

News Culture and Routinisation of Production Processes in *Vanguard* Newspapers

IBUOT, Udo P. (PhD)¹, NWANTAH Nkiruka Favour² & OKEIBUNOR, Ngozi B³

¹Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State

²Department of Mass Communication, Covenant University, Ota Ogun State

³ Department of Mass Communication Benson Idahosa University Benin City, Edo State

✉: nkiruka.nwantah@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

+2348138929782

Abstract:

News production goes beyond the routine of accessing, selecting, processing and interpreting events considered as newsworthy. It involves consequences of journalistic practices that are capable of influencing the professional culture, knowledge and expectations of the given medium. Though news production processes may be influenced by the editorial policy of a newspaper organisation, they should be managed away from slanting which involves omission, differential placement or even burying of anti-policy stories in inside pages. The study is an exploratory attempt that is designed on the methodology of participant observation or ethnography, and constitutes part of the first author's work experience in the editorial and news production desks of Vanguard newspapers spanning 26 years. Its theoretical underpinnings are the gatekeeping and the agenda setting theory of communication. The paper examines the routine news culture and production processes in Vanguard Media Limited, publishers of one of Nigeria's leading national daily and weekly newspapers in Lagos. Results of these routine processes include balanced and in-depth reporting of events by the newspaper establishment.

Keywords: Accessing, Interpreting, News culture, News Routinisation, Participant observation, Processing, Selecting

INTRODUCTION

News production is a generic process that involves getting access, selecting, processing and interpreting news events. Getting access to news is a function that can be examined historically, with other newspapers, radio and television serving as mainstream sources. However, in contemporary times, the internet, with Facebook and X (former Twitter) as major platforms, have grown to become the preferred sources. Welbers, Atteveldt and Schaper (2015), describe selection of news as a filtering process in which journalists apply specified criteria to determine whether available stories are useful or detrimental to their societies. News processing is associated with determining which story to place on which page, and this usually flows from discussions at an editorial conference involving the editor and line editors of the newspaper.

Routinisation of news refers to the process in which a procedure or process becomes ingrained in an organisation's fabric such that actors or operators have no reason to query its

use. Where news production procedures have become properly understood, it allows organisations to become adepts at solving such types of problems. Chae and Park (2023) describe the concept of routinisation as the "automaticity in behaviour", with 'automaticity' referring to "unintentionality, uncontrollability, lack of awareness and efficiency." The concept of automatised behaviour goes with lack of intention or awareness, and is often carried out with limited exploration and attention towards points that are restricted in the work environment. As an automatic behaviour, routinisation not only requires little mental effort, but total lack of effort because the actions are carried out without the consumption of any cognitive resources.

On its part, the concept of news interpretation is best understood from the expositions of Beeman and Peterson (2001), as ways through which routine procedures, cultural categories, and social positions can come together in particular 'instances' of interpretation. This in essence points to interactions that usually occur between reporters, editors and news sources. However, Karolin (2018) in aligning with

Salgado and Strömbäck (2012) describe the presence of journalists in the news and their giving context information as the two core indicators of news interpretation. Moreover, Karolin (2019), in her bid to make the measurement of news interpretation applicable in other cases and to ensure its reliability, lists three-fold dimensions of news interpretation. These are as: (a) Journalistic explanation: where journalists target tactical considerations, strategies, motives or reasons behind actions, thereby retrospectively explaining why something happened; (b) Journalistic evaluation: where journalists express opinions about political actors or events, measured by their use of value-laden terms; and (c) Journalistic speculation: where journalists interpret future possibilities or possible consequences of current events. His postulation is those indicators must continue to occur in journalistic statements with or without the support of factual information.

News culture, also known in scientific literature as journalistic culture, newspaper cultures, or news producing culture, is a common occupational attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour among news workers. Hanitzsch (2007 on pg. 369) defines it as “a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful.” News culture is regarded as a concept that captures the field of journalism as a set of culturally negotiated professional values and conventions that operate mostly behind the backs of individual journalists. Ali (2022 on pg.1) refers to it as the “wide range of journalistic beliefs, methods, and media products or other related media artefacts that exist throughout cultures.” A major advantage associated with the use of journalism culture as an analytical starting point rests on two central features of the notion of culture in the social sciences: its inclusiveness and openness. As Hanitzsch et al (2011 on pg. 274) have observed, the “concept of journalism culture is inclusive enough to integrate very diverse and often isolated scholarly discourses, most notably discussions of professionalism, objectivism, professional role perceptions, and ethical standards.” It is also open to journalism’s constant reformulation and reconstitution, as culture itself is a process of continuous change, renegotiation, and redefinition. Hanitzsch et al (2011) explain that one of the reasons for research in journalism culture seems to be its ability to provide a more intuitive way of examining the diversity of practices and orientations in journalism. While there may have been a broad agreement among media professionals about a ‘common understanding and cultural identity’ of journalism, there is, however, no common agreement as to the meaning of global journalism culture and how objective it can be. This is because, despite the number of studies that focus on news production culture, issues of journalism culture and its dimensional structure seem not to have been tackled.

Ali (2022) blames individual cultural tendencies for this lack of a global journalism culture. Citing Thomas Hanitzsch’s global study on journalism culture, which included 21 countries between 2007 and 2011, he explains that the outcome of the study showed that journalistic cultures like

detachment, non-involvement, offering political information, and monitoring the government were regarded as essential journalistic virtues or cultures around the world. In his examination of production studies, Erdal (2008) examines the various traditions in media research that dwell on conditions of production and the processes behind the contents of media organisations. This is a field that Dwyer (2019) describes as one that is being founded on sophisticated theoretical approaches to the communication and reception of meaning and to the political economy of media ownership, control, and regulation. These steps start with the demands of understanding the relationships between different levels of analysis, such as from the newsroom, the individual newspaper organisation to the global media conglomerate.

The news production theory involves an ethnographic analysis of newsroom working routines and the consequences of decisions taken by journalists with the potential of affecting the professional culture, knowledge and expectation of the given news medium. Van Hout and Jacobs (2008 on pg. 59) are in favour of the viewpoint that news production theory is a “process of entextualisation involving multiple actors who struggle over authority, ownership and control.” This is a postulation that Beeman and Peterson (2001) are in agreement with. Methods used in news production studies are often those of observation, interviews and content analysis of documents, while the product usually provides considerable understanding on the nature of journalism in modern or contemporary societies. As Cottle (2007) observes, these studies provide illumination on the daily routines, bureaucratic nature, competition, ideologies and cultural practices of the news media. The common ground is that they seek to explain what constitutes constraints, contingencies and complexities of the operations of journalists in the workplace and also offer avenue for the explanation of the theories associated with news presentations and the media generally.

Ryfe (2023) asserts that though scholars have generally imagined news production practices as symbolic resources that exist outside the actions of reporters, an understanding that has been considered as productive, yet they have failed to answer the basic question of how news practices actually get into the heads of reporters. It is certain that an answer to the question of the processes of internalisation will offer explanations to actions of news reporters. Joo (2014) in his examination of news making process when producing news related to ethnic minorities in the Korean society such as migrant workers, married migrant women and mixed-heritage children of multicultural families, describes the process as a meaningful social construction because it provides an important key for understanding the cultural and political background and characteristics of society. Ostertag (2020 on pg. 2846) has, however, expanded the focus of news production beyond the “holy trinity” of production, text and consumption associated with formal news organisations. His postulation is that solving practices of “news consumption and the goal-seeking practices of news communication intersect at the content of news, fomenting reciprocal relationships of mutual support and dependency between the two.” While Harcup and O’Neill

(2017), Ryfe (2012), and Usher (2014) align with this view, Belair-Gagnon, Nelson and Lewis (2018) and Bolin (2012) are in favour of a mixture of both.

A number of studies have been conducted in the area of news production theory and processes. These studies, according to Cottle (2007), hover around the 'gate-keeping' selections by news editors introduced by White (1950). White, often called 'Mr. Gates' had observed that individuals tended to perceive as true only those events which fit into their beliefs concerning what is likely to happen. Thus a newspaper editor or reporter would tend to see or be consciously aware of what he believes to be true. A journalist turned sociologist, Breed (1975), in his focuses on how publishers or chief executives of newspapers, who are makers of policy, make journalists to enforce their usually unwritten editorial policies, however, holds that conformity with such policies are not often automatic. His postulation is that reporters are usually bound to consider professional norms and ethics.

Breed (1975 on pg. 182) attributes the existence of "ethical journalistic norms, the fact that reporters tend to have more liberal attitudes and perceptions than the publishers and could invoke the norms to justify anti-policy writing; and the ethical taboo preventing the publisher from commanding subordinates to follow policy," as reasons for ambivalence towards conformity in news organisations. In examining the concept of uniformity of news products, Breed explains that following his observations, various newspapers featured similar items that were styled or presented in similar patterns. He lists factors that are responsible for similarity of news items in newspapers as wire services and syndicates which supply identical news materials; wide distribution of publicity handouts; chain ownership of newspaper organisations and, the tendency of most publishers to maintain political policies of the conservative slant.

Following inspiration from Tuchman, Sigal, and others, Wheatley (2020) offers a reconceptualisation of routine and non-routine channels of news production to explore source materials that a story may trigger. He explains that although the concept of routine source materials may be familiar, one contribution that the reconceptualisation may bring is the sub-categorisation of the traditionally singular "routine" channel. Jackson and Moloney (2015) and Macnamara, J. (2016) have defined routine news stories are those often associated with public relations press releases which come not only from PR practitioners but also from politicians, non governmental organisations, trade unions and other pressure groups. Non routine news, however, are those that are often unpredictable, stories of chaos, informal tips and investigative stories. Wheatley not only adopted but also expanded the framework of Boesman, D'Haenens and Van Gorp (2015) who had collapsed the informal and enterprise channels into one and identified "other media" as distinct. He asserted that this affected the nature of news reporting in the sense that as stories develop or maintain a presence in the news, they often pick up elements of different channels.

It is also noteworthy that in his study of BBC radio and television news coverage, Schlesinger (1973) examined dimensions of the organisational milieu which are necessary for understanding of the news production processes in the broadcast media. In the study, Schlesinger explained these organisational milieu to involve the hierarchical control structure which determines policy for news coverage, the everyday production routines that structure news as an organisational product and the system of advanced planning which enable news stories to be identified. Moreover, Tuchman (1972 on pg. 661), in her examination of factors that help newsmen define the issue of 'objective fact,' discourses on three factors - form, content and inter-organisational relationships. While form refers to attributes and newspapers which evince such processes, content applies to issues of social reality that are usually taken for granted by journalists. Inter-organisational relationships is similar to content because a journalist's relationships with an organisation is bound to shape his experiences and enable him to take certain things or issues in such organisations for granted.

Tuchman's focus was on whether objectivity was peculiar to the news production profession, while her findings suggested that objectivity can protect journalists from the risks of their trade. Furthermore, she raised the question of whether it is possible for professionals in other fields to also use the term 'objectivity' in the same way. An obvious answer, however, is that from her observations, objectivity is a strategic ritual that may also be applied by other professionals to defend themselves from critical onslaughts. How journalists manage the concept of objectivity in their daily presentations of news is, however, explained by Cottle (2007). She remarks that in an attempt to claim to be objective, journalists often present conflicting possibilities and even structure information upside down, in the traditional inverted pyramid form of newswriting. In aligning with Tuchman's (1972) postulation that inter-organisational relationships shape news production, Cottle (2007 on pg. 9) asserts that "the different forms of news produced today qualify...claims that the organisational nature of news production necessarily leads to ideological closure."

Eliasoph (1988) also argues in this direction, asserting that the differences are found in organisational factors associated with the media establishment such as its relation to the audience, social and political positions held by those in control of the media, such as hegemonic factors, and reporters' social positions or world views. Tuchman's (1978) definition of news production processes as journalists' attempt to construct reality itself rather than presenting a picture of the reality that they observed, is significant and worthy of critical examination. This is because news is also explained as the process of transforming experiences and or occurrences which others take for granted. Lau (2004) describes this process from the perspective of distinguishing extraneous and internal sociological factors that impact on and shape the news product. These extraneous factors include issues like news media ownership, government regulations and size of the media organisation; while professional journalistic values, practices and ideologies constitute the internal factors. In the

argument as to whether the constraining external factors can be removed, Lau reflects on the possibility of a change of the subsisting internal factors. His position, however, is that from a critical realistic point of view, some internal factors such as news values can hardly be altered because they, more or less, represent cognitive and perceptual features that are observed on a daily basis and are transposed to news production. The understanding that flows from this scenario is that news may not, even with the removal of other internal factors, be able to provide an accurate representation of reality.

For Branston and Stafford (2003), the news production process explains some media activities that are similar to regular factory processes but yet are different. Moreover, in their observation, news production processes involve the 'raw material,' variation in prices, variability in production and distribution patterns, as well as short shelf life of news products, and the issue of ploughing back into business of revenues or proceeds from news production. They classify news production processes along two lines of collecting and processing of suitable news materials, and distributing of finished products. McQuail (2012) examines the news production process from a different perspective, which is that of an organisational activity that can be described essentially from the 'selecting' and 'processing' functions. The first perspective, which is that of 'selecting' involves the sequence of decision making regarding the supply or access of 'raw materials' to the delivery of the finished product. The second perspective which involves 'processing' is associated with the application of work routines and organisational criteria which affect the nature of the product. This includes both professional and business decision making processes.

This probably accounts for Van Hout and Jacobs' (2008, on pg. 61) definition of the concept as that of 'negotiated processes' that define the interactions between sources, reporters and their editors. They distinguish between a sociological and culturalist paradigm in the theories of news access. In their view, the sociological paradigm investigates news access in terms of 'strategic and definitional power' and routines of news production and processes of 'source intervention,' whereas the culturalists think of access in terms of 'cultural and ritual power'. This concept of 'negotiated process' speaks to the symbolic role of journalists and how they perform their functions within the conventions of textual structures of news presentation.

It is also noteworthy that news production processes may be influenced by the editorial policy of the news media. An editorial policy is defined by Breed (1975 on pg. 179) as a consistent "orientation shown by a paper, not only in its editorial but also in its news columns and headlines as well, concerning selected issues and events." A newspaper's editorial policy is, therefore, not only concerned with the newspaper's right to attract and hold its readers but also by its considerations of public welfare. This is determined by the use of its share of public attention, and its sense of responsibility to its staff. Newspapers' policies are always skewed towards

the areas of politics, business or labour, and this often manifests in reporters' slanting of stories.

While slanting may not always be considered a prevarication, Breed (1975 on pg. 179) explains that it certainly "involves omission, differential selection, and preferential placement such as 'featuring' a pro-policy item, 'burying' an anti-policy story in an inside page, etc." A reporter is often introduced to the newspaper's editorial policy through the socialisation processes that he may be oriented to in the newspaper establishment. The socialisation process may not be observed through commands but can manifest through subtle means that may include gossips or grapevine channels, or even observation of the attitudes of the newspaper's executives on how to handle the given story.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to present the news production theory as it was reflected in the first author's 26 years of practice in the newsrooms and production desks of *Vanguard* newspapers at Apapa in Lagos, Nigeria.

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the tradition of news production tension that is experienced in the *Vanguard* newspapers,
- ii. explore the news culture in the *Vanguard* newspapers,

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A number of researchers have described news production as a two-fold process. These are essentially classified as 'selecting' of news stories which involves making decisions regarding the supply or access of raw materials to the delivery of the finished product; and as 'processing' which involves work routines and organisational criteria which affect the nature of the product. These researchers include Hanitzsch and Hoxha (2014), Van Hout and Jacobs (2008), and McQuail (2012). These studies did not reflect an ethnographic exploration of the editorial and news production processes of newspapers. Even Schlesinger's (1973) study of the BBC radio and television news coverage in the United Kingdom, focused on the broadcast media, not the newspapers. These observations, along with the paucity of studies on the subject in Nigeria and the first author's work experience spanning 26 years in the editorial and news production desks of *Vanguard* newspapers led to this exploratory work.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on two communication theories: the gatekeeping theory, and the agenda setting theory. Although there are several relevant communication theories that cover the field, these two theories have significant correlation with news production functions or activities.

Gate keeping theory

The gatekeeping theory was introduced in the 1940s and 1950s by sociologists Kurt Lewin and David Manning White. Its key tenets essentially explain how media professionals serve as gatekeepers and control the flow of news by serving both as filters and selectors of content. The theory was further expanded in the 1980s by two scholars: Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos. It is described by Folarin (2005) as a working theory which offers guidelines, conventions and rules that seek to guide the process of media production and ensure its consistency over time. The process of gatekeeping can simply be explained as that of screening of information to be disseminated by the journalist and suppression of other pieces of information that are not considered necessary. Folarin observes that timing, ownership pattern, management policy and perceived needs of the audience are some of the factors that influence the gatekeeping theory. Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) list three assumptions about the theory. These are that media organisations and key media professionals serve as 'gates' to checkmate the flow of information to the public. The second assumption is that gatekeepers can decide to shut or open the gates through the process of editing the information that flow in to them, in which case some information may die natural death, while others may take a different shape from their original forms before the processing.

The third assumption is that sections of the gates are equally governed by rules that are impartial, but the gatekeepers have the power to make decisions or transfer such information though their powers are limited by channel rules or those of interdependence. McQuail (2012) explains that the gatekeeping theory has been used as a metaphor to describe the process through which selections, and in particular decisions are made about what particular news or angle to publish and which to reject. He remarks that the theory has a wide range of applications, such that not only can it apply to the works of publishers, literary agents and associated news production activities in newspapers and the broadcast media, it is also relevant in the marketing and distribution of existing media products. This is just as Roberts (2005) remarks that Kurt Lewin who introduced the theory in 1947 actually started with experiments to entice Iowa women to eat more beef as a patriotic duty during the period of the Second World War. He explains that there was not even a sentence on media in the initial model, but over the years, researchers have refined and defined the theory to accommodate theories of social control and agenda setting to it.

While gatekeeping theory may be a descriptive theory, it is also slightly normative, although it may not have predictive powers. The gate keeping theory has encountered considerable criticisms which have led to dimensional reformulation over the years. However, the most poignant is that which often questions its relevance in an internet age. Heinderyckx and Vos (2016), argue for instance, that the common criticism of gate keeping in the 21st century is that digital technologies now harbour news production and distribution capacities such that scarcity of information is no longer relevant as it used to be. The response to this criticism is that gate keeping theory is

still relevant because though citizens share information through social media and information distribution networks have become expansive, the amount and quality of news that reaches the audience has still not changed dramatically.

Agenda setting theory

The modern notion of agenda setting theory owes its origins to *Public Opinion*, the seminal work of Walter Lippmann in 1922. Baran and Davis (2012 on pg. 346) cite Lippmann as asserting that "people do not deal directly with their environments as much as they respond to 'pictures' in their heads. For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex and too fleeting for the direct acquaintance." But Lippmann is not credited with associating the theory with the mass media. Baran and Davis (2012 on pg. 347) credit Cohen (1963) with the provision of the first connection between Lippmann's work and the media when he insisted that "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about."

Moreover, Weiss (2009) remarks that the groundbreaking theory was developed by McCombs and Shaws in 1972 with their work, the *Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media* in which they provided support for the claim that priorities of news media can become priorities of the general public or audience. McCombs and Shaw found from their studies that there was significant correlation between issues the voters felt were most important and those which enjoyed more space or prominence in the media. They concluded that there was a strong relationship between media agenda and the public agenda. The take away from this theory is that the audience always tended to identify with media emphasis on an issue and synchronise with such views as being the legitimate views.

NEWS PRODUCTION PROCESSES AND APPROACHES

News routines studies first emerged in the 1950s, and since then, there have been several studies that focus on journalists' routine practices in the newsrooms. Westlund and Ekström (2019), explain that news reporters in the 1950s were embedded in significantly different types of newsrooms and compared to contemporary journalists, used different systems or tools to produce news. But the nature of news routines has not changed as reporters engage in similar routines in the pursuit of news. While Carlson and Lewis (2015) describe routines of news work as patterned, routinised or repeated practices that journalists adopt to do their work, Ryfe (2016 on pg. 128) disagrees on the ground that the latter definition is heavily oriented towards industry, habit and consensus; and seems to imply that routines guide practice. He remarks that "within practice theory, routines are properly understood not as expressions of external pressures on journalists (whether understood as organisational, political, or economic pressures), but as cultural resources that bind journalists to a shared community of understanding." From this perspective, it

is easy to assert that news production is related to practical knowledge than formal knowledge.

Hansen and Hartley (2021), however, explain that a new tradition has emerged in modern newsrooms. The tradition provides that decisions are now being made based on large amounts of automatically generated big data relating to the audience. This is further amplified by Bodo (2019) who remarks that the arrival of news personalisation technologies have raised questions about whether, and how these high tech news production devices that have been developed by technological platforms can be applied in the newsrooms. News personalisation concept is all about bringing together a number of developments that have potential to affect news production and delivery businesses. As Hellberger, Karpinen and D'Acunto (2018) have explained, news personalisation relies on the quantification of audiences, linking it to the age-long debate of how newsrooms should connect demands of readers with the journalistic mission and editorial judgement of editors. These high tech platforms upset dimensions of news production, delivery and consumption in several ways. These include competing for advertising revenues with news organisations, controlling access to audiences, planning important roles in news delivery, and setting their agenda at the expense of the news media.

The processes of media or news production involve a large volume of work that, out of necessity, has become a matter of routine. As McQuail (2012) remarks, in the news production process, the chain starts with noticing or observing stimuli in the environment, writing or filming same and then processing the stimuli in line with the editorial policy or dictates of the media organisation. A number of routines associated with news production have been outlined by Cottle (2009). These are that news is subject to temporal routines, and news layouts are organised spatially. The third routine is that news processing is organised in relation to a newsroom division of labour and corporate hierarchy. Cottle who conducted his study with the methodology of participant observation, asserts that the understanding of organisational character of news production was vital in the unraveling of news and its ideological limitations. He lists other factors that play dominant roles in news processing as professional pursuit of deep seated news values and the operation of a journalistic culture which supports relationships with journalistic colleagues. Thus professionalism, news gathering and processing policies are useful in reduction of possible conflicts in the newsroom.

A proper definition of the news process can only be made if the first step, which is decoding the process of news production has been made. Though Hanitzsch and Hoxha (2014) explain that it is difficult to define news production as a process because there is no generic definition of news, but this would depend on the context and the need for such news. What is, however, important is the fact that news production processes begin the moment a reporter or journalist observes or hears something that he considers worthwhile. Equally significant is the fact that the processing of a news story is not

a one-man activity. It involves not only the reporter but also the sub editor, the graphic artist, the sound engineer, the lighting crew, the printer, circulation officer and other technical employees that facilitate the whole production process.

Usher (2012) studied production processes at *Marketplace Radio*, a financial news broadcast media organisation that serves an audience of about nine million people in the USA. His findings include the fact that despite their unique case features, newsgathering and processing formats are almost uniform on the traditional media newsrooms. Moreover, he observed that most of the news organisations start the news day with editorial meetings where reporters, news editors and news producers communicate among themselves and identify news angles and breaking news events to investigate for publication. Usher describes the structures of news work at *Marketplace* as 'deep' and influenced production. The structures included pressure to produce the news on time to meet deadlines, meeting of audience needs, pressures of beats and the need for uniformity.

Schlesinger (1973) equally undertook a case study of BBC Radio 4 in the United Kingdom (UK) and remarks that the issue of deadlines for the producers is about the most important thing to be recognised in the daily routines of news production. He explains that in planning the bulletins, the duty editor first considers the issues of selection, ordering and treatment of news stories for broadcast. This often happens after he would have read the daily newspapers and or listened to the early morning news. Often forgotten in the run of the mill of news production is the role of the sub editor or copy editor. As Schlesinger explains, the sub editors are like technical editors and have responsibility for designing the newspaper for reader friendliness; they also cast appropriate headlines, write captions and cut-lines for news photographs in the newspapers. In the broadcast media, sub editors are responsible for writing short items for the news reader as well as introducing monologue reports used in the bulletins.

Tuchman (2002) identifies three traditions in the news processing chain, though she argues that news is not found but that it is made. The three traditions are those of political economy, social organisation and textual studies. Scholars in the realm of political economy rely on critical and Marxist approach which tend to subsume media and news production under the same category and examine their specific contribution to the production and reproduction of the status quo. Cottle (2003) remarks that these scholars connect the concept of political economy to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *German Ideology* in 1846 which encapsulates the issue of social organisation of power. He explains that political economy builds upon classic Marxist views and holds that both functional and other models of mediated communication tend to ignore issues of class and power. Furthermore, his postulation is that political economy has been responsible for the economic, legislative and technological conditions of mass mediated news as well as the inequalities and inadequacies associated with infrastructure.

Social organisation is also referred to as phenomenology or ethnomethodology. Cottle (2003) explains that the tradition is concerned with emphasising the meaningful nature of social life and examination of the role of news media in disseminating meaning to the audience. This approach is associated with uncovering of the routinised practices of daily news production both through the techniques of observation and interview. The last approach which is textual studies is concerned with the need for a closer reading of news as narratives that are filled with symbols which shape them and are in turn reshaped by them. While such studies often do not focus on the production processes, they usually reflect the media and audience link in the further dissemination of news. Textual studies are also noted for their abilities in interpretation of the formats of news, their historical roots and current changes, especially in the areas of qualitative studies.

NEWS CULTURE AND PRODUCTION PROCESSES IN VANGUARD NEWSPAPERS

Vanguard Media Limited is a national newspaper publishing organisation established in Lagos, Nigeria, by a veteran Journalist, former Editor of *Sunday Times* and co-founder of *The Punch* newspapers, Mr. Sam Amuka, on June 3, 1984. It went daily on July 15, 1984. Its corporate headquarters is located at Kirikiri Canal area of Apapa Local Government Council of Lagos State. The media group publishes the *Vanguard* as a daily, along with *Saturday Vanguard* and *Sunday Vanguard* titles, with *Sporting Vanguard* which joined the stable on March 5, 2018 being the last title to be published by the organisation. According to Company Details on Vanguard Media's website (2017), the newspaper organisation's motto is 'Toward a Better Life for the People,' while its vision is to be the best media group with the widest reach through innovation backed by excellent service delivery, highly motivated human capital and latest technology. The newspaper group has a satellite press at Asaba in Delta State from where its printed products are circulated to readers in the South-South, South-East and parts of the North Central geopolitical zones and Abuja Federal Capital Territory. Its press in Lagos prints products for circulation in states in the South-West, and parts of the North Central geopolitical zone.

The news production processes in *Vanguard* newspapers follow the tradition of tension that is experienced in any news organisation. It starts with the news editor thinking of what he wishes to accomplish and the actual news that he eventually achieves at the end of the day. The organisation operates the news beats system, which means that reporters are assigned to major news gathering organisations such as the State House, Legislature, Judiciary, Police, Ports, Airport, banks, financial institutions and stock exchange, among other news making establishments. The news editor calls bureau chiefs and reporters on these beats in the morning hours to demand for specific breaking news and investigation of stories. In most cases, reporters or bureau chiefs would hold conversations with the news editor on angles to adopt in investigating or writing the news stories. These conversations facilitate decision making on the part of the news editor, who would

prepare a news slug for discussion at the editorial conferences scheduled for 4.00 p.m each day.

During each of these meetings, which are held either at the editor's office or in the conference room, at the instance of the news editor, a slug listing all the major news stories of the day would be presented. The editor along with his deputy, and other line editors interrogate stories outlined in the slug, debate on the relative weight of each of the stories, and where necessary, request for fresh angles to enrich the stories. Apart from the daily editorial meetings, all title editors with the line editors meet every Monday at the conference room to discuss the dimensions of news production and associated challenges facing the newspaper titles in the media group. Some of these include the circulation problem in the Lagos area and nationally, production deadlines, advertising and printing schedules. An example of one of the dimensions of discourses in these Monday meetings was the discussion on how to report on the siege by fuel tankers and other articulated trucks, which had for several days caused a near permanent shutdown of the Oshodi - Apapa Expressway in Lagos, where the newspaper organisation operates from. Following the observation that these articulated vehicles had laid siege to all the lanes on the expressway and other link roads to the expressway, the editors decided that reporters should spread across the city and count all the trucks that had taken over the roads, and to report on the losses incurred by business organisations and individuals that conducted their businesses along that blocked expressway.

While some reporters were assigned to do the counting of these articulated trucks and fuel tankers that laid siege to the expressway the following day, others were assigned to interview stakeholders at the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), President of the Association of Maritime Transport Owners (AMATO), General Manager of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA), the Lagos State Commissioner for Transportation, non-governmental organisations, and even commuters on these roads. When reporters came in with the reports, the news editor presented the synopsis before the evening editorial meeting. The deputy editor who presided at that meeting directed that the features editor should write a news story on the siege. The editors further decided that the report should serve as cover story for the daily newspaper and when the story was submitted, it was showcased as the lead story of *Vanguard*. After the selection of the major news stories by the editors at the evening meeting, the news editor usually itemises the stories on page by page basis and submits them to the chief sub editor who delivers them to the sub editors in charge of specific pages for page planning or design.

The stories are often saved on the Microsoft Word or Word Perfect network platform with specific filenames that are given to the subeditors. The sub editors' import these stories by these file names to their Adobe Page Maker pages, and select newsworthy standalone photographs or other infographic materials to offer illumination to such pages. The news stories are further edited while the pages are designed

usually horizontally, with appropriate headlines, cut-lines, captions, bylines. Further routinisation of the news production processes is observed, with proofreaders examining each of the planned pages to check grammatical accuracy of the texts and the headlines. Proof reading function starts after the sub editors or graphic artists have completed the page planning work, after which the pages are printed on A4 paper size for reading. Sometimes the proofreaders are given the file names of the planned pages so they read the soft copies and make corrections on their desktop work stations. Upon readers' satisfaction that headlines on the pages are correct, that the stories end appropriately and match with the headlines, and that the grammatical constructions in the body text are satisfactorily corrected, the pages are certified okay for filming. Thereafter, the chief sub editor orders the forwarding of such an okayed page to the Image Setting unit for the next routines of film making and platemaking.

CONCLUSION

News production theories have led to an understanding of how journalists see unfolding events and determine how these should be reported to the audience. The various perspectives involved in the definition of news production and in particular have been examined, with focus on two of the major theories associated with it. These theories that have significant relationship with news production activities or functions are the gatekeeping theory and the agenda setting theory. Backgrounds of these theories such as their authors, salient facts on what they seek to explain or perform are also explained. Three approaches to the study of news production theory are also offered. These traditions are those of political economy, social organization and textual studies; while the news production processes are also explained.

Apart from these, a participant observation of the news production processes in *Vanguard* newspapers in Lagos was featured. The presentation seeks to explain the processes the journalists go through on a typical news day as well as the newsroom tradition of tension that is experienced by journalists in any news organisation. The tradition of tension in the news production process, which regards the newspaper establishment as a mad house has been reflected while the news culture as it applies in *Vanguard* has also been reflected. Also noteworthy is the exploration of the modern newsroom tradition of news personalisation that is being considered across the globe. News personalisation is a concept that seeks to bring together a number of developments that have potential to affect news production and delivery business. It relies on the quantification of audiences, linking it to the age-long debate of how newsrooms should connect demands of readers with the journalistic mission and judgement of editors. These high tech platforms have capacity to upset dimensions of news production, delivery and consumption in several ways including competing for advertising revenues with news organisations, controlling access to audiences, planning important roles in news delivery, and setting their agenda at the expense of the news media.

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