and inactions rather than praise singing them all over the media contents. Journalists should ensure that they hold government to be transparence in decision making process, transparent in financial reporting and media itself should be transparent in news sourcing and accountable for accurate reporting. Agbaje (2013), posits that Nigeria's anti-corruption initiatives should be bolstered by redefining news values to emphasize accountability and openness in governance. By emphasizing accountability and transparency, development journalists can facilitate justice, equitability and prosperous society.

Local Content: Western media news values adopted do not consider local contents. By local contents, we refer to the creation, production and dissemination of information, material or programming that are that originate from a specific geographic region or community, reflect the unique experiences, perspectives or concerns of that region, produced by local talents, creators and media talents, addresses the local issues, needs and interests and as well relevant to the local audience and context. Du-Vo thanh et al (2023), observe that studies show a decline in public interest in traditional news outlets like newspapers and television, possibly due to the constant exposure to negative stories that can lead to compassion fatigue. Okoro (2011), notes that to promote a feeling of national identity and pride, local information and tales should take precedence over excessively relied-upon international news

Audience Engagement: Audience engagement refers to the ways in which media outlets prioritize masses it their contents, interact with them, involve, and respond to their concerns. Audience engagement is crucial for building trust, fostering inclusivity, and promoting social change. In a diverse and dynamic society like Nigeria, audience engagement is essential for media outlets to remain relevant, effective, and responsive to the needs of their audience. According to Ibrahim (2015), redefining news values can encourage audience participation and engagement, making news more accessible and relevant to Nigerians. By prioritizing audience engagement, Nigerian media can; build trust and credibility, foster inclusivity and diversity, promote social change and development, enhance media literacy and critical thinking and support democratic participation and civic engagement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is critical to redefine news ideals in Nigeria in order to support inclusive, development-focused, and contextual reporting. Nigerian media can better meet the demands of their broad audience by implementing a framework that places a high priority on contextual truth, local relevance, and solutions-oriented storytelling. This framework's crucial elements—audience involvement, conflict sensitivity, and contextualization—allow media outlets to create inclusive environments, encourage trust, and advance social change. Nigeria is facing numerous development issues, but if news values are reevaluated, the media will be better equipped to effectuate change, support sound governance, and give voice to the voiceless. In the end, this reinterpretation could make Nigerian media a tremendous catalyst for advancement in society, the economy, and democracy.

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