

COVERAGE OF ICT ISSUES BY LOCAL NEWSPAPERS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the coverage of ICT issues by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State. The objectives were to determine the depth of coverage given to ICT issues, the monthly frequently coverage, the front page prominence accorded to ICT issues, the format of presenting these issues and the category of ICT issue that received greater coverage. The discourse is hinged on the agenda setting theory and gate-keeping theory while the research method is content analysis of 11,555 issues of The Pioneer, The Ink and The Nigerian Pulse newspapers for the period of six months (January-June 2016). The units of analysis are: news, features, opinions, columns and editorials and there were ten categories of ICT issues researched. The analyses done were presented in tabular form and simple percentages. The findings show that only 175 ICT stories were published within the period under study. There was no enough front and back page prominence given to ICT issues. The news format was the most common genre of reportage. Stories were mainly published in briefs the most frequently reported categories of ICT was government activities on ICT but cannot be felt in reality. The study recommends that for the analyzed newspapers to set meaningful agenda on ICT issues in the society, they need to broaden their scope of coverage and the news format of presentation; deepen the discourse/content of ICT information by taking proactive steps towards reporting ICT issues by investigating new products and innovations that need public understanding and clarification; and also consolidate on routine ICT coverage as well as encourage their reporters to take up ICT reporting.

Key words: Coverage, ICT, Issues, Media, Newspapers.

Introduction

The 21st century has been quite revolutionary in human history in terms of information and knowledge. Advancement in technology in this era has reshaped human activities. The world has become a global village as postulated by Marshall McLuhan where the use of information technologies is vital and thus indispensable. Information communication technology has become a grand transformative force,

creating a new environment that marks the transition from an industrial society to a digital and knowledge based society.

The role, importance and significant contributions of ICTs remain outstanding as they are regarded as key aspects of modern society. The level of development of ICT is significantly related to the level of development of a country. Therefore the effective and efficient utilization of ICT facilities in the developed world has greatly improved research in all areas of human life. Adamu (2007) observes that ICTs involve computers, ancillary equipments, software, firmware and similar procedures, services including support services and other related resources. This is an emerging multidisciplinary field of study that is gathering momentum in recent times. This evolving trend helps to link the science communities with the public, society at large (Batta, Ekenam and Udousoro 2014). It has fundamentally changed the ways people live, the ways organization work and the way societies function.

There is no doubt that ICTs possess unequalled potential for the attainment or satisfaction of basic human needs. In our society, the kind of transformation witnessed in the lives of people is in part, a function of advances in ICT. We can talk about satellite, mobile phones, the internet, e-commerce, e-banking, e-fund transfer, e-library and e-research. These possibilities which have made computer mediated communication possible are what William Gibson cited in Iwokwagh and Obagwu (2012, p. 395) called “cyberspace” of information superhighway. The magical changes brought about by these technologies are quite glaring in every facet of our lives from the simplest of domestic services to corporate and limitless industrial application.

Value creation through technology is heavily dependent upon the alignment of technology and business strategies. Information and communication technology plays an important role in improving the overall value change of a society. It helps organizations recognize improved competitive advantage within the industries they reside and help generate superior performance at a greater value. ICT has made it possible for the use of computer applications and internet services to create, foster, deliver and facilitate learning anytime, anywhere around the world. Indeed the introduction and rapid spread of ICTs such as the World Wide Web, e-mail, telephone, fiber optics and satellites is revolutionizing the way in which societies interact, conduct their business, compete in international markets and set their economic and human development goals. ICTs enable societies to produce, access, adapt and apply information more rapidly and at a reduced costs as well as offer enormous opportunities for enhancing business and economic viability.

In spite of the belated penetration of ICTs in Nigeria, their impact is already felt in many spheres of our national life. These technologies are as a matter of fact, bringing new hope and are changing the lives of the people. It has repositioned contemporary societies for sustainable development, created profound changes in the way we live and work and it has become so pervasive that the total Nigerian environment of the 21st century experiences a quantum leap and transformation in

all sectors of the economy. Development in ICT in contemporary Nigeria has provided several facilities to reconfigure and create new and more enabling environment for realistic development of the country through enhanced information dissemination within the shortest period of time. In Akwa Ibom State for instance the role of ICT can be felt in almost all areas of the society, from the mobile phones people use to the traffic light in streets, the use of computers in offices and organizations, E-payment in schools and organizations. E-banking and transactions in banks and business organizations, the use of the state's E-library. ICT centres, the global village located at the heart of the town which deals with telecommunication and computer services thus, the need to report ICT issues by the state's newspapers is very essential.

Considering the potentials of ICTs to the overall development of the society, a deliberate action is therefore required to explore how these tools can be effectively used among the poor to reduce poverty and enhance their productivity and competitiveness. Thus, communication of this new innovation and technology to the public by the mass media is very important to the society. The pivotal role of the mass media in diffusing and framing innovation and technology information is commonly acknowledged as their coverage triggers awareness. The audience expects the media and reporters to provide them with up to date information on the most current products and application in the rapidly changing ICT market. The public wants reliable judgment of journalists covering ICT issues as information experts, on whether new products or applications are actually worth their while and money. They demand information and judgments in a style and language they can comprehend.

Batta et al (2014, p. 57) stresses that "communication of information technology in the media has a great bearing on public understanding, popularization and utilization of technology by the citizens" The media have the obligation to inform, create awareness, influence opinion, affect perception, increase knowledge through media education and plays an advocacy role to influence policy and decision making for individuals, groups and society.

The audience and public expect ICT journalists to offer ratings and advice with a probable impact on the market success of new products and technologies. The media do this by giving attention, according prominence to issues, setting and building agenda on a wide range of issues associated with ICT through the feature of graphics, pictures, write-ups, editorials, opinions, documentaries among others. Asemah (2011, p. 45) notes that "the mass media broaden and deepen ones perspective; they give knowledge and skill and serves as the watchdog of the society". The newspaper media needs to play an enormous role of educating and informing the public about innovations, current events, occurrences and issues associated with ICT as it has become a necessity in human life that is indispensable and inevitable. Thus this research aims at analyzing the coverage of ICT news by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Information and communication technology is a dynamic innovation that is transforming both the social, economic, political and educational sectors in the society. It is the engine that propels the society to function effectively. There is no doubt that ICTs possess unequalled potential for the satisfaction and attainment of basic human needs. In Akwa Ibom state today, no one can underestimate the role ICTs play in improving and enhancing human life. Communication has been enhanced through ICTs. Information and communication technology gadgets have made our health system more effective and reliable. Lives have been saved through the utilization of ICT offerings in the health sector. Transportation today is easier and faster. The banking sector has become more efficient. Agriculture and industrial productions are boosted. ICT innovations can be used to boost performance in all aspects of the economy of Nigeria.

Therefore, since ICT is pivotal in our contemporary society, the media are therefore saddled with the responsibility of reporting issues of ICT to the public. Also ICTs are ever-changing and their application sophisticated. They have become more complicated for users. The media should act between the ICT world and the general public, shaping public consciousness about ICT. In short, the way people understand ICT is influenced to a significant degree by the coverage, interpretation and presentation of these issues by the media. The mass media which are known for their basic function of informing, educating, and interpreting issues to the public needs to cover and inform the people about ICT issues as it is becoming a grand phenomenon in recent time.

However, several factors determine media coverage of event and issues. Udoh (2011) notes that whatever the media cover must be news worthy and it must interest a large number of people in the society. The media needs to stand as a gap between the ICT world and the public by diffusing, explaining and interpreting these new technologies and in forging our understanding of future trends. Thus, ICT is one beat that the media in Akwa Ibom State needs to pay attention to, observers and readers of newspapers have noticed that they do not devote attention to stories or issues that border on ICT, this might be as a result of the fact that these newspapers may have other competing beats such as politics, economy, fashion, business, sports and culture calling for their attention. Also journalist here commented that hardly do their editors assign them to beats or events related to new technologies particularly ICTs, this might be as a result of lack of interest and ability to report such beat. There could also be the issue of “commercialization of news” where by people pay for news item. Thus, the question then is why are local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State not giving wider coverage to ICT issues? This study therefore tends to establish the extent of coverage given to ICT issues by newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To determine the extent or depth of coverage of ICT issues in local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. To examine the frequency of reports on ICT issues in local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. To find out the prominence that local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State give to ICT issues.
- iv. To determine the format used in reporting ICT issues in local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.
- v. To determine which category of ICT issues receive greater coverage in local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were set to guide this study:

1. What is the extent of coverage given to ICT issues by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What is the frequency of reports on ICT issues as published by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State?
3. What prominence do local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State accord ICT issues?
4. What is the format and news hole allotted to ICT issues by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State?
5. Which category of ICT issues receive greater coverage by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State?

Review of Related Literature

The Mass Media

The mass media are the channels or vehicles that carry information from the source to the receiver. The feature of the mass media is that it is impersonal and can have delayed feedback process. Coleman (2005) stresses that mass media means technology that is intended to reach a mass audience. It is the primary means of communication used to reach the vast majority of the general public. The need for mass media was based on the expansion of the society to the point that it was becoming impossible to exchange information within such a heterogeneous society. According to Asak and Ohiagu (2013, p. 29) “the mass media encompass much more than just news, although it is sometimes misunderstood in this way. It can be used for various purposes; advocacy, entertainment, public service among others.” They further stresses that mass media is a collective term which refers to the use for mass communication of all technological channels intended to reach a large audience.

Mass media of communication have been characterized by a single overarching model. This model according to John and Shawn (2011) has the following characteristics.

1. Communication flow is largely one way, from the sender or source to the receiver or audience.
2. Communication is from one or a few to many (i.e. one or a few sources generate and distribute content to large, heterogeneous audiences).
3. Communication is anonymous (sources generally do not know their audiences and audiences do not know the sources, except at a general level).
4. Audiences are largely passive recipients of the messages distributed by the media, with little opportunity for feedback and practically no opportunity for immediate feedback or interaction with each other.

In other words, mass media create content they believe the audience will want and distribute that content to an audience that has very few ways to provide immediate feedback. This model has characterized all media of mass communication whether books, magazine, newspaper, television, radio, cable or satellite TV, recorded music or motion pictures.

Generally, mass media are broadly classified into two groups. The print media and the electronic media. The print media include such publication of newspapers, magazines and books which were made possible with the invention of alphabets, papers, ink and printing press. These inventions aided the process of mass-oriented channel of communication, which aided the expanded and scattered nature of human settlements in the early centuries (Nworgu, 2010). The print media are characterized by permanent and space-bound, delayed information. functional literacy level, and are not cost effective. The electronic media include the broadcast media that transmit information electronically and they comprise of radio, television, film, cinema or movies, internet, CDs and DVDs. It is ubiquitous, temporal and time-bound, have wide coverage/reach, cost effective, transient and effective for mass mobilization.

Asak and Ohiagu (2013, p.29) categorized mass media into 7 branches based on their invention.

1. Print (books, pamphlets, newspaper, magazines etc) from the late 18th century.
2. Recordings(gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, cartridges, CDS. DVDS) from the late 19th century.
3. Cinema-1900
4. Radio-1910
5. Television-1900
6. Internet-1990
7. Mobile phones-2000

However, the roles the mass media play in the society have remained the bases for their existence, relevance and popularity. As the society moved from smaller settlements to mega cities where the audiences are heterogeneous, scattered and diversified there was the need for a means and process of wider search. The establishment of the mass media became an imperative in the bid to achieve wide communication with people of diversity and orientation who now occupy our towns

and cities. The functions and roles of the mass media include both the generally accepted, widely recognized and not too widely recognized ones. They include: information and education function, surveillance and agenda-setting function. Other functions of the media include correlation function, entertainment function, integration function, advertising function, gate-keeping, status conferral function among others.

The Newspaper and News Coverage

The word "newspaper" has become a household name to everyone in the society and world over. This is because of its importance as a news organ or channel. There is no doubt that the word newspaper is derived from its function as the paper which carries assorted kinds of information on events which the audience can rely upon and use as a reference point in future occurrences.

Conceptually, a newspaper can be defined as an unbound printed publication issued often at regular intervals which presents information in words often supplemented with pictures (Alozie 2011). Newspapers carry information on a broad spectrum of issues which includes news, advertisements, health, the economy, enquiries and letters from readers or members of the audiences. Newspapers also carry information on science and technology, ICTs, politics, education, fashion, gender issues, tradition, agriculture among others.

Sambe (2008) citing Coker (1968) describes newspaper as any paper printed in order to be dispensed and made public, weekly, often, at interval or principally advertised for the public. Newspaper belongs to the class of the print media which provide a variety of news and more details than radio and television. They fit into consumer's schedule more easily than the broadcast media because the reader can select what he wants to read and read it at his leisure hour or keep the paper for future references. The importance of the newspaper can be seen from its role as leading mass information. The newspaper has been playing this role from its inception and has done it more than any other form of the print media (Okunna 2002). Just as the name suggests "news" and "paper", the newspaper is primarily a medium for disseminating news. It brings recent information to its audience and provides them with happenings around them. It also interprets events for the audience so they can be informed on national decisions. In the early days, newspapers were the only medium that the masses depended on for daily news. Apart from this, the newspaper also carries topics which are lighter in mood like cartoons, puzzle, Sudoku, movie reviews and book reviews. These capture the interest and imagination of readers from all age groups.

Alozie (2011, p. 22) outlined some of the functions of the newspaper in the society to include:

1. Reporting news of social and cultural relevance to particular groups or audience.
2. Conducting research on past significant political and social events.
3. Reporting on current political and social development.

4. Acting as a market place for public opinion by providing forum or platform for various viewpoints in the society educating by going beyond the basic fact to in-depth analysis in opinion piece, feature stories, columns and editorials.

Newspapers function as a unique and vital force in the daily lives of people. They provide facts and analysis that allow citizens to make effective and responsible decisions not only in coping complexities of modern living but also in protecting the rights and liberties of a free society (Rankin 2006).

However, coverage is a process which involves collecting facts and checking them carefully for accuracy. The duty of journalism is all about coverage or reportage. Every journalist walk about events, occasions and happenings with his pen, paper and other electronic gadgets looking out for events to report or cover, aiming to satisfy his audience waiting patiently to have firsthand information of such events. In carrying out this duty effectively and satisfactorily, the journalist should be able to answer the five Ws and H as noted by Udoh (2014). The information journalist gathers should answer questions of who, what, where, when, why and How. Coverage therefore involves a careful, intelligent and often meticulous process of taking account of events that are newsworthy and that would interest the audience of a medium.

Nwabueze (2011) stresses that coverage is the process of giving account of news or events through a medium to an audience. It consist of gathering facts about an event, occasion or people through careful observation, reasoning and verification and organizing them into a news story with a view to giving mass media audience a good idea of what happened. A reporter may decide to put his covered news into any of the genre of journalistic writing which includes editorial, feature. straight news, cartoon or opinion stories. According to Bender, Fedler and Drager (2009), news writers have a challenging task. They must convey information, often complex information to their readers and viewers. The main duty of a reporter is to go to events and cover proceedings then interpret it in a language that is universal (simple language) for his audience to read. They have to tell a story by providing facts in a clear and concise manner using simple language. Simplicity of language matters because news writers are trying to reach readers whose capabilities and interest vary greatly

As Bender et al (2009) noted categorically that simplicity in language is of essence. They also tried to bring to the fore the different types of audience a reporter encounter. "Some may have a high school diploma, whereas other may have a doctorate degree. World events may fascinate some others may prefer to learn about the World of entertainment and celebrities". Therefore to communicate effectively to a mass audience news writers must learn to present information in a way that will allow almost everyone to read and understand it.

Information and Communication Technology and its Application

Global advancement in ICT have been traced to fundamental changes in the production and utilization of information in the twilight of the century, popularly referred to as “information Revolution”. The success in this direction was given impetus by Marshall McLuhan hypothesis of a “Global Village”. Generally speaking, information technology is understood to be the global system of information management which enables access, processing, storage and retrieval of information disseminated through telecommunications and computing media (Iwokwagh and Okechukwu, 2012).

Information and communication technology is an umbrella term that includes any communication device such as radio, television, cellular phones. Computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning (Nwanyanwu and Okechukwu, 2012). According to Chile and Ende (2007) cited in Nwanyanwu et al (2012, p. 446) notes that ‘an unending series of technological advances have transformed the mass media landscape through the extensive use of computers and satellites, multiplexing and fiber optics, digitalization and data compression’. They cannot only gather, process and disseminate information; they can also arrange marshal and select information rapidly. Inequality and disparity in information flow between the developing and developed nations are basically as a result of media technique occasioned by information and communication technology. It is therefore imperative for developing nations especially Nigeria, to rise to the challenge so as to bridge the gap.

Information and communication technology therefore refers to huge advances in technology that have revolutionalized communication, making access to people quicker and easier, with minimal or no error and hindrances. There is a radical change of the old ways of doing things. For instance, the old information system which was characterized by slow analogue technology has been substituted with the new digital technology. (Omego, 2014) Typewriters have been replaced with computers, analogue telephones and cameras have been replaced with digital technology and the postal system has been substitute with electronic mail. People from different parts of the world can share views or ideas through the internet and through video-conferencing or teleconferencing. Through video-conferencing participants can see and hear themselves and the picture of the participant can be sent electronically to appear on a screen in another location. This method of communication can be used to conduct interviews for jobs, hold management meetings or even be used for distant learning. This facility according to Ononogbo (1998) cited in Omego (2014), has minimized conference travels, cost and risks.

Furthermore, innovations in information and communication technology are believed to encourage development, there is no doubt that the Nigerian environments (economic, social or political) have in one way or the other been influenced by the resources of ICTs. Some of the consequences are positive, while some are negative. Aziegbe (2005 p: 84) says that of all the technical changes that

have influenced our lives in recent years, it is those in information technology which have had the greatest impact. This will continue to be, at least until the end of the first half of the next century when other major technological breakthroughs in the areas of new materials, biotechnology or energy may force entirely new ways of living on mankind.

Influence of Newspaper Ownership and Staffing on ICT Coverage

The effect of ownership on the content of newspaper has attracted a great amount of attention in the communication research over the years. Mass media ownership and its effects on different aspects of mass media performance had been the subject of many studies. Ownership structure, as one of the factors on the organizational level, affects the content of mass media messages. Research usually indicates three basic types of mass media Ownership: Government owned (federal or state), privately or individual owned, and chain ownership (Kanyiwedo, 2013). Government-owned media outlets is usually seen as a means of political propaganda by the government. The government is in charge of the funding of the media organization or has a greater control of the shares. Thus, the editorial content of such media are being influenced by the government. The effect is that government in one way or the other determines what may or may not be published. While privately owned media are seen as pursuing interests that are determined by desire to make profit, although it is not always the case. The fact that media are (partly) owned by government does not mean that channels and content are totally controlled by government. Usually, if not subsidized, these channels have to make profit, which means independence to certain extent from government ideological interests, while chain ownership is owned by group of persons or individuals.

However, most staff or personnel of newspaper media outlets are being employed by their owners whether public or private owned. The owners may want to dictate to the managers or staff what to report, the manager who wants to retain his job has to work with the dictates of the owner. Those who do not work with the dictates of the owner are often relieved of their appointment (Asemah 2011). Yarosun and Asemah (2008) note that publicly owned and government controlled media tend to be more authoritarian and more “exposed” to selfcensorship than privately owned media. They carry more news favourable to the government. They avoid direct criticism of government actions. The manager cannot work against his employer. The internal pressure from the owner of a media house where the manager works can compel him to publish a story to favour his boss cannot work against his employer.

Moreso, personnel or staff that do not have any knowledge of specialized reporting cannot cover beat on ICT. This however, will also influence the contents of media reports. Reporting ICT issues should be of great interest to the media because of its importance in the society. Unfortunately, there is a widely held view that it is hardly the case because most journalists and the media do not possess the knowledge and sustain interest to report ICT to the publics (Kennedy and Overholder, 2010).

Review of Related Studies

Herbert, B., Ita, E. and Nevelyn, U. (2014). Techno-Scientific Temper of three Nigerian Newspapers. *Journal of Developing Countries Studies*, 4(26).pp.57-63.

This study was carried out to examine the character and extent of science and technology coverage in three select Nigerian newspapers. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the frequency of coverage of science and technology issues, the news orientation of the reports, genre or formats of reporting, the sourcing of information and depth of reportage. The discourse is hinged on the agenda setting theory while the research method is a content analysis of 156 issues of The Guardian, Leadership, and Daily Trust newspapers for the year 2012. The relevance of content analysis was to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of texts and the statistics are used to make broader inferences about the politics of representation.

The findings show that of the 329 techno-science stories captured in the study, biomedicine was the most frequently reported topic at 26.44%; routine reporting (65.96%) exceeded event-specific reporting (34.04%); the news format (54.71%) was the more common genre of reportage; foreign sourced stories (54.10%) outnumbered locally sourced reports (45.90%) and in terms of depth, 42.25% of the stories were briefs. The study recommends that for the analyzed newspapers to set meaningful agenda on techno-science in Nigeria, they need to broaden their scope of coverage beyond biomedicine' and the news format of presentation; deepen the discourse/content of techno-science information by becoming more deliberative; consolidate on routine science coverage as well as pay more attention to local sourcing of science and technology information.

This study is related to this work in the sense that ICT is an aspect of science and technology and the methodology used for the work was content analysis which is also the method used for this work.

Herbert, B., Clifford A. and Charles O. (2014). Science, Nano-Science and Nano Technology Content in Nigerian's Elite and Popular Press; Focus on Framing and Socio-Political Involvement. *New Media and Mass Communication Journal*, (31).pp.9-17.

This research sought to investigate the extent to which science and nano-science are framed in one elite (The Guardian) and two popular newspapers (Daily Trust and Leadership); and if there is a significant difference in framing as there appears to be a gross paucity of research data on press framing of science in Nigeria. Moreover, the researchers do not know how the print media frame nano-science and nano-technology which tend to hold some promise for Third World development. Neither do they know the extent of social inclusion nor the depth of political engagement in the communication of science and technology in the Nigerian press. It adopted the content analysis research technique involving a selection of newspapers between January 1 and December 31, 2012: the year Nigeria revised its Science and Technology Policy.

Results indicate that: there is a near absence of nano-science content in the analyzed papers while the coverage of other science issues abounds. Where it occurs at all, nano-science is framed as an emerging field. Frames dealing with risk/controversy, socio-economic implications, or safety/ethics rarely occur. Health/medicine, ICT, biotechnology, and high-tech issues are covered more than other science issues. Political actors lay people, NGOs, corporations and community leaders are not significantly included in the coverage. This study is related to this work because both research works have implications for journalism practice and development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on the Agenda setting theory and Gate-keeping theory.

Agenda setting theory.

This theory was proposed by Maxwel McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972. Agenda setting is the process of reflecting the events in our society. The major assumption of the theory according to Asemah (2011) is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we read, listen or watch in mass media. The media make us to think about issues, they make us to think or feel certain issues are more important than others in our society.

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) observe that the theory on agenda setting by the media proposes that the public agenda or what kinds of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicize. The forgoing implies that the media “play drums and when they play their drums” we begin to dance to the tune of their music. It is however worthy to note that the issues raised by the media change from time to time and it is because the society is dynamic.

The elements involved in Agenda setting theory according to Folarin (1998) cited in Asemah (2011) include:

- i. The quantity or frequency of reporting.
- ii. The prominence given to the reports through headlines, display, pictures and layout in newspaper, magazine, films, graphics or timing on radio and television.
- iii. The degree of conflict generated in the reports and
- iv. Cumulative media specific effects over time

The theory is related to this work in the sense that if the newspaper sets agenda on ICT issues, the public will get to read about them.

Gate-keeping Theory

The gate-keeping theory was propounded in 1947 by Kurt Lewin. It is the process by which information is filtered by the media. According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009), gate-keeping is the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day, and it

is the center of the media's role in modern public life. This process determines not only which information is selected, but also what the content and nature of the messages will be. Gate-keeping occurs at all levels of the media structure from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed or covered. It has the following as its assumptions/principles as presented by Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008):

1. Media organizations as well as key media professional act as gates to the flow of information coming in from the larger society.
2. The gate can either be opened to let some kinds of information through for processing and publication, or shut to deny other kinds of information the opportunity for processing and publication.
3. Gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or by gatekeepers, with the power to make decisions or to transfer, but that the "power is interdependent on other channel regions and ranges of impartial rules". Anaeto et al (2008) say that the theory deals with the process and factors which influence the decisions of media organizations to select or reject potential newsworthy items for publication.

This theory is relevant to this work because the media have the ability to open or close gates to issues they want the public to know about. In other words the media can decide to open gates on issues related to ICT so that the public will be aware of it.

Research Methodology

The content analysis method was used for this work. Content analysis method aids researchers to search for documented records. Ofor (2003), states that 'it dwells on manifest content of communication'. In other words, what is to be content analyzed is only what is visible to the eye. Babbie (2001, p. 204) further states that content analysis is particularly well-suited to the study of communication and to answering the classic question of communication research: "who says what, to whom, why, how and with what effect" This method therefore allows the researcher to base his results of the research-objectives on the newspapers report pertaining to ICT issues.

The local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State formed the population of this study. A total of 168 editions of three newspapers: The Pioneer, The Ink and The Nigerian Pulse Newspapers published within a period of six months (January- June 2016) were drawn purposively for the study. The reason for selecting these newspapers is that they were easily accessed by the researcher and can also be easily accessed through internet and outlets. They can easily be found in government offices and private organizations. They have wide audience readership and have identifiable operational offices.

The population consisted of 168 editions of the three newspapers 72 copies of the Pioneer, 48 copies of the Ink and 48 copies of the Nigerian Pulse from January to June 2016 excluding the weekend editions. The study undertook a census sampling of the population. The Pioneer newspaper publishes three times weekly on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; The Ink newspaper publishes twice on

Tuesdays and Thursdays while The Nigerian Pulse newspaper comes out on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Content Categories

Researchers usually create categories as pigeonholes in order to assign units. Categorization of the units into sublets, according to Folarin (1998) helps to expunge ambiguity and facilitate easy measurability of content categories. For this study, stories in the selected publications were categorized as follows:

- i. Multimedia
- ii. Mobile Services
- iii. Satellite Communication
- iv. Computer Services
- v. Internet Services
- vi. Computer Gadgets
- vii. E-banking and Transactions
- viii. Telecommunication industries and Providers
- ix. Social Networking
- x. Government activities on ICT

Units of Analysis

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p.164), “unit as a thing that is actually counted and the smallest element of a content analysis.” The unit of analysis is therefore of crucial importance in content analysis. This element, component, unit or item according to Akpan (1990) could be a word or symbol, the theme, sentence or paragraph of the item. To this end, the units of analysis for this study for format of reporting issues are: News stories, Features, Columns, Opinions/Views and Editorials.

The units of analysis for depth of coverage in this study are: Full page, Quarter page, Half page and Briefs. Full page means when a particular story or issue in a newspaper runs across the entire page of a newspaper which indicates there is enough depth. Half page indicates that the story is not of much importance therefore did not cover the entire space of a newspaper. Quarter page is the smallest part in a newspaper with small write up while Briefs is a short news story or report usually written without much interpretation or pictures.

Furthermore, the units of analysis for prominence of issues in this study are: Front page, Inside Page and Back Page. Stories written in Front page and Back page signifies that the issue or report is of great importance, stories written in inside pages indicate that the report is not of great importance.

Intercoder Reliability

In order to ensure accuracy in the coding system, two coders were used to code the stories into the coding sheet. A total of 177 ICT issues were found out of which the two coders agreed on 175 contents and disagreed on two (2). Hoisti’s formula as cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2003) was used to calculate the intercoder reliability test. The formula is as follows:

$$C.R = \frac{2M}{N1+N2}$$

Where M = the number of issues agreed upon

N1 = the number of issues for coder 1

N2 = the number of issues for coder 2

C.R = coefficient of reliability

The researcher therefore calculated the value for reliability

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2(175)}{175+177}$$

$$C.R = \frac{350}{352}$$

$$R = 0.9943181818$$

Method of Data Collection/Analysis

Data were collected through the examination of the content of three newspapers- The Pioneer, The Ink and The Nigerian Pulse which form the population of this study based on the subject matter.

The data collected from the newspaper analysis were calculated using simple percentages and frequency count. The analysis and presentation of data were done using tables indicating items in frequencies and percentage scores.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section explains how the data collected for this study are presented, analyzed and discussed. To ensure clarity of the collected data, this section presents them in tables showing the frequency and percentage of coverage, interprets the data as presented in the tables and discusses findings of the study. A total of 168 editions of three newspapers were content analyzed and also counted under these units of analysis- news, features, editorials, opinions/views, columns and briefs. The amount of ICT reports were calculated against the overall 11,555 reports in the 168 editions in tabular forms. Tables were also constructed to show the monthly frequency reports, front page prominence, the format of presentation of ICT stories, the depth of reportage and the category of ICT with greater coverage.

The data presented here and the ensuing discussions are in tandem with the objectives and research questions formulated earlier in the study.

Table 1: Extent of coverage given to ICT issues as against the overall reports in the three newspapers

Newspapers	ICT Stories	Overall Stories	Percentage
The Pioneer	98	11,555	0.84%
TheInk	37	11,555	0.32%
The Nigerian Pulse	40	11,555	0.34%
Total	175	11,555	1.5%

Table 1 shows the number of ICT stories against the overall items in the three newspapers. The study calculated the total number of reports in the three newspapers which amounted to 11,555 reports. Also, the total number of ICT stories published by the three newspapers amounted to 175 being 1.5% of the overall stories in the three newspapers.

Table 2: Depth of Coverage of ICT Issues

Depth of Reports	Newspapers						Total	
	The Pioneer		The Ink		The Nigerian Pulse			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Full page	2	2.04	10	27.03	12	30	24	13.71
Quarter Page	22	22.45	5	13.51	8	20	35	20
Half Page	20	20.41	22	59.46	20	50	62	35.43
Briefs	54	55.10	0	0	0	0	54	30.86
Total	98		100		37	100	175	100

Data in Table 2 show that stories were evaluated on the basis of full page, half page, quarter page, and brief reports for the three newspapers. It can be seen that full page was given little attention which amounted to 13.71%, while quarter page was only 20%. ICT stories in the three newspapers were half pages amounting to 35.43%. Only the Pioneer newspapers reports ICT stories on briefs which amounted to 30.86%.

Table 3: Monthly ICT Reports

Months	January		February		March		April		May		June		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Pioneer	21	21.4	15	15.3	8	8.20	21	21.4	18	18.4	15	15.3	98	100
Ink	5	13.5	6	16.2	25	25.4	7	19	5	13.5	12	32.4	37	100
Nigerian Pulse	3	7.5	6	15	7	17.5	5	12.5	8	20	11	27.5	40	100
Total	29		27		17		33		31		38		175	100

Table 3 shows the monthly ICT reports as published by each of the three newspapers. The table starts from the month of January- June 2016. In January the three newspapers covered ICT issues in an average of (16.5%) in February (15.4%), march (9.7%), April (18.9%), May (17.7%) June (21.7%).

Table 4: Prominence Given to ICT Issues

Prominence of Reports	Newspapers						Total	
	The Pioneer		The Ink		The Nigerian Pulse			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Front Page	3	3.06	1	2.70	1	2.5	5	2.9
Inside Page	94	95.92	36	97.3	39	97.5	169	96.57
Back Page	1	1.02	0	0	0	0	1	0.57
Total	98		100		37	100	175	100

Table 4 shows that the Pioneer published three (3) stories on its front page which represent (1.71%) of the total 175 reports published by the three newspapers on ICT issues in the 168 editions used for this study. The Ink and Nigerian Pulse have one ICT reports on their front pages representing (2.70% & 2.5%) respectively for the two newspapers. This indicates that the three newspapers did not give show prominence to ICT issues in their reportage.

Table 5: Format of Presenting ICT Report

Format of Reports	Newspapers				Total
	The Pioneer	The Ink	The Nigerian Pulse		
	n %	n %	n %	%	
News	82 83.7	7 19	5	12.5	94 53.7
Features	16 16.3	10 27	5 12.5	31 17.7	
Columns	0 0	14 38	20 50	34 19.4	
Opinion/View Point	0 0	6 16	10 25	16 9.1	
Editorials	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	
Total	98 100	37 100	40 100	175 100	

Table 5 indicates that the three newspapers presented ICT stories through the news format at the rate of about (53.7%) whereas the feature format scored (17.7%) The data also show that the Ink and Nigerian Pulse newspapers mainly had their ICT stories as columns and opinions, which amounted to (38% & 16%) and (50% & 25%) respectively.

Table 6: Category of ICT with Greater Coverage

Categories of Reports	Newspapers				Total
	The Pioneer	The Ink	The Nigerian Pulse		
	n %	n %	n %	%	
Multimedia	4 4.10	0	0	1 2.5	5 3
Mobile Services	9 9.2	1 2.70	5	2 5	12 6.9
Satellite Communication	10 10.2	1 2.70	2 5	2 5	13 7.4
Computer Services	6 6.1	8 21.62	8 20	20 12.5	22 12.5
Internet Services	9 9.2	4 10.81	4 10	10 5	17 9.7

Computer Gadgets	8 8.2	1 2.70	2 5	11 6.3
E-banking and Transactions	12 12.2	2 5.41	1 2.5	15 8.6
Telecommunication Industries and providers	16 16.3	2 5.41	2 5	20 11.4
Social Networking	15 15.3	4 10.81	4	10 23 13.1
Government activities on ICT	9 9.2	14 37.84	14 35	37 21.1
Total	98 100	37 100	40 100	175 100

Table 6 gives a clear indication of the categories of ICT covered by the three newspapers. Overall, the most frequently covered field bordered on government activities which include call on government to harness resources towards ICT which was at (21.1%). This was followed by social networking which is gathering momentum in recent times at (13.1%), telecommunication industries and providers which involve all the telecommunication networks corporations and regulations at (11.4%). The lowest frequency of coverage was Multimedia which was at (2.9%).

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings was done in response to the research questions. The questions were treated in the order in which they appeared and all the data presented form the basis for discussion.

Research Question One: What is the extent and depth of coverage given to ICT issues by the Ink, Pioneer and Nigerian Pulse Newspapers?

Table 1 and 2 shows the extent and depth of coverage given to ICT issues Table 1 shows that a total of 175 ICT stories were published out of which The Pioneer had 98 stories, representing (56%), The Ink published 37 stories, representing (21.1%) of the total ICT stories while The Nigerian Pulse published 40 stories representing (22.8%). This therefore means that ICT reports in the three newspapers could not measure up with the overall reports in the three newspapers for the period of six (6) months. This finding supports Russell's (2012) assertion that nowadays, there are smaller news holes and air time devoted to science and technology issues especially by smaller news media. Based on the amount of ICT coverage, it is obvious that it was very poor when compared to the overall reports by the newspapers, thereby placing responsibilities on reporters and journalists in Akwa Ibom State to consider ICT beat in their reportage.

Table 2 show that stories were evaluated on the basis of full page, half page, quarter page, and brief reports for the three newspapers in order to ascertain the depth of coverage given to ICT issues by the three newspapers. It can be seen that 35.43% of ICT stories in the three newspapers were half pages. It is worthy to note that the Pioneer newspaper has the highest number of brief report and it's the only

newspaper out of the three that reports briefs which amounted to 30.86%. Depth of coverage according to Batta et al (2014) does have consequences for agenda setting and framing of issues in the press. The quantum of space or airtime allotted an issue, where, and how often it is placed allows the public to gauge its relevance, salience, prominence, significance and importance. They further concluded that more frequent full page, half page or quarter page stories would conduce to better, deeper, fuller, and more significant coverage of techno-science.

Research Question Two: What is the monthly frequency of reports on ICT issues as published by the Ink, Pioneer and Nigerian Pulse Newspapers?

Table 3 indicates the monthly breakdown of ICT reports as published by the three newspapers. The table starts from the month of January to June 2016. A total of 56% reports on ICT were published by The Pioneer for the period of six months under review. The Ink published 21.1% of ICT issues for the six months while The Nigerian Pulse published 22.8% of ICT issues for the period of six months under review. The implication of this finding is that newspapers in Akwa Ibom State did not cover ICT issues frequently. The low rate of monthly reports can be as a result of newspapers in Akwa Ibom State waiting for issues of ICT to occur before they report them to the public. This finding corroborates Dutta and Batta (2013) that the coverage of science and technology like other topics is more incidental than routine. Normally, it is not supposed to be so. They should rather take proactive steps in evaluating these issues and report same to the public.

Research Question Three: What prominence do the Ink, Pioneer and Nigerian Pulse Newspaper accord to ICT issues?

Answers to research question three are found in Table 4. The table shows that ICT reports placed on the front pages of the three newspapers represented 2.85% of all the ICT reports published. The Pioneer newspaper published a total of three reports on ICT issues. It was observed that The ink and Nigerian Pulse had no reports on their back pages and only one report was seen on the back page of the Pioneer newspaper. Most reports on ICT were published on the middle pages of the three newspapers under review representing a total of 96.5% of the total ICT reports by the three newspapers. This implies that newspapers in Akwa Ibom State did not give due prominence to ICT issues on their front pages, which is contrary to the assertion of Baran and Davis (2006) that there is an important relationship between media reports and peoples ranking of public issues. The rate at which the media cover a story and the extent that people think about that story is to a great degree determined by the prominence accorded to such report. From these findings, it can therefore be concluded that Akwa Ibom State newspapers did not sufficiently give people what to think about concerning ICT issues as agenda setting theory posits.

Research Question Four: What is the format of presenting ICT issues by the Ink, Pioneer and Nigerian Pulse Newspaper?

Table 5 indicates the format used in reporting ICT issues by the three newspapers. The results of the finding show that The Pioneer reported ICT issues only on news

and feature formats which was 83.6% and 16.3% respectively, the Ink reported more of ICT issues on column and feature formats which was put at 37.8% and 27% respectively while the Nigerian Pulse reported ICT issues mainly on column and opinion formats at rate of 50% and 25% respectively. The three newspapers did not report ICT issues on editorial format. The significance of this finding is that the Pioneer newspaper tended to give more information (news) than discussion, deliberation, analysis (features, opinions columns, among others). This indeed has implications for depth. While the Ink and Nigerian Pulse reports were based on column and opinion formats which tallied with what Tejumaiye (2009) posits that newspapers provide contents capable of shaping peoples opinion and feelings on issues in the society. This result also supports the view of Rankin (2006) that newspapers function as a unique and vital force in the daily lives of people. They provide facts and analysis that allow decision not only in complying with the complexities of modern living, but in protecting the rights and liberties of a free society.

Research Question Five: Which category of ICT issues receives greater coverage in the Ink, Pioneer and Nigerian Pulse Newspaper?

From the computations on Table 6, the most frequently covered field centred on government activities which include call on government to harness resources towards ICT which was at (21.1%). This was followed by social networking which is gathering momentum in recent times at (13.1%), telecommunication industries and providers which involve all the telecommunication networks corporations and regulations put at (11.4%). The lowest frequency of coverage was Multimedia which was (2.9%). Looking at the individual newspapers the data show that The Pioneer did not accord much attention to government activities on ICT (9.2%) based on their format of presenting ICT issues as news when in reality notmuch governmental activities were done on ICT. The other newspapers which had more data on governmental activities put at 37.8% and 35% present ICT issues as columns and opinions which involve more analysis. The import of these findings is that the three analyzed newspapers did not spread their reportorial attention to all areas of ICT, but only gave prominence to government activities on ICT. Other important areas of ICT issues were neglected especially multimedia, mobile services, satellite communication and computer gadgets.

The foregoing makes it obvious that the category of ICT that received greater coverage in newspapers in Akwa Ibom State was based on reporters point of view while other main areas like multimedia, mobile services, computer gadgets and satellite communication were neglected. This finding contrasts with what Stefan, Nikolaus and Oliver (2012) assertion that ICT journalists define their role in terms of disseminating innovations, guiding their readers and explaining complicated matters.

Conclusion

Based on the result findings, it can be concluded that local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State did not give adequate attention to ICT issues as much as expected of them. A total of 175 ICT stories were published out of 11,555 stories published by the three newspapers for the period of six months under study representing only (1.5%). In spite of the low reports of ICT issues the depth of coverage was low as most ICT stories were written in briefs and half pages. Also ICT stories were not given front page prominence which is the first page any reader sees in the newspaper. Other issues like politics, sports, business, fashion, health and other interesting issues were reported more than ICT issues. This could be attributed to commercialism, sensationalism and negativity which applies to newspaper media in Akwa Ibom State.

The inability of newspaper reporters in Akwa Ibom state to report ICT issues can be construed to mean the inability of the reporters to understand ICT issues as well as newspapers little investment in improving the capacity of journalists on ICT issues.

Recommendations

Information and communication technology is relevant to the society and cannot be overemphasized. From the study it has become imperative to draw the attention of the media to their agenda setting role and gatekeeping function. They should realize the importance of ICT to the society and therefore the following recommendations are made:

1. Media organisations should improve upon the extent of coverage given to ICT issues so that the public can have a better understanding of these issues.
2. Given the relevance of ICT in modern society, it is incumbent to give more prominence to ICT issues by placing the stories at the front page of the newspaper for emphasis so that the readers should take them seriously.
3. Media organisations should be proactive towards reporting ICT issues by investigating new products and innovations that needs public understanding and clarification.
4. Media professionals should be trained on ICT issues and beats so that such interest can be awakened.

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