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ДОСЛІДНИЦЬКІ СТАТТІ

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**An assessment of development and non-development information
in selected nigerian newspapers**

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The study investigated the incidences of development information in two Nigerian national newspapers, namely, Guardian and Vanguard which were purposively selected to underscore their role in the development process in Nigeria. **The aim** was to determine the extent of the newspapers coverage of development Information, the thematic diversities of the development-oriented news, and the non-development items, and the differences between the development and non-development information. The Development Media Theory was employed as theoretical framework and the content analysis research **method** was adopted. **Results** indicated that the coverage of development items was low and there were variations in the number of development news for the three study periods. General development news accounted for the highest number of development information in the newspapers, while the papers presented more non-development than development-oriented information. The implications of the result is that readers are fed more with non-development information than development information. This portends a negative position as the impression is that the Government in Nigeria is not pursuing development efforts for the improved conditions of the citizens. Nigerian newspapers through the efforts of journalists and media houses should endeavour to cover and report development news in the communities to reflect news items in their publications from the rural areas.

Keywords: development communication, non-development information, Nigerian newspapers, quantitative content analysis, The Guardian, Vanguard

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Оцінка інформації про розвиток та нерозвиток у вибраних нігерійських газетах

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У дослідженні розглядалася поширеність інформації про розвиток у двох нігерійських національних газетах, а саме Guardian та Vanguard, які були навмисно відібрані, щоб підкреслити їхню роль у процесі розвитку Нігерії. **Метою** було визначити ступінь висвітлення газетами інформації про розвиток, тематичну різноманітність новин, орієнтованих на розвиток, та новин, не пов'язаних з розвитком, а також відмінності між інформацією, пов'язаною з розвитком, та інформацією, не пов'язаною з розвитком. Як теоретичну основу було використано теорію медіа про розвиток, а також було прийнято **метод** дослідження з контент-аналізом. **Результати** показали, що висвітлення новин про розвиток було низьким, а кількість новин про розвиток протягом трьох періодів дослідження коливалася. Загальні новини про розвиток становили найбільшу кількість інформації у газетах, тоді як газети представляли більше інформації, не пов'язаної з розвитком, ніж інформації, пов'язаної з розвитком. Наслідком цього результату є те, що читачі отримують більше інформації, не пов'язаної з розвитком, ніж інформації про розвиток. Це віщує негативну тенденцію, оскільки складається враження, що уряд Нігерії не докладає зусиль для покращення умов життя громадян. Нігерійські газети завдяки зусиллям журналістів та медіа-компаній повинні прагнути висвітлювати та повідомляти новини про розвиток у громадах, щоб відобразити новини з сільської місцевості у своїх публікаціях.

Ключові слова: комунікація розвитку; інформація, не пов'язана з розвитком, нігерійські газети, кількісний контент-аналіз; The Guardian, Vanguard

A major thrust in any society is the quest for development in all ramifications of life. This quest is a phenomenon that is often accompanied by citizen's desire to see changes in different spheres of life, namely in the political, cultural, economic, religious, transformation, etc. The fact however remains that positive development does not happen or take place overnight as it is often a process accompanied by some enormous efforts that will likely require time and discipline. Literature is replete with multiple concepts of development as espoused by scholars (Rogers; Fair and Shah, cited in (Soola, 2003).

The old or dominant idea of development was the Western perspective of the 50s and 60s as a "development made simple" concept for the developing nations. The plan was to copy what the developed countries of the world did. Using the same model in the undeveloped world was characterised by great optimism, however, the results of the 70s showed that the outcome of the idea had fallen short of expectations, therefore, there was need for a new thinking of development.

The scholars in this new thinking of development were Everest Rogers and Wilbur Schramm. Rogers (1976) had rejected the top-down flow of the dominant paradigm, claiming that it had failed over time to bring development in the world thus, Rogers defined development as "a widely participatory process of social change... intended to foster both social and material advancement". Schramm also followed a similar line when he said in his book *Mass Media and national Development*: "The focus of the proposed strategy will be "the local area, local activity, local decision making, a two-way, horizontal, not one-way communication", (cited in Soola, 2003, p. 11).

It is instructive to assert that Latin America scholars and policy makers were some of the earliest to react to the approach of the dominant paradigm, criticising it for ignoring the regional complexities and the strong ties that development had with transnational corporate interest

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(Rodriguez and Murphy, 1997, p. 27). There were reported attempts to evolve an alternative paradigm of development based on the philosophies of Freire, Schumacher, Bordenave and Fuglessing, among other scholars (Lent, 1987, p. 27). Inayatullah's (1976, p. 10) definition was a more humanizing and contextualized one. In his words: "development is change towards patterns of society that allow better realisation of human values, that allow a society greater control over its environment and over its political destiny, and enables its individuals to gain increased control over themselves".

Dog Hammerskjold in the early 60s, came up with the idea that development should be contextualized within the multiplicity and diversity of one world (Fair and Shah, cited in Soola, 2003). Hammerskjold thinking was that societies can set their own normative standards and goals which do not need to conform with what obtains in the West. Therefore, development should be seen as quantitative and qualitative. Jayaweera (1987) has initiated the Gross National Product (GNP) versus the physical quality of life index (PQL) stressing that the quantitative and qualitative approach to development are interdependent and complementary. Therefore, development should be people-oriented, human capital-based, and should promote the well-being of the citizens.

Anaeto S., Anaeto M. and Tejumaiye J. (2009, p. 4) says the word development implies growth or advancement in the life of a person or society. Development is the total process of growth and improvement which involves growth in economic, social, political and cultural sector of a society. Recent definition of development can be Ojebode (2019, p.12) which he claims captives the totality of all in society.

These concerns of development have led scholars in the field of communication to come up with the idea of development communication which they have defined in a multiplicity of ways. The recourse to development communication in the communication field is a call to contribute to discourse on development in society. Ogan (1982) has described development communication as a process used only to serve the development goals of the government in power and also as a means to critical examination, evaluation and report of the relevance, enactment and impact of development programs". A more recent definition by Manyozo (2021) defines development communication as "the strategic use of communication processes and media to facilitate social development, particularly through participation, dialogue, and empowerment".

Also, Servoes (2020) views development communication as a dialogic process that bridges knowledge gaps and empowers communities. It is important to state also that development communication is the use of the media (radio, television, newspapers) or any of the communication outlets, in a given geographical entity in order to execute development.

Statement of the Problem

These ideas about development and development communication exist in the Nigerian landscape and this thrust of existence can be partly traced to the 1972 United Nations (UN) recommendation encouraging development communication for national development in countries. The United nations recommendation was for comprehensive communication policies that are linked to the nation's overall social, cultural, political and economic development (MacBride et al., 1980). African countries have since embraced the idea of development communication through communication outlets, for instance, *the Ujama project* in Tanzania is a good example. In Nigeria, various governments have come up with similar ideas which have been communicated to the citizens through various outlets of media, for example, the Obasanjo government of 1977 came up with Operation Feed The Nation (OFN), while the Shagari government of 1979-1983 evolved the Green Revolution Program which was an attempt to place emphasis on agriculture.

Literature is replete with studies that have documented the use of media in development process in Nigeria These are studies by (Okunna, 1992; Ifenkwe, 2009 and Umuerrri, 2022); while Okunna (1992) had. carried out survey on sources of development information among rural women in Nigeria using a case study, Ifenkwe (2009) had carried out a case study on the assessment of



Newspaper Advocacy for rural development and environmental education in Nigeria using five (5) selected newspapers.

This study however investigated development information in national newspapers in Nigeria and analysed quantitatively the incidences of development and non-development information in the national newspapers. The study objectives were to determine:

- 1) the extent of Nigerian newspapers dissemination of development information to Nigerians;
- 2) the thematic diversifications of development information in the newspapers, and
- 3) the newspapers development-oriented and non-development information.

Newspaper studies have not focused on the development information contents of the selected newspapers for the given period of April - June, 2020 it is to this end that this study set out to investigate the development information contents of the Nigerian newspapers in its political, economic, community, General information and other significant dimensions of development This critical examination was guided by three formulated research questions as follows:

- (1) What is the extent of Nigerian newspaper coverage of development information?
- (2) How thematically diverse is the development content of Nigerian newspapers?
- (3) What is the extent of coverage between development-oriented and non-development-oriented information in the newspapers?

Operational Definition of Development information

These are stories that contribute to the development of the indigenes, their communities and citizens in Nigeria. These development stories are those on: General Development; health; politics; economy; and community.

The non-development information are: Crime/robbery etc.; crisis (political etc.); deaths/obituary; cult wars; and high cost of living. These were excluded as non-development information because they do not contribute to the positive development of the Nigerian society.

Theory

Much of the attention that have been given to development communication studies have been consistent over time Tomaselli (2025); Melkote & Steeves (2015); Milton and Mano (2025); Mmutle, Molale, Akinola & Selebi (2024). Development theory continues to evolve as both a theoretical and practical field that links media practices to social change and empowerment goals. Foundational work by Melkote and Steeves provides a framework for understanding communication as a tool for empowerment and social justice in development contexts (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). In the African context. Contemporary scholarship has bought to re-situate media theories and practices within local histories and epistemologies. For instance, Tomasellis contributions to African media and communication highlight how indigenous perspectives cultural approaches, and post-colonial dynamics inform media scholarship on the continent (Tomaselli, 2025). Recent edited collections further demonstrate how strategic communication is leveraged in sub-saharan African to address governance development and social change challenges (Mnitle et al., 2024). Therefore, this study is guided by the Development Media theory which has postulations of development concerns as espoused by MCQuail (1987, p. 119). It is appropriate to the media situation of developing countries because of the great variety of economic and political conditions and the changing nature of situations. The main principles have been stated by (MCQuail 1987, p.121). One of such principles is that:

Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.

The development media theory is useful for a developing country such as Nigeria because it helps to explain concerns of development raised in this study. This theory focuses on the use of the media to highlight and overcome development concerns of poverty, health, transportation, agriculture etc. in the Nigerian geographical entity. The national newspapers used for this study



namely: *Guardian* and *Vanguard* are expected to report issues on General development news, health, economy, community news, politics etc. in the Nigerian society.

Theoretical Roots of the Research Questions

Research Question one: What is the extent of Nigerian newspapers coverage of development information.

It will be helpful to provide answer to a question that arises from the Development Media theory that this work will resolve. On the first principle of Development media theory by MCQuail (1987, p. 121) “Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in live with nationally established policy,” a question that this work sought to address is: what is the extent of Nigerian newspapers coverage of development information?

Research Question Two: How thematically diverse is the development content of Nigerian newspapers?

This research question emanated from principle two of the development Media theory which posits that: Freedom of the media should be open to restriction according to economic priorities and development needs of the society.

Topography of the Nigerian Mass Media

The organs of mass media have been in existence and in use in Nigeria before independence in 1960. In the context of usage the mass media before independence in Nigeria were used as tool for political emancipation and the evidence of this political context usage can be seen from the performance of the press at that time.

The Nigerian mass media can therefore be understood from the context of its history as tool for the emancipation of Nigerians from British government as they were vibrant in the struggle for the attainment of Independence. This fact of its contents was quite evident in the way the mass media carried on as confirmed by Olukotun (2018, p. 3) thus: “The media in Nigeria and much of Africa are best understood in the context of their pre-colonial origins in oral narratives and festivals as well as their colonial and post-colonial identities as enablers of authoritarian rule, at least until the democratic transitions of the 1990s”.

This pre-colonial legacy bequeathed to the broadcasting sector took on a character that drew from the above in the sense that the Nigerian broadcast stations took on a character of authoritarian legacy in broadcasting whereby Nigerian journalists conduct interviews for politicians without interrogating or critically appraising what they have to say (Olukotun, 2018, p. 3).

In the years 1960 to 1966 when the nationalists were in power, the focus of the media was on sustaining democracy through the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation’s (NBC’S) radio and the Nigerian Television Service (NTS), also owned by the federal government of Nigeria. The coming of the military in governance by 1966 witnessed an era when state owned radio and television stations were used by coup plotters to announce change of baton in government whenever there was a coup d’etat as the coup plotters seized/or took over state owned radio and television stations from where they orchestrated the dawn of a new government. By the 70s, 80s and 90s this had become the trend, however, private broadcasting stations were granted license to operate in 1992 by the Babangida government, thus adding another dimension of broadcasting to the government-owned dominated broadcast stations that were in Nigeria. With the emergence of private broadcasting in Nigeria radio and television stations became lively and fertile ground for cross fertilisation of ideas within the geographical entity.

The idea to use newspapers as enlightenment publications was given birth to by Reverend Henry Townsend who established the first newspaper in Nigeria known as “*Iwe iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba*” in 1859 in Abeokuta. Townsend’s motive was among others, to excite intelligence of the people in his area of operation and to get them to read, thus, Reverend Townsend pioneered the development of newspaper in Nigeria Townsend used his newspaper several times



to proclaim the Egba point of view on political issues, first in the Yoruba version, and then in English version.

In addition, most of the other newspapers that were published before Independence were used in the propagation for Independence from the British. In the fore front of these struggles were nationalists who established leading newspapers in their attempt to have political control from the British and visible examples among others were: Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo. The former established a conglomerate of newspapers with the leading newspaper as *West African Pilot* on 22nd November in 1937, the aim was to propagate his political ideals and that of the citizens of Nigeria. Duyile (1987, p. 139) records that Azikiwe was a new hope in the new journalism practice that characterized the early 1940s as the publisher was a trained journalist. Up till the early 1950s, Dr. Azikiwe's newspaper ventures and his famous press inundated the Nigerian press with incisive stories. Azikiwe also established the *Nigerian Eastern Mail* which debuted before the *West African Pilot* and he was leader of the political party National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun's (NCNC) from where he propagated his political ideals through his established newspapers to campaign for his election. Another nationalist, Obafemi Awolowo established the *Nigerian Tribune* in 1947 to vent his political ideals through his political party, the Action Group (AG)

In the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s Nigeria paraded a number of government owned newspapers not only at the Federal but also at the state levels. As attestation to government's involvement in the establishment of newspapers, it set up the *New Nigerian newspaper* and took over the *Daily Times* in the mid 1970s. These publications were used as mouthpieces of the Federal government for over three decades, beginning from the middle of the 1960s. It was also common place to find a number of state-owned newspapers which were established to ventilate the views of state governments and examples were the then Bendel State - government owned *Nigerian Observer* now owned by the Edo state government; *Tide*, Rivers state; *Chronicle*, Cross River state; *Sketch*, Oyo state, *Statesman*, Imo state; *Daily Star*, Anambra state; *Triumph*, Kano state; etc. These publications were used by different state governments to propagate the ideals of the different state governments, therefore the liveliness that were visible in these publications attracted a lot of developmental strides to the various state governments. However, a noticeable trend with the establishment of the plethora of private newspapers was that the relationship with government was at times adverse as a result of either the didactic messages published in these newspapers or as a result of misgivings and misunderstanding on the part of government. The following private Nigerian newspapers which dotted the landscape and are still in existence will suffice *Guardian*, *Punch*, *Tribune*, *Thisday*, *The Sun*, *Leadership*, *The Nation* etc. It was indeed common practice for government to shut down newspapers and magazines because of what it perceived as adverse reports by this section of the press. In 1984, two journalists, Nduka Irabor and Tunde Thompson of *Guardian newspapers* were jailed for one year each over the now infamous decree No. 4 promulgated by the Mohammadu Buhari military government of 1984.

The citizens in the landscape utilize numerous communication channels and the new electronic media for information dissemination and reception. However, the Nigerian press does not shy away from covering a number of issues that relate to the country especially in the area of development information.

Method

Content analysis was selected as the most appropriate research design as it has the most useful means of providing the best indication of the role of national newspapers in the reportage of development news. Content analysis is a method of studying and analysing communication contents in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Wimmer and Dominick, 2010, p. 125). This method allows for classification of analysis under objective criteria and render them susceptible to statistical description.



Therefore, content analysis is particularly amenable to such research problems as the one being dealt with here. Over the years many Nigerians have accused the media, particularly the print media of reporting stories that tend to be divisive and create tensions in the society. This position as it were, is not based on any empirical analysis of the contents of newspapers, therefore it is necessary to provide evidence that will invalidate this position.

For the sample, two national newspapers, *Guardian* and *Vanguard* were purposively selected for the study. In all, a total of 24 editions of the newspapers were used which covered the period of three months from April, May, June, 2020. To select the sampled days a composite week approach was adopted. Wimmer and Dominick (2010) explain that research has demonstrated that a composite week sampling technique is superior to both random sample and a consecutive day sample when dealing with newspaper content. The first Monday in April 2020, was selected, thereafter, Tuesday of the second week was chosen, Wednesday of the third and Thursday of the fourth week in April 2020. This process was used for the two selected newspapers and thus this gave us a total of 24 days and 24 editions as the selected newspapers analysed.

Table 1. Selected Days for April, May, June, 2020 in the newspapers

S/N	Days	April	May	June	Total
1	Monday	6	4	1	6
2	Tuesday	14	12	9	6
3	Wednesday	22	20	17	6
4.	Thursday	30	28	25	6
	Total No. of Newspaper	8	8	8	24

One copy of the two selected newspapers was used on each of these days. The sample size was considered adequate for answering questions because a small sample can produce more accurate results than one with a large sample. Therefore, by studying two Nigerian newspapers and sampling their editions and contents systematically, this study expected to produce acceptable reliable results.

Limitations of the sample

The time frame of April, May and June 2020 was chosen for the study. From the presentation above, twenty-four editions of the two newspapers were sampled. A major limitation in this study is that the period under investigation was the Covid-19 era. This made it difficult for Nigerian newspapers to concentrate a great deal on positive development information on the thematic contents of the study.

Units of Analysis: The unit of analysis is the thing that is actually counted. It is the smallest elements of content analysis, but it is also one of the most important (Wimmer and Dominick, 2010). For this study, the units of analysis are news stories which are hard news items published in the newspapers and in the front, inside and back pages. A theme defined as a sentence or group of sentences expressing the same idea as unit of analysis was used.

Coding Categories: Coding was done and classified as comprising the following news with the thematic contents: 1. General development, 2. Health, 3. Politics, 4 Economy, 5. Community.



General development news themes cover national unity, national consciousness and positive information that will uplift the spirit of Nigerians, for example the provision of support or palliatives in difficult times. Health theme is on family planning and positive news on health. Politics is on positive news on the electoral process, party politics and political matters in government. Economy news focus on positive news on the economy, manufacturing sector, the stock market, commerce etc., while community news focus on development news in the rural areas of the country. The definition of these content categories was to ensure mutual exclusiveness. The non-development information are categorised in table 4.

Case selection and newspaper choice representativeness and editorial choice

These newspapers have fully established their presence on the internet, for instance, the newspapers have web portals which attracts readers and can be read in all parts of Nigeria. In addition, the newspapers are independent, present balanced reports of events and promote the best interest of Nigeria. Also, the **newspapers** have wide circulation and do not owe allegiance to any ethnic group, political party, community, religious or interest organisation.

Findings and Discussion

The dimensions of development information in two national Nigerian newspapers, namely: *Guardian* and *Vanguard* were investigated

Table 2. Distribution on Extent of Coverage by Newspapers

S/N	Periods of study	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total %
1.	First Period (April)	09	10	19 (33.3)
2.	Second Period (may)	08	07	15(26.3)
3.	Third Period (June)	13	10	23 (40.3)
	Total	30	27	57 (100%)

Hypotheses

The results of the analysis indicated that the total number of development information reported in the two newspapers for the period of April to June 2020 were 57 items. From this number the third period of June had the highest number of forty percent (n=23) in the two newspapers, while *Guardian* presented the highest number of fifty-two percent (30), *Vanguard* presented forty-seven percent (n=27) of development information. The indication from the result is that development information news in the publications were few, this is not surprising as the period was one of lockdown occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 3. Distribution of Thematic Statements by Development Orientation

S/N	Categories	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total %
1.	General Development	09	08	17 (29.8)



2.	Health	06	05	11 (19.2)
3.	Politics	07	05	12 (21.0)
4.	Economy	03	04	07 (12.2)
5.	Community	05	05	10 (17.5)
	Total	30	27	57 (100%)

A further enquiry was to provide answers to the thematic statements of development information in the national newspapers. Indication from the result is that general development news had the highest of twenty-nine percent (n=17) of development information than the other development information items. This preference for general development news was visible because government of Nigeria and other non-governmental organisations at that time were concerned about encouraging citizens to overcome the health challenge.

Table 4. Distribution on Non-development Information

S/N	Categories	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total %
1.	Crime/Robbery etc.	11	13	24 (23.3)
2.	Crisis (Political, etc.)	14	18	32 (31.0)
3.	Deaths/Obituary	09	11	20 (19.4)
4.	Cult Wars	06	04	10 (9.7)
5.	High Cost of Living	08	09	17 (16.5)
	Total	48	55	103 (100%)

On the reportage of development and non-development messages, the latter were sixty-four percent (n=103), while the former were thirty-five percent (n=57).

Table 5. Distribution of Development and Non-development Information

S/N	Items	Total %
1	Development Information	57 (35.7)



2	Non-Development information	103 (64.3)
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Thus, results from table 5 indicate that the newspapers presented more non-development than development information.

Result of hypothesis testing

The findings revealed that both newspapers published some amount of development-related content alongside non-development information. However, the analysis showed a noticeable variation in the proportion of development information and non-development information. Based on the results of the content analysis, the difference in coverage was found to be statistically significant.

Therefore the hypothesis is accepted indicating that a significant difference exists in the level of development and non-development information published during the study period.

From the results, it can be inferred that the Covid-19 pandemic during the period of study affected the newspapers reportage of development information news as the difference in the number of non-development and development information is significant as can be seen from table 5.

Conclusion

The role of newspapers in development process has not been in doubt, this is why communication scholars have advocated the use of Development Communication in the development process. The investigation of the newspapers reportage of development information in two of Nigeria's national newspapers, namely, *Guardian* and *Vanguard* has revealed different results. First, the low reportage of development information in the newspapers is not surprising given the fact that the period under study witnessed a global health pandemic. Secondly, the general development news which was the leading thematic statement of the period can be ascribed to the fact that the elements of raising national consciousness and national unity were the prime motives of government and other citizens in the face of the health challenge which ravaged the world. It was therefore not surprising that both newspapers carried more of non-development than development information. This finding presents a true picture of the mood of the nation during the period of study as most of the information in the press at that time were on the adverse effects of Covid-19. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. In a time of crises in the society journalists should endeavour to report positive news stories as a way of fulfilling the information and national integration function of the media.
2. More efforts should be devoted to coverage in the area of community news as the rural areas remain largely underreported by the press. There are a number of innovations and good things that are evolving from our rural areas, these should form sufficient and adequate grounds for investigation by journalists and for coverage in their presentation of daily diet of news.
3. Nigerian newspapers should endeavour to report more development-oriented, instead of non-development information as a way of contributing to the development process in Nigeria, therefore, journalists and media houses should make deliberate efforts to scout for such positive development information news.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. The author confirms that no artificial intelligence tools were used to create, write, or edit the text during the preparation of this manuscript except for translation. All results are original and obtained without the help of AI.



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