

Concepts and Emerging Theories: An Analysis of Editorials in Nigerian Newspapers

¹ANI, Moses, ²ANYANDIKE, D. O.

¹Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State.
Tel: +2348033416584

²School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
Tel: +2348037770678

(*E-mail: notibutchrist2k4@yahoo.com and dominic.anyadike@yahoo.com)

Abstract

One of the ways newspapers bare their mind on issues of public interest is through editorials. As an important piece of writing, editorials do not shy away from controversies, in the hope of not only presenting the issues to the reading public, but also drawing responses from the public and attracting new readership in the competitive marketplace of ideas. It is on this premise that this paper examines the relatedness in the concepts that make up the contents of editorials in three selected Nigerian newspapers. Through a qualitative analysis of editorials in *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers using Grounded Theory method, the concepts of Timeliness, Contempt, Personality-Issue, Audience-Specific and Change were discovered. The study period spans from January – June 2012 and it focuses on salient issues of public interest as commented on by the newspapers. The findings of this study which are the concepts stated earlier gave rise to emerging theories.

Key words: Editorial, Grounded Theory, Concepts, Emerging Theory, Newspapers

1.1 Background of the Study

The place of editorials as the view of a newspaper (as an institution) cannot be over-emphasized. It is the newspaper's opinion on important social, political, economic or legal issue of the day, which is intended to persuade readers to agree to a particular point of view.

As an important piece of writing, it does not shy away from controversies, in the hope of not only presenting the issues to the reading public, but also drawing responses from the public and attracting new readership in the competitive marketplace.

This study is a qualitative analysis of editorials in *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun newspapers* using Grounded Theory method. The study period spans from January – June 2012 and it focuses on salient issues of public interest as commented on by the newspapers.

Grounded theory method as used in this study aims at reflecting the source of emergent concepts which is ultimately grounded in the behaviour, words and actions as well as styles and patterns of presentation.

1.2 Problem Identification

From the initial editorials read from each of the newspapers, currency of the issue in question was a major area that was partially ignored in presentation. In order to avoid sounding stale, each of the newspapers played down on the date by using words like: "last week", "recently", "last Month", "for some time now", "recent week", "latest report", "sometime this Month", and so on; except for *Vanguard* newspaper that used "Tuesday" for an issue she commented on Friday of this same week. (*Vanguard*, Friday March 30, 2012).

The slant of most of the editorials was more of condemning unwarranted and unwanted behaviours usually exhibited by government on issues that bother on public interest.

The style of presentation of issues in the editorials does not appear to be universal, as it appeals to a group of persons and not the general public.

The language use was quite elitist especially as portrayed in *The Guardian* newspaper. There appears to be a generic tone of persuasion that runs in almost all the editorials except that of *Vanguard* which is more like a passing comment, without any persuasive drive.

2.1 Review of Related Empirical Studies

According to Goulding (1999:8): "... researchers adopt grounded theory when the topic of interest has been relatively ignored in the literature of has been given only superficial attention. Consequently, the researcher's mission is to build his / her own theory from the ground."

The root of grounded theory can be traced back to a movement known as symbolic interactionism whose origins lie in the work of Charles Cooley (1864-1929) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). The concern of these scholars was to avoid the polarities of psychologism and sociologism. The former is a view predicted on the assumption that social behaviour is explicable in genetic terms and by logical or neurological

processes while the latter is the opposed fallacy which looks at personal conduct as if it were in some way programmed by societal norms. (Goulding, 1999)

Mead argues that the most profound aspect of human conduct is symbolism, the greatest symbolism being language. But Mead fails to show how linguistic terms develop in an individual's career, which is what Chomsky (1964) emphasized.

Scholars believe that individuals are purposive in their actions and will act and react to environmental cues. Hence, newspapers as institutions react to social ills and abnormalities in government activities through their own voice (editorial). The meaning attached to words used in each editorial is theme specific. These meanings are modified, suspended or re-grouped in the light of changing situations (Schwandt, 1994).

From this viewpoint the investigator hopes to construct what people see as their social reality (and by extension what these newspapers view as ideal) and how objects or experiences contribute to the construction of this reality. (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992)

The notion of generating new theory from data, as opposed to testing existing theory, resonated with other social scientists and grounded theory as a research design became increasingly popular.

According to Glaser & Strauss (1967):

While methodologies such as ethnography, semiotics and phenomenology are currently occupying prime position in the conversation about qualitative paradigms in social research; outside of the humanities, grounded theory has largely been excluded from the discourse on interpretive and postmodern methodologies.

Recent studies have shown that this may be partly attributable to the language of the method with its connotations of positivist practices, inherent in the use of such terms as open coding, axial coding, verification procedures and so forth (Goulding, 1999).

Scholars argue that such attempts to structure order and interpret data that are commonly seen to defile the canons of pure qualitative research where the primacy of the subjective experience of the participant take precedence over the interpretation of the researcher.

Conclusively, an attempt to explain the development of grounded theory and explicate the intellectual assumptions which underpin both the philosophy and application of the method is indispensable in any research exercise.

3.1 Methodology

The method adopted for this study on qualitative analysis of editorials is grounded theory method. According to Goulding (1999:6) the main impetus behind the use of grounded theory method "was to bridge the gap between theoretically 'uninformed' empirical research and empirically 'uninformed' theory, by grounding theory in data." Hence, any theory that would emerge from this study will be data specific.

Given its emphasis on new discoveries, the method is usually used to generate theory in areas where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge about a particular social phenomenon (Goulding, 1999).

In this study, a 14-day edition was randomly selected for both continuous and constructed week, which runs across each of the newspapers studied. (*See appendix*)

The coding areas to be qualitatively analyzed include:

- Currency of the editorial
- Slant of editorial to issues
- Nature or pattern of presentation
- Language use
- Persuasive tone (Advocacy)

3.2 Determination of Appropriate Data to be Analyzed

The data to be analyzed were grouped based on subject matter / theme. These include:

- Politics / Government
- Environment
- Personalities
- Health
- Education
- Boko Haram
- Agriculture

The coding areas will be qualitatively analyzed based on each of the above themes. Using Grounded theory as a method to determining areas of similarities and differences, this will focus on currency of issues, nature of presentation, slant of editorial, language use and persuasive approach (Advocacy). The meaning to each of the choice of words used will be where the emphasis is, so as to come up with emerging concepts which will inform the theoretical ground on which this analysis will be based.

4.1 Qualitative Analysis of Data using Grounded Theory

For the avoidance of doubt, one reason why these newspapers played down on the dates of the issues commented on was because they do not want the reader to see the issue as stale. News as an editorial matter must not lose sight of currency of an issue.

The Guardian and *Daily Sun* in their editorial on Boko Haram insurgency used “recently” and “for some time now” respectively. This conveys the recurring nature of the issue under consideration. While *Daily Sun* captures its own editorial on the issue as a trend, *The Guardian* approaches it as a reason for the call from dialogue.

Issues of significance in editorial should be approached as a trend without losing sight of its currency. This brings us to the concept of *timeliness* in news. On this issue, timeliness becomes the ground on which a theoretical construct can be postulated.

This also applies to almost every other word used by the various newspapers from the above table to capture the currency of the issue under consideration.

It is important to note that there are words to show emergent time, which is traced to a time in the past. An example is the editorial on “Lagos and the recalled doctors” (*Daily Sun*, June 10, 2012). The doctors were sacked sometime last Month and were recalled two days to the comment made by the newspaper. This will help the reader appreciate the length of time the sack lasted and its implication to the health sector of the country.

On the slant of the editorial, the newspapers were quite unfavourable in their position to issues relating to government and the masses (i.e. unfavourable to government). They seem to condemn the way and manner government approached issues relating to health, security (Boko Haram), environment, education, agriculture, politics and the likes. The few editorials on personalities were quite neutral in slant except on few cases.

Below are extracts from the newspapers used to capture the slant of the editorial:

- (1) “It is ridiculous that ... government has not thought it wise to cut wasteful foreign spending.” (*The N11.25bn budget on foreign trips: The Guardian*, Jan. 12, 2012)
- (2) “We condemn the way and manner this matter was handled by the government and demand for a high-powered public probe.” (*The Malabu oil scandal: Daily Sun*, June 5, 2012)
- (3) “We repudiate those moves by the indicted firms bearing in mind that the recommendations, if implemented, will go a long way in bringing about ... transparency in the management of subsidies...” (*Implement the fuel subsidy report: Daily Sun*, April 27, 2012)
- (4) “The president wrote a good advertisement copy...providing cover for others to cause mayhem under the disguise of Boko Haram.” (*Worse Than We Thought: Vanguard* Jan. 12, 2012)
- (5) “How can malaria be this dangerous and all that the minister of health does is to wait for the next World Malaria Day to tell Nigerian to buy mosquito nets?” (*Nigeria’s unacceptable Malaria Burden: Vanguard*, April 26, 2012)
- (6) “The WAEC should not be blamed for all perceived defects in the system because government has not equitably played its part to arrest the degeneration of standards and the poor rating of most candidates. Government has failed to provide adequate facilities and equipment in schools; it has failed to recruit competent teachers...” (*WAEC at 60: The Guardian*, April 22, 2012)

From all the extracts, the following units of words show unfavourable slant as used in the editorials: “Government has not..”, “We condemn..”, “We repudiate..”, “providing cover for..Mayhem”, “Government has failed..”

All the above words used to portray unfavourable slant conveys the concept of *Contempt* as seen in the newspapers’ editorials. Hence, this will form the ground on which a theoretical construct can emerge on how newspapers view government approach to issues of national interest.

On the nature of presentation given to the various issues with respect to style of presentation, it differs from one newspaper to the other. This also depends on the issue under consideration.

Some were historical others analytical, descriptive, narrative (with quotes) and attack. Editorials on politics/government, Boko Haram, environment and health were more of analytical and attack with a little historical, while editorials on personalities were largely descriptive.

The descriptive nature of the editorials compares persons with their status in the society. This shows that there is a link between personality and status in descriptive editorials. Also only *Vanguard newspaper* used narrative (with quotes from the source of those editorials). Issues or events cannot exist in isolation of persons;

hence, most of the editorials drew attention to individual persons which those issues or events emanate from.

Examples:

Boko Haram = President Goodluck Jonathan

WAEC = Minister of Education

National Security = Gen. Andrew Azazi

Fuel Subsidy Probe = Hon Farouk Lawan

Voters Card = Prof Attahiru Jega

Since newspapers do not always comment on issues without relating them to personalities, it shows that the concept of *personality – issues* will form a fulcrum for a theoretical construct that is likely to emerge.

On language use, all the newspapers used simple language except for *The Guardian* that sounded elitist in their presentation. This goes to show that *The Guardian* seeks to address particular audience (the elites in the society). Hence, newspapers are *audience-specific*. Examples of such words are: “pigned”, “squander mania”, “estacodes”, and “profligacy” (*The Guardian*, Jan. 12, 2012). Others are: “opaqueness”, “stranglehold” and “revamp” (*The Guardian*, April 23, 2012).

Lastly, on persuasive tone (advocacy) used, it is obvious that almost all the editorials canvassed for change from a wrong behaviour to right behaviours. It is more of advocacy and campaign for change based on the prevailing situation.

These can be seen in the following statements:

- (1) “...WAEC and the council examiners owe the public a duty to ensure higher standards..” (*The Guardian*, April 22, 2012)
- (2) “This is the time for government to show demonstrable evidence to keep Nigeria as one indivisible entity.” (*Daily Sun*, Jan. 12, 2012)
- (3) “In reality though, Nigerian leaders have only one option under the prevailing circumstances: to promote dialogue and enable Nigerians decide how to live in a peaceful way.” (*The Guardian*, Feb. 13, 2102).
- (4) “The Nigerian Judicial Council should examine itself again for credible performance” (*The Guardian*, April 26, 2012)
- (5) “We commend the selection of Ribadu and Idika Kalu... let them face the job squarely with the stated objectives in mind at all times.” (*Daily Sun*, Feb. 13, 2012)
- (6) “Nigeria needs to commit resources to researches on Malaria vaccine...” (*Vanguard*, April 26, 2012)

From the above extracts, the following words were used to portray advocacy: “higher standards”, “demonstrable evidence”, “promote dialogue”, “face the job squarely” and so on.

One common concept that runs through all the above words as used in the editorials is the concept of *change*. Hence, in every persuasive tone (advocacy), the resultant effect will be change. This will indeed form the basis for any theoretical construct that can emerge from concepts.

It is important to note that it is not all editorials that portray advocacy. One of such example is the editorial on personalities which is largely descriptive and does not call for change but only eulogizes (praises) or attacks the personality.

5.1 Conclusion

Using the multi-indicator concept as a basis for arriving at a given theory from the data analyzed, Glaser (1978) points out that: “the more one finds concepts that work, the more category becomes ‘saturated’”

According to him:

A core category is a main theme. It sums up a pattern of behaviour pulling together identified concepts which have a relationship to each other. It is the substance of what is happening in the data.

Having considered various editorials as reported in *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers, certain areas of new discoveries have been made.

First, the study began with an open coding of the various titles of the editorials into themes based on their relatedness. This was followed by a systematic qualitative analysis of each editorial along the following areas: currency of issue, slant of editorial, nature of presentation, language use and persuasive tone (advocacy).

In the course of the analysis and comparing of data, it was reduced in groups which led to the concepts of *Timeliness*, *Contempt*, *Personality-issue*, *Audience-Specific* and *Change*. Relating these concepts to the editorials in the Nigerian newspapers in the light of the issues considered; one can develop a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon under study.

5.2 Emerging Theories

These concepts as they relate to the editorials in the newspapers are content and context specific. Based on the concept of **Timeliness**, there is a recurring presentation of issues in the editorials to show currency of the issue in question to appeal to the taste of the reader. This leads to the emerging theory known as **Time-bound Theory**. In newspaper reports, issues are presented to the general public in such a way that it will not lose its currency or such that the impression of currency is being conveyed through the way such reports are presented. This theory helps to explain how newspapers achieve currency through their choice of words in conveying such impressions. This agrees with one of the elements of news writing which elucidates that something is news when it is current.

The concept of **Contempt** as drawn from the responses made by the general public which inform the content of the editorials leads to the emerging theory known as **Negative Response Theory**. This theory tries to explain how unfavourable attitude to issues of public interest in the society tends to produce negative response to such issues from the newspapers. Since these newspapers represent the mass audience as a voice, their response to unfavourable attitude of government to issues of public interest agrees with what individuals members of the society share as feelings towards such issues.

On the other hand, the concept of Personality-Issue leads to the **Personalized Issue Theory** as an emerging theory. This theory tries to explain the relatedness between issues and persons, such that there are no issues without persons. This goes to show that persons make issues that make news. Hence, issues cannot make news without persons. This agrees with one of the elements of news contained in the 5W's & H which is "Who" (the person that makes issues) and "What" (the issues that makes news).

Also, the concept of **Audience-Specific** as a common concept in news reporting leads to the emerging theory known as **Audience Specific Theory**. This theory explains why every news report is targeted to a specific audience. Some are for the general public; others are for a particular gender (i.e. women), while some are for youths, or elitist adult. Even though editorials are meant for the general public but the impression being created through the pattern of presentation by the newspapers (especially The Guardian newspaper) shows that it is meant for the elite public.

Lastly, the concept of **Change** as an extension of the concept of **Contempt** in newspaper editorials leads to the emerging theory called **Proactive Change Theory**. This theory attempts to explain the reason why newspaper editorials show contempt to unfavourable attitudes towards issues of general public. This points to the fact that every response to something unfavourable seeks to achieve proactive change. This change is borne out of dissatisfaction from individuals (represented by the newspapers) on the insensitivity of the government to issues of public interest.

It is important to note that each of these emerging theories are connected to newspaper editorials and thus they are called emerging theories on editorials.

References

- Baker, C., Wuest, J. & Stern, P. (1992). Method slurring the grounded theory/phenomenology example. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17(11) pp1355-60
- Chomsky, N. (1964). *Current lines in linguistic theory*. The Hague, London: Mouton
- Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley: The Sociology Press
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine
- Goulding, C. (1999). Grounded theory: some reflections on paradigm, procedures and misconceptions. Working paper series, June 1999. *Wolverhampton Business School Management Research Centre*.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human enquiry. In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Strauss, A. (1991). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Notes

- The Guardian* (April 22 – April 28, 2012)
- The Guardian* (10th June, 13th Feb. 5th June, 9th May, 12th Jan., 30th March and 26th May, 2012)
- Vanguard* (April 22 – April 28, 2012)
- Vanguard* (10th June, 13th Feb. 5th June, 9th May, 12th Jan., 30th March and 26th May, 2012)
- Daily Sun* (April 22 – April 28, 2012)
- Daily Sun* (10th June, 13th Feb. 5th June, 9th May, 12th Jan., 30th March and 26th May, 2012)

Appendix

Table 1: Distribution of samples of editions to be studied

S/N	CONTINUOUS WEEK	CONSTRUCTED WEEK
1	Sunday, 22 nd April, 2012	Sunday, 10 th June, 2012
2	Monday, 23 rd April, 2012	Monday, 13 th February, 2012
3	Tuesday, 24 th April, 2012	Tuesday, 5 th June, 2012
4	Wednesday, 25 th April, 2012	Wednesday, 9 th May, 2012
5	Thursday, 26 th April, 2012	Thursday, 12 th January, 2012
6	Friday, 27 th April, 2012	Friday, 30 th March, 2012
7	Saturday, 28 th April, 2012	Saturday, 26 th May, 2012

Table 2: Distribution of issues and the words used to show currency of the issue in question

S/N	EDITORIAL TITLES	SOURCE / DATE	WORDS USED
1	Contempt for privileges	Vanguard (Feb 13)	“recently”
2	PDP and democracy in Nigeria	Daily Sun (Mar.30)	“last week”
3	World Bank’s selection process	The Guardian (April 23)	“last Monday”
4	Our Endangered Coastline	Vanguard (April 27)	“last February”
5	Nigerians unacceptable Malaria Burden	Vanguard (April 26)	“On Tuesday”
6	Lagos and the recalled doctors	Daily Sun (June 10)	“last Month”
7	Stop these killings	Daily Sun (Jan. 12)	“for some time now”
8	Again, dialogue to save the nation	The Guardian (Feb. 13)	“recently”
9	To move the stock market	The Guardian (March 30)	“the current ...”
10	The hike in electricity tariff	The Guardian (June 5)	“less than a year...”
11	FG’s proposed borehole drilling legislation	Vanguard (Fri. March 30)	“Tuesday”