

## **The Past, Present and Future of Visual Journalism in Television News Reporting in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Visual journalism encompasses the broadcast and print media, where sounds (words), images (pictures) are deployed to convey information in resolving visual noise. Visual noise is the physically seen or interpreted tangibles, meant to distort meaning in a visual message. However, the visual relevance of sounds and images in TV news report is a departure from those of the print media which are static and fixed. With technological advancement, information via these sounds and images in TV news reporting is conveyed with immediacy and accuracy. Findings show that in developed countries, raw visual journalism is being applied in TV news more than what obtains in Nigeria's news reporting. This is an aftermath of political, economic, technological and even cultural challenges. Based on the findings, it is recommended that more individuals should be encouraged to invest in the TV broadcast industry to create the needed healthy competition between government own-media outfits and that of private sector. The expectation is that this kind of competition will help break monopoly and brings about checks and balances.

**Keywords:** Visual journalism, Conflict reporting, TV news, Competition, Private sector, Broadcast media, Print media.

### **Introduction**

These days, television news reporting has exclusive influence on nearly every issue, be it politics, religion, governance, fashion, sports and culture. This is because it will not only convey messages, but accuracy with audio and visual details in reinforcing effective meaning (Ifedayo, 2013). Obviously, within this mix, television news (news editors, news producers and other news managers) present visual conflict as noise to us as they see it. While Nigerians have witnessed so many conflicts especially amalgamation of different cultural, religious and political tendencies in re-ordering of the terrain, springing up new challenges in relationships between various interests and sections of the country (Owens-Ibie, 2002 in Akpoghiran & Otite, 2013). Here, television news is often seen as realistic and spontaneous synergy for acceptability.

Unlike newspapers where objectivity is debatable, TV news programmes are supposed to be unbiased and present impartiality in a transparent form. TV news should offer apparently raw 'evidence' of events as they happen (Chandler, 2011).

Akpoghiran and Otite (2013, p. 13) aptly see this in,

Some television organisations believing to tell visual conflict the way it happens. For example, *CNN* believes in reporting from the war front, so that they (*CNN*) can 'tell it as it is', because *CNN* wants you to 'be the first to know'. *CNN* and *BBC* for instance, are known for their defiance of blunt coverage of the Niger Delta crises especially the side of kidnapping and hostage taking. The bombings, killings of innocent people and attacking of churches by the Islamic sect Boko Haram were intensively carried and reported by the *CNN* and *BBC*. The news media thrive on visual conflict despite the negative impact it has on the society.

In Nigeria, Okolie (2009) in Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) further argues that the struggle for independence witnessed some consensus among the political gladiators; it also revealed conflict between them, occasioned by the differing response to their socio-cultural and political loyalties. The trend of conflict has remained highly dynamic whereby making the media a vibrant market for conflict reporting. The various crises such as religious crises, industrial strikes, bombings, and ethnic rivalries, like in Kaduna, Bauchi, Jos, Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Benue, the Niger Delta region and different parts of the country attracted the attention of the television stations and the mass media in general. As an inevitable aspect of human interaction, and an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions, visual conflict cannot be avoided.

Rising from this, Brown and Ngwu (2015) agree with Goshgarian, Krueger and Minc (2003) that visual statements in news reportorial come in many different forms and use many different media. Artists, photographers, advertisers and designers approach TV news with the same intentions that authors of written materials do – they want to share a point of view, present an idea, inspire or evoke a reaction. And invariably, Odoemelam, Ebeze and Okwudiogor (2015) accept these TV images as constituting the gamut of visual communication, which remain as very profound ways of examining how TV news represent or report particular issue of public concern. In practicable sense, Eugene (2014) assesses broadcast news stories as taking into account the visual and auditory nature of broadcast news. For example, images often accompany a story, and the story needs to be consistent with the image. Moreover, because the audience is listening to a story, rather than reading it, a good TV news story appeals to the eye and ear. Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) put this as television news therefore remains a source of identity and sense of social aspiration, even though visual conflict takes centre stage. On this premise, Chandler (2011) approves that,

TV broadcasters emphasize the informational and factual

nature of the news: news can be 'gathered', 'uncovered' or 'exposed'. The newsreader is presented as a 'neutral' observer. By reading the scripted news, the newsreader, dressed with sober formality in an orderly studio, and seated behind a desk (which reduces the body language), appears to speak 'the objective discourse of 'the truth'. Newsreaders have a sense of permanency: they are always there when the programme begins: they are never seen to arrive, and they don't move about during the programme. And yet we are directed by the newsreader. Audience gaze follows the newsreader's gaze when we or she/he looks off screen. Everything seen seems to support what the newsreader says. Although the content may be far from reassuring, the newsreader's manner is always friendly, reliable and reassuring. The 'tail piece' offers a happy ending.

The necessity of this study comes from Nwachukwu (2009), Onu (2009) in Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) suggesting that what our daily basis of conflict is reported on the media. Reporting conflict on television because of the effect of sights and sounds makes television emotional, appealing and perceptive. In conflict reporting, there is the possibility for exaggeration of facts and figures, which may further aggravate the visual conflict. Reporters are often overwhelmed with what they see only, without taking time to follow or dig into the root cause of the conflict, thereby subordinating the actual issues. By so doing, a reporter may unwittingly provoke the violent component of the conflict to the detriment of the cause. Only an insignificant number of the events that happened around us are reported by the news media, partly because news is defined in accordance with specific criteria. That is, journalists select those events or issues containing elements of the drama of visual conflict. Hence, visual conflict attracts, and people find the story interesting and stimulating especially when it is reported on television.

In essence, the stronger the element of conflict in the news or story, the greater the probability that the news or story would be reported and given prominence on television. Causes of conflicts as shown in television news have also been identified with resources, identity, power, status or values, system disequilibria in the distribution of national development, and marginal political representation of minority groups in Nigeria.

In this regard, this researcher therefore, decided to capture the systematic and structural interplay of visual implications of conflict in news reporting; vis-à-vis it's enabling and prevailing icons (sounds and images) in resolving visual misunderstandings within news management.

### **Empirical Status of TV Broadcasting and TV News Genres in Nigeria**

Television broadcasting started in Nigeria on October 31, 1959 championed by the legendary Chief Obafemi Awolowo who established the *Western Nigerian Television* (WNTV) in Ibadan that year. It was the first TV station in Africa. The former Eastern

region followed suit on October 1, 1960 by establishing its own broadcasting station. The Federal Government established its own station National Broadcasting Commission (NBC-TV) in Lagos in 1962.

The regionalisation of the broadcasting media later led to ethnic or tribal loyalties. Regional interest, integration and awareness were given priority above national integration and unity. Between 1969 and 1979 when Nigeria was under military dictatorship, 19 states were created each with its television station (Uche, 1989 in Salawu, 2006, p.153). Uche (1989) further posited that regional broadcasting systems were completely independent of the Federal Government. The only relationship between them was that the regions needed to get frequency allocation from the Federal Government. Subsequent governments created the rest until the federation became 36 states. On October 1 1979, states were granted the permission to create and manage their TV stations. As a result, different states started re-establishing and operating TV stations to contest with the existing national television network: *Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)*.

However, privatisation of the broadcast media industry led to the emergence of privately own media outfits like *Africa Independent Television (AIT)*, *Channels TV*, *Silverbird Television*, etc. The entrance of these and many others revolutionised broadcast media in Nigeria. Nigeria also has cable television networks that provide 24-hour TV programming. Both local and international stations could be found on these cable networks. The Internet and the social media networks have also come to be the driving forces in TV news broadcasting in Nigeria (Uche, 1989 in Salawu, 2006, pp.153-154).

Akpan (1989, p.302) agrees that television has come to be described as a cool medium because it is a medium that involves nearly all our senses. It stimulates awareness and empathy more than any other medium of communication. Because of its multi-sensory involvement, the least mistake seen on television is easily noticed by the viewers. Television makes viewers participate in an event instead of merely looking. It makes the viewers assume the role of people who are moving about the surroundings of the event; they participate actively in the happening. James (2011) compared this note of visualized actions as characterised by the steady development and acceptance of professional practices.

Visual journalism in TV reporting is purely human-biased communication, and it continues to be an important means of communication today (James, 2011, p.357) since oral communication was inadequate for any society that needed to be more informed and educated. As humans formed tribes and societies, they needed to exchange visual information about themselves and about the world around them. Robbie Tcw (2015) divides television news genres as applicable to Nigeria's context as follows:

**Mode of Address** is how an audience is spoken to, or addressed. Mode of address is constructed through language (and dialogue) and mise-en-scene. Mode of address can be

formal, informal, personal, attacking or friendly. **Breakfast News** as the name suggests, is shown in the morning, at breakfast time. The programme usually has an equal mix of hard and soft news but there is less analysis than an evening news programme. The mode of address is informal. Presenters are often sitting on a couch or comfy chairs and will joke, speak informally and in a chatty manner and respond to the stories in a personal way. Guests are often on the show too and these will often be celebrities, sports' stars and actors or musicians. **Rolling News** or 24 hour news is constant, all-the-time news. As satellite channels and free view became more accessible so did television news. As they are on all the time, breaking news stories feature heavily on these channels. Exclusive interviews and reports feature heavily too. This also means that many stories are constantly repeated. The mode of address is very similar to evening news as it remains very formal. However, the format is a bit loose as they have to allow for breaking stories. These will include images of the local areas and names of local towns. There will be a mix of hard and soft news. The soft news story or stories will come at the end of the programme and can often be about something specific to the region. **Evening News** as the name suggests, these programmes are in the evening. They are seen as a 'flagship' programme, meaning they are of great importance to a channel and receive high viewing figures. The mode of address is formal. Presenters, both sits and stands to report, wear smart clothing, use formal language. The music and sound is dramatic and builds tension, often stories are punctuated with a loud sound effect (a bang or clock chime, for example). The lead story starts the programme, 3 or 4 stories follow then the sport, then the weather. A voiceover from the anchor often is used over a montage of the stories.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Social Responsibility Theory is one of the theories of communication propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1967) in their book 'Four Theories of Press'. "Social responsibility theory allows free press without any censorship but at the same time the content of the press should be discussed in public panel and media should accept any obligation from public interference or professional self regulations or both," (Study Material, 2015 <http://www.jimssouthdelhi.com>).

The second theory that influences this paper is the Agenda-Setting Theory. This theory could also be described as the agenda-setting function of the mass media. Conflict reporting in television is also contingent upon the agenda-setting postulations. The mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time. McQuail (2010) in Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) says the core idea of the theory is "that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceive as the main issues". The elements

involved in agenda setting, according to Folarin (2002) in Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) are: the quantity or frequency of reporting; the prominence given to the reports and the degree of conflict generated in the reports. By frequently reporting of conflicts in television, an agenda 'fear' arises.

The two theories share a common denominator - that is their concern about the plight of the TV audience in the hands of the TV news. While the agenda-setting highlights the domineering nature of TV news in influencing thought process in relation to news items, the Social Responsibility theory interprets a watchdog role on TV broadcast excesses. These theories are vital to ensure that the TV news play their roles within the ethics of journalism. In as much as TV news influences the society, the society can in turn influence what the TV news has to offer in news dissemination. The relationship between the two theories capture vividly what the role of both TV news and the audience should be in the society. The theories provide the benchmark or template for a dependable co-existence between the TV news and society.

### **Effect of the Theories on TV News Reporting**

The two theories are centred on achieving the expected conducive environment in which the TV news operates. Beyond this fact, the mercy of TV news regarding the visual impact of its output on thought processing is in agenda-setting theory. The society has the right to subject TV news to public opinion pool as the broadcast station in turn takes responsibility for their actions as part of their social responsibilities to the society. Chandler (2011) concurrently analyses TV news programmes, "As having much of constructions in a drama, and have a similar need to attract viewers - to entertain. It is often argued that news has an 'agenda-setting' function. The themes in the news constitute an inexplicit (albeit unconscious) political agenda. By what is omitted as well as what is included by the newsmakers may influence what people consider to be useful."

However, the above justification will be misleading without facts as provided by Ajibade (2010), stating that,

No visual news medium anywhere in the world exists in a vacuum. News media operate within, clearly defined environments, which influence the development and growth of the mass media and are, in turn, influenced by the mass media. These environments include social, political, economical, technological and cultural factors that dictate the direction of growth and development of the mass media as a social institution. Like a man, whose character and dispositions or attitudes are shaped by the kind of environment in which he grows up as a child, the Nigerian TV news reporting is a product of various influences, experienced from its formative years till date. Consequently, fortunes of the Nigerian TV news reporting continue to be dictated by social, political, economic, cultural factors, etc.

The political and socio-economic fallouts of the theories have excruciating

after effects on its audience/TV media practitioners. Pristinely, Nigeria's governance during the military era had a negative impact on the reported news. This era saw the formulation of anti-media decrees and the killing of some journalists. Others were either detained or imprisoned without trial. Though, in a democratic dispensation, press freedom and security are still not fully guaranteed. Some government media policies are not friendly as the media industry is not yet fully privatised. As the regulatory agencies and the government are slow in implementing certain policies that will enhance the media profession. For example, government's delay in fully regularising the use of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and most recently, the extension of the deadline for media houses to change their transmission systems from analogue to digital are typical of the issue in question. Economically, journalists are not well-paid. This often leads some so-called media professionals or journalists to compromise standards in order to make more money from corrupt practices.

### **Applications of Visual Journalism in TV News Reporting**

Stovall (2011, p.246) accepts that in comparative terms, visual journalism is as important as words; information and ideas are sometimes more understandable if they are visually presented or if they have visual elements. To support this claim, Stovall (2011, pp. 5-7) separates TV broadcast into 'news' and 'not news' categories as functions of what is called news values. These are concepts that help to decide what TV audiences are interested in. There are millions of 'news' that occur in the society every day. These TV news editors and news directors select and share the characteristics in ways of resolving visual conflict. These are discussed as follows:

1. **Visual Impact:** There is spectacular impact created in the TV news associated with visual empathy in news reportorial, where the news consumers appreciate the news content. With reference to the first outburst of Ebola in Nigeria, the reported news in pictures, rented agonistic situation. Stovall (2011) sees this televised event that changed people's lives as being classified as news. Although the event itself might involve only a few people, the consequences may be wide-ranging (p. 5). Catapulted from Nwabueze's (2011) point of view is the argument that visual impact in TV news has to do with the number of persons a story affects or is likely to affect, and as such, lack of visual impact, denounces some level of trust in TV news (p. 8).
2. **Visual Timeliness:** Visual timeliness is a value common to almost all TV news stories. It refers to the visual recency of an event. Without the element of visual timeliness, most events cannot be considered news (Stovall, 2011, p.5). Collaboratively, Nwabueze (2011) supports Stovall (2011) on how current an event or occurrence is, giving it an angle over other events. Breaking news gets attention in TV news reporting. Obviously, putting TV news reporters as giving priority to what is happening now, what is current, i.e., more current than competing stories, not what is no longer news (p. 6). Physical and reconciliatory

dialogues reported as TV news will create psychological restfulness to the nationhood. Examples of this could be found in the peace treaties between Federal Government of Nigeria and The Avengers in the Niger Delta, and Boko Haram in the North East.

Visual timeliness must always allow TV news to explain chronicled events. Chandler (2011) concurred by “saying that a TV report is a story, no more, but no less, is not to demean news, or to accuse it of being fictitious. Rather, it alerts that news, like all public documents, is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity”. TV reportorial appears “to be cast in the form of a narrative, with principal and minor actors, connected sequences, heroes and villains, beginning, middle and end, signalling of dramatic turns, a reliance on familiar plots” (McQuail, 1987 cited in Chandler, 2011).

3. **Visual Prominence:** Prominent people, sometimes when they are doing trivial things, make TV news (Stovall, 2011, p. 6). “Nigerians need to know Buhari's health status – Falana,” coming from the delayed return of the President from United Kingdom on a medical check-up (*Channels TV*, 2017). Televised news of this development will warrant more interest. Another TV visual prominence eclipsed on tributes to Stephen Keshi, “perhaps more than any other footballer, dead or living, Stephen Keshi was the architect of the new Nigerian football, which at one time was rated the fifth best country in the global game” (Okpara, 2016).
4. **Visual Proximity:** Events occurring close to home are more likely to be TV news than the same events that occur elsewhere (Stovall, 2011, p.7). This explores the way journalism employs visual proximity in the TV news reporting. Even while the practice of on-the-spot reporting has continued to increase, distant news estranges effective audience/viewership. Occasionally, in the absence of live reporting, generated images give way to virtual proximity. This actually allows the audience, to act 'the jury' in witnessing the event.
5. **Visible Conflict:** When people disagree, when they fight, when they have arguments – that's news, particularly if one of the other news values, such as visual prominence, is involved. Visible conflict is one of the TV reporter's favourite news values because it generally ensures there is an interesting story to tell. One of the reasons, trial stories are so popular with television viewers is that the central drama involves visible conflict – two competing forces, each vying to defeat the other (Stovall, 2011, p. 7). TV news has more potential for dramatic conflict and also more likely to appear; many news stories are interpreted in terms of visible conflict, since this is more dramatically interesting. There is thus a bias in favour of 'bad news', a featuring of negativity. Like drama, the visual news does tell a story. The ordering and duration of items reflects the importance which newsmakers ascribe to them. The format of news programmes is thus strongly hierarchical (Chandler, 2011).

6. **Cultural Fear:** Another perceptual dimension of conflict reporting is the intensification of the conflict. The notion of the intensity dimension is derived from the claim that television news tends to present only the more intense moments of social conflicts. By the frequency and the degree of coverage given to conflicts television news can heighten tensions. For instance, while the ailing Late President of Nigeria, Umaru Yar'adua was in a Saudi Arabian hospital, the electronic news media like *Channel Television*, and foreign ones like *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* were focusing on the intensity the conflict was generating in the country. Indeed, it generated a lot of controversies and conflicts of interest. When the volume of television news coverage of conflicts continue to attract public comments, criticisms, and observations then tensions, anxieties, fears begin to increase (Akpoghiran & Otite 2013).

Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) quoting from Waisbord (2002) and Eti (2009) argued that news media especially the television establishes “culture of fear” which they perpetuate by portraying “a vast array of threats”. Thus, such intensified portrayal of conflict in television news, as Eti (2009) in Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) observe, “presents and shapes negative perception of risk among member of the news audience, and creates a sense of helplessness when it does not cover aspects that communicate hope and a selection”. The media are attractive to conflict. The news media wants to be in the front bench in journalism. Hence, Lowry *et al* (2003) in Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) opined that the guiding principle in the intensification of conflict news is “if it bleeds, it leads.” And, in other words, conflict is attractive.

7. **Visual Unusualness:** A rare visual event is sometimes considered news (Stovall, 2011, p.7). Chandler (2011) permanently sees TV news as selective. He continued that, Stuart Hall notes that TV reporters speak of 'the visual news' as if events select themselves. Furthermore, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story, and which 'news angles' are most salient are divinely inspired. Richard Hoggart in Chandler (2011) ponders that the most important filter through which TV news is constructed is, the cultural air we breathe, the whole ideological atmosphere of our society, which tells us that some things can be seen and that others had best not be seen in the context of TV news reporting.

8. **Visual Currency:** Issues that have visible current interest often have news value, and events surrounding those issues can sometimes be considered in TV news reporting (Stovall, 2011, p. 7). By technological advancement, Farnsworth (2013) for many in the newer fields of digital journalism, it's simply about visualizing data, or using graphics such as maps or charts to explain stories. But in the *BBC*, it's also about bringing together TV designers with the teams that create the more high-end multimedia graphics online and harnessing the unprecedented creative opportunities that come with it. So using skill and creativity to engage and inform viewers on the biggest, most significant stories, providing insightful,

personal and shareable visual explanations. Chandler (2011) purports visual currency to obviously be a key criterion, contributing to the idea that the TV news is up-to-the-minute. This is a key application of new technology.

### **Nigeria's Future Expectations**

From review of related literature, it was noticed that the role of new technology – Internet, social media, cable and satellite in the present day TV reporting has a remarkable impact with visual journalism. Looking inwardly, Nigeria's TV broadcast media, have noticed that there are technological lapses within the TV broadcast environment apart from the political, economic and even cultural factors challenging the profession. For example, the timeframe or deadline for media houses in the country to switch from analogue to digital network transmission; was not taken seriously. But this could not be realised as some stations are still analogue based. This singular technological setback is not good in the effort at deploying the use of sophisticated visual journalism applications in TV news reporting. The government and other regulatory agencies should ensure that the new deadline is not shifted.

More individuals should be allowed to invest in the TV broadcast media industry. Except this sector is private-sector-driven, the needed healthy competition between government own-media outfits and that of private sector will not be there. It is this kind of competition that breaks monopoly, and brings about checks and balances, and above all encourages the drive towards fair, accurate and truthful news coverage and reporting.

The future expectations for the Nigeria TV broadcast media are high as the target audience are on the increase and must be reached. The visual journalist should not allow himself to be used or bribed for any reason. In Nigeria today, it is a common knowledge that a particular issue/incidence is being reported differently by different media houses. In such a case, the target audience does not know which one to believe.

The visual news reporter should be non-partisan. He should be fair in his analysis of news no matter who is involved. The employers of labour whether public/private or government should try and improve on the salary of visual news reporters. If he or she is well paid, that will encourage him to be dedicated to duty and maybe contented. Most times, some visual journalists do not collect money because they do not have, some even have enough but will collect brown envelopes especially during electioneering periods. These days, it is very easy to see partisan visual news reporters during elections. All the professional agencies, and on the part of professing visual news reporters should discipline erring members and sanitise the system.

### **Conclusion**

This topic is not just new but unique. This submission was informed from the knowledge of the severe laxity employed by TV broadcast outfits in effectively synchronising visuals with oral communication to attract audience's attention. A case

in mind as stated earlier is the inability of most TV broadcast media houses to meet the 2015 deadline to change from analogue to digital transmission. This definitely will affect the incorporation of visual journalism in a digitalised media system to achieve impact and immediacy. There is a generational gap in technological sophistication among TV broadcast media houses in Nigeria when compared with their counterparts in the developed world.

And finally, the study also agreed with Akpoghiran and Otite (2013) that in modern societies, audiences are increasingly dependent on media to understand the social world around and to act meaningfully and effectively in the society, to find fantasy and escape or create diversion. The level of dependency is based on the degree of change and conflict present in the society, and as reported by the media. Visual conflict as a social phenomenon is presented in television news based on what the media consider and select as important news. The degree of this importance is based on audience dependency on television for news and other information.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this paper, the followings are recommended:

First, regulatory agencies should ensure that all TV broadcast media houses adhere to set standards, professional ethics and practice. For example, the new digitalisation deadline should not be extended, no matter who may lagging behind in the switch over.

Second, TV broadcasters should be trained to become familiar with new global practices and technology in sifting, strengthening visual condiments that will attract more attention, ameliorate visual conflict and fear.

Third, more licenses should be given to individuals interested in private TV media operations. This will not only encourage public/private sector investment, it will also create more jobs. It will also help to sanitise the industry through healthy competition, leading to greater professionalism and practice.

The government on its part should ensure enabling environment for TV news reporters to work effectively. The government should avoid anti-media policies based on political, ethnic or religious sentiments.

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