

# Contextualization of the Oil and Gas Sector by Select Nigerian Newspapers: A Textual Analysis

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## Abstract

This study sought to ascertain the contextualization of news reports on the oil and gas sector by select Nigerian newspapers bearing in mind the fact that the sector remains a foremost source of foreign exchange earnings. The objectives among others revolved around the need to synthesize if news reports on the oil and gas sector can be thematically described as all encompassing with a view to streamlining the strand of news that dominates the overall reportage of the sector. Textual analysis was considered most ideal for the study based on the fact that the dynamics of the study necessitated a study of the manifest content of the selected newspapers. *The Guardian* and *The Punch* were purposively selected based on the fact that they are foremost national dailies. The period of study fell within the first month of 2017. Data analysis was done using the Constant Comparative Technique (CCT). Findings revealed that the predominant theme in terms of contextualization appears to be the economy with other strands being enmeshed in shrift reportage. Textual analysis further revealed that the news writing format used was predominantly straight with no recourse to interpretative reporting embellished in critical discourse analysis. To this end, it was recommended that stories emanating from the sector should be made to pass through the frame prism so as to allow for the editorial development of multi-sectoral perspectives.

**Keywords:** *.Contextualization .News .Oil and Gas Sector .Reportage*

## Overview

The Nigerian oil and gas sector remains a foremost source of foreign exchange earnings despite econometric nuances and idiosyncrasies that it contributes only 13% to the nation's GDP. That notwithstanding, it remains the most vibrant sector of the Nigerian economy such that every other sector of the economy catches cold whenever there is a sneeze in the oil and gas sector.

As a very important sector of the economy, it may not be out of place to expect that activities in this sector should as a matter of exigency enjoy widespread illumination from the media. Ideally, being the live wire of the economy presupposes that media reportage of the sector should keep the people abreast of developments, prospects and challenges that make daily rounds in the sector. How this has played out remains the primary essence of this study.

News reports, as provided by journalists, are so crucial to the world we live in today because of societal complexities and the limitations of man. Man truly is limited by time, space and ability. The imputation as Okon (2015) notes is that "journalism (mass media) through content and portrayal can condense events beyond one's immediate physical environment, bring those events into an individual's private sphere and thus enable that individual to connect with the world" (p. 98). The supposition in this regard is that

journalism in every organic setting enables the individual react intelligently to his environment and adapt knowledgeably to his society.

Realistically, mainstream journalism has become the predominant source of information in the society. Many people learn about events in the society through journalistic output in the mass media. Journalists in this regard are perceived to be information minded. In life, nobody gives out of nothing thus making such outputs flow from the informed to the uninformed.

The expectation, however, is that news reports from the oil and gas sector should provide useful information on the arrays of activities that go on in that sector as well as cognate education on the intricacies and technicalities the sector requires with a view to repositioning the society for statutory and corresponding projections.

News reports from the oil and gas sector must be all encompassing and multifaceted so as to cater for the varying interests of stakeholders. In this way the aspirations and expectations of all stakeholders will be duly satisfied bearing in mind the fact that almost anybody in almost anywhere in Nigeria is a stakeholder as far as the oil and gas sector is concerned. Unarguably, news content from this sector ideally should give an account of the multi-dimensional events that daily play out in the sector.

In other words, there is a dire need to foray news content on the sector with a view to finding out if they provide useful insight into the dimensions of activities earlier outlined. The concerns of this study are therefore, subsumed in the context highlighted above.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As espoused by Harold Lasswell, the mass media ought to carry out surveillance functions in the society. Surveillance in this context relates to the constant flow of public information or news about events occurring within the country and the world. Ramat (2011) notes that the surveillance function of the mass media can be divided into two types: warning or beware surveillance which occurs when the media inform us about threats from weather changes, war, cyclones, etc., while instrumental surveillance occurs when the information useful in everyday life is transmitted.

When news is properly reported in the order of 5Ws & H, the reader does not only stand to benefit from the on the spot assessment but goes a long way to benefit from the ultimate meaning and significance of events as well.

Using the All-Powerful Model typology postulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), media reports should naturally fall within the framework of the power to provide information, the power to set the public agenda and the power to affect thoughts, opinions and attitudes. Theorizations in this area are apt ranging from the normative paradigm to propulsions on framing.

News reports are always contextualized in the light of frames. Frames are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames suggest that how an issue is presented in the media influences the choices people make. They help us organize complex phenomena into coherent, understandable categories. While the agenda setting typology posits that the media "tell us what to think about, the framing ideology opines that the media tell us "how to think".

The inference, therefore, is that media reports can advertently or inadvertently aid our construction or misconstruction of social reality especially as it relates to the oil and gas sector. Reports emanating from the O & G sector can fit into any of the frames listed below:

- Science
- Technology
- Economy
- Politics
- Corporate social responsibility
- Community relations

- Development infrastructure
- Environment
- Employment/welfare/labour
- Militancy
- Industry regulations/compliance

Descriptively, news reports emanating from this sector are expected to exponentially touch on these varied aspects of the oil and gas sector so as to provide a meaningful whole with apt contextualization. In other words, do news reports from the oil and gas sector provide highlights on the various streams of the sector with a view to providing a comprehensible whole? The problem of this study is therefore, preconceived in the foregoing.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do Nigerian newspapers contextualize news reports on the oil and gas sector?
2. To what extent do these reports touch on the various aspects of the industry?
3. What are the contextual themes that dominate news reports on the oil and gas sector by Nigerian newspapers?

### **Literature Review-The Concept of News and Reportorial Judgements**

The coverage of news according to Pavlik and McIntosh (2013) has made it possible for journalism to bring to the public domain, events and happenings around the world. They further note that "good journalistic coverage puts events in a context that helps people form a picture of what the world is like" (P. 269).

Itule and Anderson (2008) acknowledge that news is an extremely complex term that means different things to different people. They however define it as "Information which today's media are involved in" (P.11). Descriptively, they see news as something you haven't heard before such as man bites dog or something happy or sad" (P.11) More so, they see it as "disturbing or entertaining as determined by what editors and reporters say it is (P.11).

The imputation here is that a reporter's judgement or that of the editor is an important consideration in determining what news is. In the context of analogies, Pavlik and McIntosh (2013) liken news to the "Coverage of recent events such as fire or accidents as well as recent discoveries of events that have already taken place" (P.269). The underlying notion according to them is that news is "something that occurs that is out of the ordinary" (P. 269).

Maris and Thornham (2008) opine that "news not only defines for us what significant events are taking place but also positions these events within an interpretative framework" (P.628). The imputation as it relates to the oil and gas sector is that reportage on the sector should provide us with a platform of meaningful assessments concerning multifaceted vibrations that daily play out there.

In the discharge of such filtering and classifications, the journalist/reporter is structurally guided by professional considerations. These considerations in a cumulative sense make up what is popularly referred to as news values.

Itule and Anderson (2008, p. 15) streamline the following as news values:

- i. Timeliness: Is it a recent development or is it old?
- ii. Proximity: Is the story relevant to readers?
- iii. Eminence and prominence: Are noteworthy people involved? If so, that makes the story more important.
- iv. Consequence and impact: What effect will the story have on readers?
- v. Human interest: Even though it might not be an earth-shattering event, does it contain unique, interesting elements?

No doubt, the news we get according to scholars (Maris and Thornham, 2008) is inevitably then the product of institutional pressures and structures and of processes of both selection and construction. Its study focuses attention on issues of power both in the relationship between media institutions and the state.

Interestingly, Golding and Elliot (2008) note that news values are used in two ways. According to them:

They are criteria of selection from materials available to the news room of those items worthy of inclusion in the final product. Second, they are guidelines for the presentation of items suggesting what to emphasize, what to omit and where to give priority in the preparation of the items for presentation to the audience (P.632).

In considering the push and pull effects these considerations exert on the overall editorial process, they further posit that:

News values are qualities of events or of their journalistic construction, whose relative absence or presence recommends them for inclusion in the news product. The more of such qualities a story exhibits, the greater its chances of inclusion (P.633).

Conversely, the key ideologies so expressed can best be subsumed under the gate keeping typology which further epitomizes reportorial assessments. Rodman (2012) notes that the producers of mass messages, which in this context refers to news, are often called “gatekeepers because they determine which messages (news) will be delivered to media consumers, how those messages will be constructed and when they will be delivered” (p.8).

It must however be noted that reportorial assessments are guided by a wide range of economic, ethical and legal considerations that vary in contexts and settings. Rodman (2012) in his analogy opines that reportorial assessments as manifested in the gatekeeping process allows “gatekeepers to determine which images will represent chaotic news events such as the explosion of the oil platform that led to the 2010 oil spill in the gulf of Mexico” (p.7).

The dilemma becomes more glaring when considerations are tilted towards finding out if what is presented to audience members as news really represents a true picture of what really played out in the sociopolitical/socio-economic space. In the light of this consideration, Itule and Anderson (2008) note that “the major ethical issues facing journalists today are those dealing with fair and balanced treatments of all viewpoints expressed over an array of issues” (p.472). They further note that “journalistically, the challenge is to deliver to readers, listeners and viewers a fair and balanced viewpoints held by persons especially those that differ markedly in their perceptions of what public policy should be” (p.473). How well journalists/reporters have risen to this challenge remains a yawning gap in journalistic literature.

In a study – Newspaper Interpretation of the 2015 General Election Postponement in Nigeria: A study of *The Guardian* and *The Sun* newspapers – Okpoko and Ngene (2016) sought to find out the prominence given to stories relating to the postponement, as well as the slant and tone of reportage on the saga.

Content analysis was used to analyze data from two selected Nigerian newspapers to determine print media framing of political news stories. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Findings however revealed that both “*The Guardian* and *The Sun* differed in the presentation of their straight news as well as their feature stories” (p.82). The interpretation in the light of the forgoing is that the newspapers studied covered the story in differing angles ranging from positive to negative as well as neutral thus lending credence to the presupposition that news is a product of overriding

considerations by reporters. The challenge however remains how these considerations can be harnessed to fit properly within the ideal frame of construction of social reality in contradistinction to the paradigm of misconception of social reality.

### Methodology

Textual analysis was considered most ideal for the study bearing in mind the fact that the dynamics necessitated a study of the manifest content of the selected newspapers. Textual analysis in this regard has been defined by Presad (2008) as "the scientific study of the content of communication" (p.1).

Two national newspapers – *The Guardian* and *The Punch* – were purposively selected based on the fact that they are foremost national dailies. The period of study however fell within the first month of 2017 bearing in mind the fact that projections for a new fiscal year are usually anchored on first quarter illuminations.

For completeness, the issues that fell within the study timeline were selected and analyzed. Technically, textual analysis requires an operationalization of the subject matter. To this end, the definition of the subject matter was given thus: "any form of news writing that provides an account of events in the oil and gas sector including both upstream and downstream".

Data analysis was predominantly textual and was done using the Constant Comparative Technique (CCT) developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and modified by Guber (1985). This method according to Wimmer and Dominick (2011: ) entails a four step process:

- i. Comparative assignment of incidents to categories
- ii. Elaboration and refinement of categories
- iii. Searching for relationships and themes among categories
- iv. Simplifying and interpreting data into a coherent theoretical structure.

Interestingly, the strength in this method is that it allows the integration of data into contexts that engender textual interpretations. In terms of reliability, a professional coder was employed with a view to comparing and finding similarities among texts that fit into the textual categories. This method of reliability has been described by Wimmer and Dominick (2011) as the audit trial.

**Table 1: Contextualization of the Oil and Gas Sector in *The Guardian* (First Stream)**

S/N	Date	Story Punch	Frame
1	01/01/2017	Buhari woos militants, seeks end to destruction of infrastructure Guardian (p.2)	Militancy
2	01/01/2017	Nigeria returns to crude oil to find budget as non-oil revenue fraters (p.4)	Economy
3	1/3/2017	NEITI condemns N1.1 for tax waves to oil firms (p.17)	Economy
4	3/1/2017	NCDMB calls for local content beyond oil and gas (p. 19)	Economy
5	4/1/2017	Oil hits 18 months high of \$58.37 amid OPEC's output cuts	Economy
6	4/1/2017	Rise in oil price raises hope for early exit from recession (p.6)	Economy
7	4/1/2017	Oil industry's challenges in 2016 and hopes for boom in 2017	General/Features
8	4/1/2017	Modular refinery: investors seek support from government (p.21)	Economy
9	5/1/2017	NNPC picks Oando, Sahara Energy, others to lift 1.36 million barrels of crude oil (p. 3)	Economy
10	5/1/2017	Operators want FG to float JVs equity on	Economy

		NSE (p.17)	
11	5/1/2017	Nigeria targets 2.6 million barrels per day refining capacity	Technology
12	5/1/2017	Chevron Nigeria appoints Jeff Emang as New Managing Director (p.21)	Employment/Welfare

The predominant theme appears to be the economy as shown in table 1. The focus on militancy on the other hand appears to be significantly shrift.

**Table 2: Contextualization of the Oil and Gas Sector in *The Guardian* (Second Stream)**

S/N	Date	Story Punch	Frame
1	5/1/2017	Oil prices rise on expected drop in U.S crude inventories (p.38)	Economy
2	6/1/2017	Cooking gas price rises to N4,500 per 12.5kg in Lagos (p. 9)	Economy
3	7/1/2017	Normally returns to total blending plants as NUPENG suspends strike (p.8)	Labour
4	10/1/2017	Fuel scarcity looms as nation's marketers fail to repel loans (p.1)	Economy
5	11/1/2017	Jonathan distances self from Malaba oil deal (p. 7)	Economy
6	11/1/2017	Government to award oil blocks, marginal fields, pass PIB this year (p. 18)	Economy/Politics
7	11/1/2017	Petroleum sector loses N220b to pipeline sabotage (p. 21)	
8	11/1/2017	Nigeria, others to spend \$201.3b on petrochemical industry (p. 21)	Economy
9	11/1/2017	BP signs 20-year LNG supply contract with Thailands PTT (p. 28)	Economy
10	11/1/2017	Akwa Ibom to establish oil and gas free zone (p. 30)	Politics/Economy
11	12/1/2017	Petrol price template crumbles (p. 1)	Economy
12	15/1/2017	Subsidy stages come back as petrol open market price hits N160 per litre (p. 1)	Economy
13	15/1/2017	NNPC claims N750m daily on subsidy	Economy
14	18/10/2017	Protesters shut down petrochemical firm in Rivers	Community Relations
15	18/1/2017	Crude oil lifting: Nigeria targets long term contracts (p. 33)	Economy

The table shows economy to be the predominant theme.

**Table 3: Contextualization of the Oil and Gas Sector in *The Punch* (First Stream)**

S/N	Date	Story Punch	Frame
1	03/01/2017	Nigeria's oil output tops foreign investors' concern (p. 30)	Economy
2	04/01/2017	Budget: Rep faults 2.2 million bpd crude projection (p. 24)	
3	05/01/2017	Sahara, Oando, MRS, 36 others win NNPC crude lifting contracts (p. 24)	Economy
4	05/01/2017	Marketers expect increase in petrol price, halt imports	Economy
5	05/01/2017	Oil prices to average \$55 in 2017 (p. 29)	Economy
6	05/01/2017	Chevron Nigeria gets new chairman/MD (p. 29)	Labour/welfare
7	05/01/2017	Nigeria's crude oil sale faces delays (p. 30)	Economy

Interestingly, labour / welfare played up as the least dominant theme.

**Table 4: Contextualization of the Oil and Gas Sector in *The Punch* (Second Stream)**

S/N	Date	Story Punch	Frame
1	06/01/2017	Cooking gas price rises to N4,500 (p. 24)	Economy
2	06/01/2017	NUPENG shuts Total's depot over job loss threat (p. 25)	Labour
3	10/01/2017	We owe banks \$1bn, oil marketers lament. NNPC lost N180.48bn in November - Report (p.23)	Economy
4	11/01/2017	PIB will be passed this year, says Kachukwu (p. 24)	Politics
5	12/01/2017	NLNG to increase cooking gas supply, shortage presorts (p. 30)	Economy
6	12/01/2017	Give priority to local oil investors (p. 30)	Economy

Labour played up with economy as the most highlighted.

### **Inferences from the Review**

The best way to draw inferences, the world over is by logically following a deductive pattern – a move that progresses from the general to the specific. If applied, the following scenarios will emerge.

#### **Case Study 1**

Of the 27 stories (*The Guardian*) reviewed, about 78% manifested the colouration of news frame typified as "economy" with militancy, technology, labour/welfare and community relations assuming 3.7% each.

For *The Punch*, of the 13 stories reviewed, about 70% played up the same news frame with labour and politics assuming 7% each.

The presupposition therefore is that the stories emanating from our newspapers may have the tendency to keep us in the dark with respect to the oil exploration techniques in the O & G sector. The stories do not also tell us if the techniques so adopted also have the tendency to impact negatively on the environment. Besides, we do not also know if the companies in the O & G sector are living up to their CSR obligations.

It should at this point be noted that the O & G beat is also oriented towards science and technology and therefore concepts like fracking and fossil should not sound gibberish to many of us. The imputation however is that if the reviewed stories dominate media content, then we may remain in the dark as regards several other activities in the O & G sector.

The foregoing however holds affirmation for Amzat (2015) who notes that "the petroleum industry remains the most secretive business environment in the country" (para. 1).

#### **Case Study 2**

This scenario draws its premise from the "Nigeria oil and gas industry content development Act" popularly referred to as the "Local content Act". The Act no doubt provides a framework that allows for indigenous content in the Nigerian oil and gas sector.

The story of 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2017 on both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* becomes most pertinent.

Chevron Nigeria appoints Jeff Ewing as New Managing Director (*Guardian*, p. 21).

Chevron Nigeria gets new Chairman/MD (*Punch*, p. 29)

Reading through the story as reported in the two newspapers under review will reveal a fatal lacuna. Drawing from the premise of the Local Content Act, one would naturally be curious to know if this Act may have guided this appointment. Ironically, the two accounts were silent on the nationality of the new MD. Rhetorically, therefore, would

it have been out of place to include his nationality in that report; especially, when the entity being referred to is Chevron Nigeria?

### **Case Study 3**

Most, if not all of the stories reviewed lack depth. They were mere regurgitations of an interplay. The news-writing format used was predominantly straight with no recourse to interpretative reporting embellished in advocacy and critical discourse analysis. By extrapolation also, the press release may have been the most utilized news source thus explaining the similarity in the two separate accounts on Chevron MD by *The Guardian* and *The Punch*.

### **Interpretation**

What has played out in the foregoing scenarios conceptualizes a pattern referred to as journalistic inertia. The imputation no doubt is that Nigerian journalists, especially those covering the O & G sector have not been able to bring innovativeness and creativity to bear in their day to day reportage of the sector. Aptly described, most reports about the sector are rather a reproduction of quotes by industry players and not really a critical analysis of the trends in the industry.

### **The Way Forward**

The following recommendations have been made based on the inferences so drawn from the foregoing:

1. Journalists covering the oil and gas sector should be overtly critical and analytical about trends in the industry. This is where resourcefulness and perseverance come in. For instance, the Local Content Act provides for a: "minimum threshold for the use of local services while promoting the employment of Nigerian staff in the industry". Being analytical in this regard will warrant a journalist to endeavour to evolve ways (means) of calculating the percentage of local content in any given activity with a view to determining what the existing level is compared to the target in the Act.
2. Stories emanating from the sector should also be made to pass through the frame prism so as to allow for the development of cognate perspectives.
3. In the spirit of being analytical, it is also expected that journalists should appraise activities in the O & G sector against the backdrop of regulatory provisions with a view to ascertaining levels of compliance. To this end, there is need to develop metrics for measuring development in key priority areas.

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