

## **NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF SMALL SCALE ENTREPRISES IN AKWA IBOM STATE: A STUDY OF THE PIONEER, THE MAIL AND GLOBAL CONCORD**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined the newspaper coverage of small scale enterprises in Akwa Ibom State. The study sought to answer the following research questions: what is the frequency of coverage given to small scale businesses in select local newspapers in Uyo? What is the level of prominence given to Small Scale businesses in select local newspapers in Uyo? How are Small Scale businesses issues framed in the select local newspapers in Uyo? What are the major forms of small scale businesses reporting in the select local newspapers in Uyo? What is the amount of space given to Small Scale Businesses in the select local newspapers in Uyo? Employing a Content Analysis research method, with clearly defined content categories, the study had a population of 120 newspaper editions and this also was the sample size (120 copies of the newspapers) given that the entire population of the study was considered adequate enough. The finding of the study revealed as follows that most stories on small scale businesses appeared on 4-6 times monthly in the studied newspapers with a total of 45 items. while the 7 times and above monthly category has least coverage with 7 items. Small Business enterprises are under reported by the all the editions of the three newspapers. Local newspapers in Uyo: The Pioneer, The Mail and The Global Concord, did not give prominence to the coverage of small scale businesses in Uyo at all. The study recommended that the press should pay greater attention to the positive activities of the informal sector by way of greater coverage. Moreover, such coverage should be made more prominent than is currently the case.

**KEYWORDS:** Newspaper, Coverage, Media, Small Scale Enterprises, Communication.

## INTRODUCTION

All over the world, the small and medium sector of the economy is often referred to as drivers of the informal economy and the engine that pushes the informal sector. The reason is that these small businesses are often found in location and areas that are devoid of the big establishments and multinational sectors. As small businesses, they are usually constrained by many forces like adequate capital, manpower development, absence of grants, unfavourable government policies and even strategic plans for development. Aigboduwa and Oisamoje (2016) asserts that this sub-sector of the economy is globally acknowledged to contribute substantially in enhancing employment creation, poverty alleviation, equitable distribution of resources, income redistribution, technical and technological innovation, entrepreneurial skills development, more uniform industrial and economic dispersal and general improvement in the living standard of the populace within an economic region. Also Ayyagari, Beck and Demirci-Kunt (2017) in acknowledging the role of Small and medium scale enterprises as an instrument of economic growth and development point out that their strategic importance led to the growing recognition and commitment of World Bank group on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector as a core element in its strategy to foster economic growth, employment and poverty alleviation.

As a growing state capital in the oil rich south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria, Uyo has a lot of potentials for business growth in general and in small business in particular. Because of the influx of people into this area, propelled by oil exploration and exploitation, there is high demand for various human needs. These varieties of human needs also generate various business avenues, big and small. The range of small businesses which is almost limitless include: motor vehicle repairs, carpentry, eatery and restaurant business, drinking parlours, hair dressing and barbing saloons, retail and wholesale trading, business centres, computer sales, repair and maintenance, beer distribution, wholesale and retail among others.

Local newspaper coverage of SMEs could be particularly useful, as it would provide an additional source of information to the public and could help to create a dialogue between the public, the SMEs, and the government. This would help to ensure that SMEs are given the resources they need to succeed, while also allowing the public to better understand their needs and the importance of supporting them. This would also create a more level playing field for SMEs, as they would have the same access to publicity and information as larger corporations. It could help to promote a more competitive business environment, which would benefit both SMEs and the public.

This study takes a critical look on the coverage of this critical sector by local tabloid in Uyo with a view to analyze the types of stories that are

covered and the impact of the media on public perception of Small and Medium Enterprises. The study will also explore how the media can be used as a platform for highlighting the successes and achievements of SMEs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The role of small and medium enterprises in the economic and social development of the country is well established. The sector is a nursery of entrepreneurship, often driven by individual creativity and innovation. In recognition of the depth and breadth of the consequences of small scale enterprises in alleviating poverty and national development, there has been a deep self interest in recent years for the development of Nigeria's small-scale enterprises particularly since the adoption of the economic reform in 1986. The small and medium scale industry is seen as a key to Nigeria's growth, poverty alleviation, foreign exchange conservation. In Nigeria almost two-third of its citizen are living below the poverty line; about half are unemployed, and overall GNP per capital falls below the average for sub-Saharan Africa. World Bank, (2002)

But more importantly is the inability of both government and other international organisation unwillingness to develop the SME in our country. In Nigeria, SMEs account for fifty percent to sixty five percent employment on average and also fifty percent of its industrial output. SMEs represent about ninety percent of the industrial sector in terms of number of enterprises or firms, and however they contribute a meager one percent of GDP. Newspapers through selective presentation and emphasis set both political and social agenda for audience members. Therefore, there is a literature gap to establish how Akwa Ibom newspapers frame SMEs issues. Thus, it becomes pertinent to determine the level of prominence given to SMEs in Nigerian newspapers, how Nigerian newspapers frame SMEs and whether the space given to SMEs issues in Nigerian newspapers is significant enough to create the needed awareness. Therefore, the problem that motivated this study is the coverage of SMEs in Nigerian newspaper.

The Akwa Ibom media landscape boasts of a high number of newspaper titles. At the last count, the state has well over 100 newspapers. Given this present scenario the question that occupies the attention of the researcher is: To what extent have local newspapers covered small and medium enterprises in Akwa Ibom State? Has the coverage been able to give the necessary drive to that sector of the economy as an engine for growth?

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is the frequency of coverage given to Small Scale businesses in select local newspapers in Uyo?

2. What is the level of prominence given to Small Scale businesses in select local newspapers in Uyo ?
3. How are Small Scale businesses issues framed in the select local newspapers in Uyo.?
4. What are the major forms of small scale businesses reporting in the select local newspapers in Uyo ?.
5. What is the amount of space given to Small Scale Businesses in the select local newspapers in Uyo.?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **SMALL SCALE BUSINESSES**

There is no unified definition of SMEs as the definitions, rather depend on the nature of industrial capacity or level of development of the country, level of development of the country and this varies overtime. The difference amongst industries could be ascribed to different capital requirements of each business. However, the basic definitional parameters remain the same. The definition in Germany limits Small and Medium Scale Enterprises to two hundred and fifty (250) employees, while in Belgium it is limited to one hundred (100) employees.

Oduntan (2014) defines SMEs as any enterprises with a maximum asset base of N200 million excluding land and working capital and with a number of staff employed not less than 10 or more than 300. Ahmed (2009) sees Small and Medium Scale Enterprises as sub-sectors of the industrial sector which play crucial roles in industrial development. Lawal&Ijaiya (2007) opine that SMEs have often been defined in terms of quantitative or qualitative variables or characteristics. The quantitative indicators include the number of employees, sales, and capital employed, while examples of the qualitative indicators are legal status, ownership structure, factor intensity and technology.

For instance, the United States, Small Business Administration (SBA), Act 1958, as states that "a small business concern shall be deemed to be one which is independently owned and operated and which is not dominant in its field of operation". In addition, for the purposes of making loans, the SBA defines a small business as one that meets the following standards: (a) Wholesale: Annual sales from U\$5 Million to U\$15million depending on the industry. (b) Retail or service: Annual sales or receipts from U\$1million to U\$5million depending on the industry. (c) Construction: Annual sales or receipts of not more than US\$5million average on a three year period. (d) Manufacturing: from 250 to 1500 employees depending on the industry. (USDA 2020)

Kirby (2017) on the other hand, the United States Committee for Economic Development (CED), offers a slightly different concept for

defining small business, by advancing qualitative rather than quantitative criteria that distinguish small firms from large ones.

In Nigeria, a number of studies had been carried out in the past with a view to defining the small scale business and establish its basic characteristics. On the whole, there appear to be no universally accepted definition or characteristics of a small scale business. However, considering the multiplicity of definitions on the subject and the need to adapt to our local circumstances, this paper shall adopt the characteristics of a small business as identified by the report of the National Advisory Committee on small scale Industries Development as follows: The manager/proprietor handles or supervises the financing, production, marketing and personnel of the enterprise. The manager/proprietor does not raise short or long-term capital needs of his business from the organized financial markets; instead, he relies heavily on personal savings or loans from friends, relations or money lenders. The entrepreneur confines his vision to the local community in which he carries on his business, ignoring wider and more distant markets. The enterprise is generally poorly equipped, as the small industrialist feels reluctant to accept outside help, owing to prejudice or fear that information about the enterprise might reach the tax authorities or a nearby competitor. The rate of business mortality is high probably because of strong mutual distrust which militates against formation of partnerships or limited liability companies. The level of education of the owner/proprietor is usually low with consequent low level of business management, technical skills and market information (Onuoha, 2013).

As observed by Onuoha (2013), there is the need to revise and review the definitions and characteristics of small business continually to reflect the level of indigenous technology and technical skills available in the country, the overall development/national objectives of the economy, the cultural and social values of the society and the active and sincere involvement of development agencies and the entrepreneurs themselves.

Evidence from the literature has revealed that there is no universal definition of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across all academic disciplines (Nguyen, 2001; Zindiye, 2008; Maseko & Manyani, 2011; Ekpo, 2015). This is as a result of the difficulty in obtaining a single definition that is capable of integrating all the dimensions of SMEs as well as defining the differences and peculiarities among diverse industrial sectors in different countries over time.

However, SMEs may be viewed in terms of their qualitative and quantitative characteristics. The qualitative definition attempts to identify the certain characteristics which are more peculiar to small businesses than large ones.

Ojo (2010) identifies the characteristics to include small scale operations, ease of entry into the economic activities and reliance on indigenous

resources. The quantitative definition on the other hand focuses more explicitly on quantitative characteristics such as number of employees, value of sales and/or value of assets. The quantitative characteristics of SMEs vary from industry to industry and from country to country (Fatoki, 2011). In Nigeria, the definition changes over time and depends, to a greater extent, on institutions and the level of development. Small enterprise on the other hand, are those total assets (excluding land and building) are worth five million naira and above but not exceeding forty-nine million naira, with a total workforce of 10 to 49 employees.

## **NEWSPAPER**

The main form of print media is the newspaper. A newspaper is a scheduled publication containing news of current events, informative articles, diverse features, editorials, and advertising. It usually is printed on relatively inexpensive, low-grade paper such as newsprint. By 2007, there were 6,580 daily newspapers in the world selling 395 million copies a day. The worldwide recession of 2008, combined with the rapid growth of web-based alternatives, caused a serious decline in advertising and circulation, as many papers closed or sharply reduced operations.

General Interest newspapers typically publish stories on local and national political events and personalities, crime, business, entertainment, society and sports. Most traditional papers also feature an editorial page containing editorials written by an editor and columns that express the personal opinions of writers. The newspaper is typically funded by paid subscriptions and advertising. The emergence of this new media branch in the 17th century has to be seen in close connection with the spread of the printing press from which the publishing press derives its name. The German-language Relation aller Fürnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien, printed from 1605 onwards by Johann Carolus in Strasbourg, is often recognized as the first newspaper.

## **SMALL SCALE BUSINESS AND THE ECONOMY**

When it comes to defining SMEs, it has become a somewhat controversial area among the policy makers and scholars especially in developing nations. Many reasons are responsible for this. According to (USAID, 2004; Akingunola, 2011), many people are confused as to when an organization is deemed to be small or medium because they are difficult to measure individually. Besides, available statistics on the number, size, geographical distribution and activities of the SMEs sub-sector are not too reliable. While corroborating the above view, Ekpeyong and Nyong (1992), Fatai (2011) argued that the definition of SMEs is controversial because classifying the businesses into small and large is subjective since different value judgments

are used and this, according to them, is the reason why its definition varies from country to country and from region to region. This definitional variability has also been observed within countries where definition changes over time. Perhaps, this is why Ayaggari *et al.* (2003) opined that the definition of SMEs varies according to context, author and country but notwithstanding the variation from place to place; the underlying concept remains the same.

According to Baenol (1994) cited in Muritala *et al.* (2012), SMEs can be defined using different statistical values such as total assets, staff strength, value of annual turnover and capital investment. In developed nations such as United States, Canada and Britain; small-scale industry is defined according to annual turnover and the number of paid employees. In Britain for example, Ekpeyong and Nyong (1992, p.4) defined small-scale enterprises as “that with an annual turnover of two million pounds or less with fewer than 200 paid employees”. This is different from Japan’s where small –scale industry is defined according to the type of industry, paid-up capital and number of employees. Small-scale industries are defined as “those in the manufacturing with 100 million yen paid-up capital and 300 employees”, “those in the wholesale trade with 30 million yen paid-up capital and 100 employees”, “those in retail trades with 10 million paid-up capital and 100 employees” “while those in service trades with 10million yen paid-up capital and 50 employees” (Ekpeyong & Nyong, 1992).

## REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Ezegwu and Abamba (2017) content analysed the coverage of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Select Nigerian Newspapers Three national dailies were selected for the study; *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. The criteria for choice of these newspapers were based on their wide circulation, readership and researchers’ discretion. The universe of study covered all issues of newspapers published in Nigeria from January 1, to April 31, 2018. The population was 360. This was arrived through January- 31 February- 28, March- 31 April – 30. Therefore  $120 \times 3 = 360$ . The findings in the study indicated clearly that the SMEs were not made prominent through the front and back page publications. This is why inside page stories had 60 (73%) stories on the SMEs, of the total publication (89). Noteworthy is the fact that newspaper reportage uses placement to accord prominence to any subject matter. Ironically, many readers usually exhibit impatience in the course of newspaper readership, hence the reasoning behind the placement of stories such that readers’ attention may be easily drawn to them.

Unfortunately the placement of the subject matter in the newspapers studied was not such that readers’ attention could easily be drawn to it. By

implication therefore, the newspapers did not accord prominence to SMEs in Nigeria within the period of study. The findings go against the stand point of framing theory. According to McQuail (2010), framing is used to explain how the mass media promote a particular definition of an issue through selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration. This finding also agrees with Ashong and Umoh (2013); Owolabi (2014) position that the informal sector receives less than adequate coverage by the Nigerian press.

Ashong and Umoh (2013) content analysed the coverage of the informal sector of the economy in South-South Nigeria by the Nigerian elite press (*The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Businessday*) for the period of one year. The study combined content analysis and survey method to investigate the nature of contribution made by the national press to the development of the informal sector in Nigeria. Findings showed that media coverage of informal sector was low. The scholars recommended measures that would better position the media to contribute more meaningfully to the development of the informal sector in Nigeria.

Owolabi (2014) in his study titled implications of the media coverage of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) for national development in Nigeria, adopted content analytical method of research to analyse four select print media outlets (*The Punch*, *Guardian*, *Tell Magazine* and *The News*) in Nigeria. The findings showed that both newspapers and magazines did not give necessary attention to the coverage of SMEs; findings also showed that the amount of coverage and degree of prominence given to SMEs and related issues were not strong enough to translate to national development.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on the Agenda Setting and the Framing Theories of the mass media. Over the years, the agenda setting functions of the mass media has become a central focus by mass media scholars. The concept of agenda setting propounded by McComb and Shaw (1993) is used to refer to the perceived power of the press to influence the coverage of issues and events in the society. The mass media is believed to possess the ability to set agenda for the public by presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segment of the public will come to perceive those issues as more important than others.

This means that the more attention in space and time given to an issue in the media (prints or electronics), the more the people's attention will be directed at such issue. It also means that editors and programmers use their journalistic skills to select what the media dish out to the public thus, determine what they (public) think about. According to Coleman *et al.* (2009, p.147), the genesis of agenda setting have been linked to Walter Lippmann

(1922) who argued that “the news media construct our view of the world” thereby using the media messages to influence “the pictures in our head”. This idea is what McCombs and Shaw (1972) described as agenda setting theory which has over the years become a major recurring issue in mass media research.

Agenda setting was tested by McCombs and Shaw in Chapel Hill study of the 1968 United States presidential election and how 100 undecided voters eventually made up their minds. The press coverage of the election was content analyzed in order to identify five campaign issues and the amount of coverage given to them in the (media). The result was compared with a personal interview of 100 undecided voters all of who were asked to mention which issue they considered to be the most important (public agenda) at the moment. McCombs and Shaw found that there was correlation between the rank orders of the five issues on the media agenda and the rank order of those on the public agenda. This therefore implies that the media tell the public “what to think about”. Rogers (1993) also affirms the position by arguing further that the amount of coverage accorded an issue in the media might determine the rating of such issue by the public. Folarin (2005) also maintains the position when defining agenda setting as “the powers of the media to predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a society.”

The Framing Theory develop by Entman (1993) suggest that media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion by selectively presenting information and framing it in a particular way The rise of framing and the advent of priming have marked the shift of limited effects paradigm to the powerful effects in political communication research (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). While agenda setting theory more or less tries to tell its readers what to think about and how to interpret media messages framing looks at the influences of media agenda on audience’s evaluation process (Holbert & Hansen, 2006, in Kee, Ibrahim, Ahmad & Kiang, 2012) and framing takes a step further to guide the audience on how to think about an issue. This theory enables the media consumer interpret and give meaning to media messages in such a way that the frames can be analysed effectively. Framing, in particular, pays special attention to the organisation and presentation of news attributes as a means to impact attitudinal changes among its audience (Kee *et al.* 2012). Moreover, frames in media are key components in the study of selection and interpretation of news.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study adopted the content analysis research method, which according to Barbie (2018), is the study of recorded human communications such as

books, magazines, bulletin board postings on the internet, laws, and constitutions as well as any components or collection thereof. The content of newspapers on Small Scale Business were sorted out for analysis. In doing so, depth of coverage and prominence/importance of stories on Small Scale Business formed the categories while the unit of measurement and stories were news, features, editorials, and investigative reports. The target population for this research were the copies of *The Pioneer*, *The Mail* and *Global Concord* newspapers covering a period beginning from January 2023 to June 2023. It is from these targeted newspaper editions that the researcher relied on as an accurate and representative sample for study. The population amounted to a total of 120 editions which is the total editions of the three newspapers for the half yearly namely: see breakdown (The Pioneer publishes 3 edition per week x 4 x 6 months = 72 editions. The Mail and Global Concord publishes 1edition per week x4 x 6 months 24 x 2 = 48 editions).

The sample size of this study was a census sample (120 copies of the newspapers) given that the entire population of the study was considered adequate enough. They are *The Pioneer* *The Mail* and *The Global Concord* newspapers. This sample was considered adequate because according to Nwana (1981) cited in Okiki (2013), if a population is in many hundreds, one needs a sample size of 20%. Babbie (2013) avers that purposive sampling is often desired when there is need to sample on the basis of knowledge of the population. The three newspapers were purposively selected for the study in AkwaIbomState because of their visibility and relevance. The Mail for instance won the Newspaper of the year in Akwa Ibom State and The Pioneer newspaper is the state owned newspaper and its coverage of Small businesses will be relevant to governments and her agencies. Also, the researcher considered that the newspapers have strong coverage and circulation within the state.

The content categories included: advocacy, interpretation of government policies, business tips, financial information, market linkage; with frequency and prominence of report providing the coding parameters. All of the published newspaper content relevant to Small businesses in the form of news stories, editorials, photographs, articles/features and letters to editor were identified.

### Data Presentation

**Table 1: Showing the level of prominence given Small Scale Business in Local Newspapers**

Variables	The Pioneer	Global Concord	The Mail	Total	Percentages
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Front Page	7	5	3	15	18
Inside page	20	26	14	60	73
Back Page	4	3	0	7	9
Total	31	34	17	82	100

All the editions of the three newspapers had most of their stories tucked inside

the pages of the newspapers. Sixty items (73%) appeared on the inside page pages. The above table indicates that Local newspapers in Uyo did not give prominence to the coverage of Small scale businesses in Uyo.

**Table 2: Font Sizes of the Headlines of Reports on Small Scale Business in Local Newspaper**

Variables	The Pioneer Small Font	Large Font	Total	%	Global Concord Small Font	Large Font	Total	%	The Mail Small Font	Large Font	Total	%
<b>Straight News</b>	9	7	16	52	11	7	18	52	8	5	13	54
<b>Features</b>	3	2	5	5	4	0	4	12	3	0	3	13
<b>Editorials</b>	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Columns /Letter to Editor</b>	5	4	9	8	8	3	11	33	6	1	7	29
<b>Cartoons</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	0	1	4
<b>Total</b>	18	13	31	100	24	10	34	100	18	6	24	100

The *Pioneer* newspaper has most reports with large font size (42%) while *Global Concord* has the large font size stories with 25%. Thus, it implies that the select newspapers attached less importance to Small Business issues in Nigeria.

**Table 3: Indicating Direction of Story Frame**

Variables	The Pioneer	Global Concord	The Mail	Total	Percentage
<b>Positive Tone</b>	7	21	4	32	36
<b>Negative Tone</b>	20	8	9	37	42
<b>Neutral</b>	4	5	11	20	22
<b>Total</b>	31	34	24	89	100

From table 3 above, it was observed that negative tone accounts for most of the reports with 42%, while neutral has 22% of the reports. This indicates that

local newspapers in Uyo (particularly newspapers) are not positively disposed in covering SMEs issues

**Table 4: Genre of Newspapers Reports on Small Scale Business**

Variables	The Pioneer	Global Concord	The Mail	Total	Percentage
Straight news	15	18	13	46	52
Features	6	4	3	13	15
Editorials	1	0	0	1	1
Columns/letter	9	11	7	27	30
Cartoons	0	1	1	2	2
Total	31	34	24	89	100

The data show that the most predominant genre of report on Small Business in select newspapers was the straight news format, which was as high as 46 items (52%). The select newspapers have only 1 (1%) editorial. This reveals that SMEs reportage was largely in the genre of news format with the lack of depth associated with it.

**Table 5: Frequency of Coverage of Small Scale Businesses in the Newspapers**

Variables	The Pioneer	Global Concord	The Mail	Total	Percentage
1 – 3 times / week	9	12	16	37	42
4 – 6 times/ month	18	20	7	45	50
7 times and above / quarterly	4	2	1	7	8
Total	31	34	24	89	100

From the data generated, it was observed that 4-6 times/ week gained the highest coverage with a total of 45 items (50%). while the 7times / quaterly and above category has least coverage with 7 items (8%). The above information, therefore, indicates most stories on SMEs appeared on 4-6 times in the newspapers.

**Table 6: Content Categories Covered in the Newspaper**

Contents	The Pioneer	Global Concord	The Mail	Total	Percentage
Advocacy	6	4	3	13	15
Interpretation of Govt policies	15	18	13	46	51

Business tips	9	11	0	20	22
Financial linkage	1	0	7	8	8
Market Linkage	0	1	1	2	4
Total	31	34	24	89	100

Table 6 shows that the newspapers covered more of interpretation of Government and Business Tips (51% and 22% respectively .)

**Table 7: Depth of Coverage of Small Scale Businesses in the Newspapers**

Variables	The Pioneer	Global Concord	The Mail	Total	Percentage
0 – 10inch	20	25	14	59	66
11 – 20 inch	11	8	10	29	33
21 and above	0	1	0	1	1
Total	31	34	24	89	100

The data generated in Table 6 reveal that most news coverage on SMEs recorded below 11 column inch space, which is 59 (66%) items. From all indications, much space (depth of coverage) was not given to Small Businesses and this could be attributed to a laissez-faire attitude on the part of journalists in giving depth of coverage to Small Businesses, which invariably implies interpretation to information on SMEs in Akwa Ibom State.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Research Question One : What is the frequency of coverage given to Small Scale businesses in select local newspapers in Uyo ?

From the data generated, it was observed that 4-6 times gained the highest coverage with a total of 45 items (50%). while the 7 and above category has least coverage with 7 items (8%). The above information, therefore, indicates most stories on SMEs appeared on 4-6 times in the study newspapers.

The result shows that the informal sector receives less than adequate coverage by the Nigerian press. This however does not support the concept of development communication, which is concerned with the planned use of

communication resources to pursue development goals; to eradicate or substantially reduce poverty, social inequality, unemployment and others.

### **Research Question Two: What is the level of prominence given to Small Scale businesses in select local newspapers in Uyo ?**

All the editions of the three newspapers had most of their stories tucked inside the pages of the newspapers. Sixty items (73%) appeared on the inside page. The above table indicates that Local newspapers in Uyo did not give prominence to the coverage of Small scale businesses in Uyo. Ironically, many readers usually exhibit impatience in the course of newspaper readership, hence the reasoning behind the placement of stories such that readers' attention may be easily drawn to them. Unfortunately the placement of the subject matter in the newspapers studied was not such that readers' attention could easily be drawn to it. By implication therefore, the newspapers did not accord prominence to SMEs in Nigeria within the period of study. The findings go against the stand point of framing theory. According to McQuail (2010), framing is used to explain how the mass media promote a particular definition of an issue through selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.

Much as researchers have consistently pointed out that people are not necessarily told what to think, evidence abounds that there is "a correspondence between the order of importance given in the media to 'issues' and the order of significance attached to the same issues by politicians and the public" (McQuail, 2010 p. 512). What this suggests, therefore, is that those who have the power to alter the social and business environment of the informal sector are unlikely to feel any pressure to do so following their near absence from the media.

### **Question Three : How are Small Scale businesses issues framed in the select local newspapers in Uyo.?**

From Table 3 above, it was observed that negative tone accounts for most of the reports with 42%, while neutral has 22% of the reports. This indicates that local newspapers in Uyo (particularly newspapers) are not positively disposed in covering SMEs issues.

While a large number of informal sector activities centre around the production and distribution of goods and services under perfectly legal grounds, some others tend to involve criminal activities and illegal production. During the period of study, the most prominent activities featured by the media concerning the informal sector (as seen by respondents) were issues related to crime.

The newspapers studied did not present SMEs in Nigeria within a context that accorded a positive frame to the subject matter. In other words, the framing of SMEs by the newspapers studied was not such that could elicit a positive disposition. This pattern of coverage echoes the opinion of Papacharissi and Oliveria (2008, p. 52) who observed that “when the media place stories in specific frames, they lend a different meaning to the news. The media increase or decrease the salience of issues, which allows the public to remember and make judgments on such issues.” Looking at the story genre or format used in reporting SMEs, it was observed that straight news report led in the table with a total of 46 items representing (52%) of the total items published. The implication of this is that investigative and explanatory stories on SMEs issues presented in feature format are lacking in these newspapers. This gives report/coverage on SMEs a predictable pattern. Ohaja (2005, cited in Ezegwu, Enem & Ndife, 2017) states that a feature is an in-depth and factual.

#### **Research Question Four : What are the major forms of small scale businesses reporting in the select local newspapers in Uyo ?.**

Table 6 shows that the newspapers covered more of interpretation of Government and Business Tips (51% and 22% respectively). Table 6 shows the subjects’ perception of the media’s contribution to the development of the informal sector in terms of advocacy, interpretation of government policies, business, financial and market information. Where as a good number of the subjects felt that the press had helped much with the interpretation of government’s policies, business tips and market linkage, only little in their opinion had been done by way of prompt news coverage of their activities, advocacy, and provision of financial information. This explains the responses of the subjects as shown on table 5 when asked how satisfied they were with media portrayals. Only about 34% of the subjects can be said to be satisfied.

The benefits of development journalism have been well enunciated by Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) which include, motivation, behaviour, and attitude change, enhancement of social justice, poverty reduction, etc. However, with this low level of involvement the press leaves itself in a position where it cannot do much to lift the standard of living of the people.

#### **Research Question Five :What is the amount of space given to Small Scale Businesses in the select local newspapers in Uyo.?**

The data generated in Table 6 reveal that most news coverage on SMEs recorded below 11 column inch space, which is 59 (66%) items. From all indications, much space (depth of coverage) was not given to Small Businesses and this could be attributed to a laissez-faire attitude on the part

of journalists in giving depth of coverage to Small Businesses, which invariably implies interpretation to information on SMEs in Nigeria.

Despite the economic significance of SMEs in Nigeria, the sector apparently does not attract much media recognition. This is evident from the findings reported in the study. The studied newspapers did not give prominence to coverage of SMEs in Nigeria. The implication is that the coverage given to SMEs in Nigeria by the newspapers studied lacks the propensity to spur readers/potential entrepreneurs to establish small and medium scale enterprises as a means of solving our economic problems. Most reports on SMEs were negatively framed; dominant format with which the selected newspapers presented SMEs issues was straight news report format. Newspapers themselves involve people and give more depth to the treatment of issues when they syndicate columns, present editorials and deliver in-depth analysis and features.

## **CONCLUSION**

In spite of the presumed economic prowess of the informal sector in Nigeria, the sector apparently does not attract much media attention. This is evident from the findings reported above. It is bad enough that the press does not focus sufficiently on SMEs. It is worse when one notes that even the scant attention paid the informal sector consistmainly of negative stories – those dealing with criminal activities. The only other kind of stories that toppled crime related activities are those that are paid for by clients. This can hardly be said to be an acceptable state of affairs, especially viewed from the perspective of development communication. However, although it must be conceded that the media cannot cause development, it must be acknowledged that they possess enormous capacity to influence the development of the informal sector in a positive direction.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The press should pay greater attention to the positive activities of the informal sector by way of greater coverage. Moreover, such coverage should be made more prominent than is currently the case.
2. The press should seek more and more to be the voice of the citizens whose meager resources cannot buy them space in the media to speak for themselves.
3. The Press should ensure that more positive reports are carried of small scale business with a view to presenting them as the engine and driver of economic growth in our country.
4. Coverage of the small businesses needs to move beyond just news items to more serious presentation like editorials and news commentaries.

5. Nigerian journalists must seek to understand the operations of small businesses in order to fully give them adequate coverage as they deserves.

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