



# ASSESSING THE DEPENDENCY OF NEWSPAPERS ON THE NEWS AGENCY OF NIGERIA

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# CHAPTER THREE



## **ASSESSING THE DEPENDENCY OF NEWSPAPERS ON THE NEWS AGENCY OF NIGERIA**

**Abdulfatai Iyanda Babatunde**

### **Introduction**

A news agency is an organisation concerned mainly with provision of media contents by gathering, processing, and disseminating news, features, analysis, pictures and full multimedia services to core and other mainstream media and non-media outfits. The news agency can also be referred to as a wire service, newswire, or news service. The wire service is often established, either on cooperative basis, where group of media organisations pull resources together to form one, or by a national government as is the case in many African countries like Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa among others.

Johnston and Forde (2011:195), dwell on the ubiquitous nature of news agencies, demonstrating their relevance in the business of news gathering and dissemination around the world. Boyd-Barrett (2010:4) argued that a national news agency needs to be seen to offer a credible comprehensive and authoritative “national” service. To that end, it often appears that there is only room for one such media content provider in the market. Indeed, many national news agencies only thrive due the monopoly status conferred on them by their owner-governments, who also stand to gain particularly where events revolve around the national image. This becomes even more poignant during global events.

It has been noted that one of the strategies used by nations to enhance their image is to host global media events (Giffard & Rivenburgh 2000:8). This was with regard to a

study of how Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and Inter Press Service (IPS) covered six major U.N. summit meetings hosted by different nations. They found that hosting a summit meant nations got a higher profile than those which were participants. However, Western countries received more overtly positive coverage when they hosted than those hosts from the global south.

When it became operational in 1978, the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) enjoyed tremendous patronage by the core media organisations. Radio stations and newspapers subscribed to its bulletins. NAN copy was always the delight of editors of client news media as Dare attested to in his Ph.D. thesis. He said “editors of clients' news media gave the agency high marks for credibility and reliability” (1983:288). He reckoned that NAN stories accounted for an average of 20 percent of the total number published by newspapers which subscribed to its services. Dare found out that even for a newspaper that published the largest number of stories, such as the now rested National Concord, NAN stories occupied as much as 10 per cent of the news hole (i.e. space allotted to a particular story on a page of the newspaper). He attributed this to the fact that NAN stories were usually short items. Hence, client editors often found these copy useful as page fillers.

To an appreciable extent broadcasters also relied on NAN bulletins when preparing their newscasts. Onabajo (2000:132) attested to Nigerian broadcast industry's reliance on NAN's services "especially as it concerns news about Nigeria and Africa".

Still, Dare concluded that NAN services may not have been so indispensable to the editorial operations of the newspapers. Editors he interviewed stated that the effect of discontinued NAN services on their newspapers would be minimal, at least in the sense that they would be able to fill their pages with other materials (1983:309).

### **The Problem**

The need for this study stems from the increasing use of new media by different groups of people. This trend is made possible by several factors including easy access to the internet, and it seems to be steadily eroding the relevance of news agencies. This may constitute a major challenge worthy of scholarly attention. A traditional feature of news agencies, especially those established or owned by governments, like the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), is that they hitherto enjoyed a monopoly - being exclusively licensed to distribute local, national and foreign news and other media contents or services. This has become history as the monopoly has been broken by the activities of new media activists since the advent of the internet. This raises the question about the continued relevance of the news agency.

### **Purpose Of The Study**

The purpose of this study is therefore to assess the dependency of a sample of Nigerian newspapers on the services of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in their daily news gathering, processing and dissemination.

### **Objectives Of The Study**

The study set out with the following broad objectives.

- To evaluate the extent to which Nigerian newspapers depended on NAN in sourcing news output;
- To evaluate the frequency of usage of the NAN services by Nigerian newspapers?
- To evaluate how internet and social media affect the operations of NAN.

It sought to conclude with suggestions to help policy makers improve the operations and services of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). Its findings are relevant to the media industry since a healthy and vibrant national news agency is expected to greatly assist mainstream media organisations to source news at competitive rates that keep down their operational costs. All this was premised on a brief review of the development of the organization and its service.

### **News Agency Of Nigeria (nan)**

News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) was established by the federal government. The need to create a national news agency was first mooted in 1957 when Nigeria and Reuters signed a subscription agreement, according to Nzekwu (1994:1). An initial proposal was for a cooperative organisation that will provide news content. It was to be established and controlled by leading broadcasting and newspaper interest groups in the country. The cooperation was to be controlled by leading broadcasting and newspapers interests in Nigeria. It however collapsed when the Daily Times withdrew "on the grounds that the estimates were unreasonably low and the proposed subscriptions were too high". But government's interest in setting up a national news agency was aroused in 1961 at a conference organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) held in Dakar, Senegal at a meeting of the committee of African and Malagasy States. It was summoned to examine how to create an inter-African Press Agency. Consequently in May 1976, Nigeria's Federal Executive Council promulgated Decree No. 19 of May, 10, 1976 for the establishment of the News Agency of Nigeria and went into full operation in 1978 (Nzekwu1994:11-12).

### **Theorising The Study**

Any academic investigation should build on previous studies. Knowledge should be cumulative, as each research study adds to knowledge from previous works, paving the way for subsequent ones. As Dogo 2002:57) states: "somehow, somewhere, somebody must have said or did something related to your work. Perhaps yours is an in-depth study of what has been superficial". In order to appreciate the importance of news agency operations in the business of information gathering, processing and dissemination, the study examined some relevant theoretical tripods. Scholars in different fields of studies have various perspectives on theory. A social psychologist, Kurt Lewin (1958 cited in Folarin 1998:3), defines theory as a way of explaining the ordering and occurrence of various events. A communication scholar, Wilbur Schramm (1963) sees theory as a "crap - detector" which enables us to separate

scientific statements from unscientific ones. To Kerlinger (1973 in Aneto, Onabajo and Osifeso 2008), theory is a set of inter-related constructs, definitions and propositions that give a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining and predicting such phenomena.

This study takes a conceptual look at how wire services operate, particularly in the geographical entity called Nigeria. The Media Dependency Theory was used to support the work in order to further deepen our understanding of a wire service as a media content provider. This theory states that the more dependent an individual is on the media to meet his needs, the more important the media will be to that person or in this instance an organisation. Therefore, the study argues that considering necessary details of operations in a typical mainstream media organisation, services of a news agency must be very important.

Mainstream media rely on certain communication technologies which now seem like eternal fixtures in society, but they were once new. Stanley & Dennis (2009:47) state that the advantages of new media like the telegraph and telephone were recognised, then each communication technology was adopted – first by businesses and then by the public.

*“.....During the 1860s, the telegraph was to [American] civil war what the 24 hours cable news network like CNN were to the war in Iraq: It helped fuel and then satisfies [sic] widespread public interest in fast-breaking news coverage of the conflict.*

*By the time the civil war ended, the telegraph had spawned a number of wire services supplying news to affiliated papers spread across the nation – the first electronically based media networks had been created.*

*“In the middle and late 19th century, popular demand for cheap media content by large urban populations drove the development of several new media.....”*

(Stanley & Dennis 2009:47)

What Stanley & Dennis referred to as new media in the 1860s is obviously different from what is now known as new media. Introduction of the telegraph into the process of producing printed news copy delivered to few media organisations was indeed a novelty at that time. But new is relative, there has been a paradigm shift in what is now regarded as new media. New media have become synonymous with internet-aided media which facilitate social interactions. There are various social media platforms such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter, LinkedIn. These have altered the media landscape and may include the position of news agencies in the industry.

Högerl (2010: 4) dwells on challenges facing news agencies in this era of the internet. So it is that the use of internet and mobile phones may have given birth to "citizens' journalism" where people now use their personal devices to gather and disseminate news, even faster than the conventional media professionals. Högerl notes that:

*“..... in recent years a number of news stories have been broken first by*

*citizens armed with mobile phones, digital cameras and an internet connection. News about the earthquake in Haiti, for example, the emergency landing of a Quantas A380-plane in Singapore or the Iran elections, were first broken by citizens. Even if a news agency has a foreign correspondent in the country, he would never be as fast as an ordinary citizen involved or seeing it happen ...*  
(Högerl, 2010:4)

This trend is also evident in Nigeria, where news of the Dana Air plane which crashed in Lagos on June 3 2012, was first broken by eyewitnesses on Facebook and Twitter. Framing this inquiry within the Media Dependency Theory is to facilitate a disciplined examination within a specified route which according to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), comes from a broader uses-and-gratifications perspective. They argue that the uses-and-gratification approach is a limited-effects theory and that it grants individuals much control over how they employ media in their lives. Although media scholars are divided on just how powerful the media are, some argue that the limited-effects and powerful-effects models are not necessarily incompatible. The Dependency Theory takes a step towards showing how both may explain media effects.

Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur (1976) originally proposed the Media Dependency Theory. Like uses-and-gratification theory, this approach rejects the causal assumptions of the early reinforcement hypothesis, the old idea that media simply reinforce previously held attitudes. To overcome this weakness, the authors took a broad system approach. Their model proposed an integral relationship among audiences, media, and the larger society.

In their view, two factors determine how dependent on the media a person will become. First, people become more dependent on media that meet more of their needs than on media that satisfies just a few. Applied to organisational news operations then, it can be argued that news organisations will be more dependent on agencies that meet more of their operational needs, perhaps in a more systematic manner. In Nigeria, and this shall be demonstrated further later, many media organisations like The Punch, The Guardian and The Nation, had relied on the services of the News Agency of Nigeria to varying degrees, perhaps in relation to their constituted functions. Media serve a number of functions - monitoring government activities, reporting other news, and providing entertainment. The study was concerned to know how dependence on NAN fared in the face of new media.

The second source of dependency is social stability. When there is radical social change and (or) intense conflict, established institutions, beliefs, and practices are challenged, forcing a re-evaluation of information sources and perhaps new choices for media consumption. At such times media consumption tends to increase, whereas at more stable times, media dependency may be greatly reduced. In times of war for example, people become incredibly dependent on news programming. They may even increase their usual scope of consumption.

It appears that the philosophy informing the establishment of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) is aligned with this theory. When it was established, the Federal Government of Nigeria was dissatisfied with the underreporting of developmental issues or negative portrayal of Nigeria in the foreign media sources which local media relied on for news, even news about Nigeria, because of the non-availability of a national news agency. The establishment of NAN broke the heavy reliance on information from foreign sources (foreign news media) by the local media.

Dare explains that for more than a decade, the flow and content of international news had been the subject of controversy and criticism.

*“.....at UNESCO and other international fora, the doctrine of “free flow” of information consecrated in significant instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on Civil Political rights, and for a quarter of a century implicitly accepted by most countries, has come under increasing challenges.*

*Major elements in the grand design, the argument goes on, are the transnational communication industries and the principal news agencies of the Western world: the Associated Press (AP) and the United Press International (UPI) of the United States, Agence France-Presse (AFP) of France and the Reuters of Britain.*

*At the centre of the controversy on world news flow are the four Western news agencies that affect, one way or another, a total world daily newspaper circulation of 450 million and a world broadcast audience of more than 1.4 billion persons provide general, regional and even national news to subscribing media in various countries. . .” (Dare:1983:1-5)*

The government's perspective at the time was that having a national news agency would enable Nigeria have a voice that could be heard; the nation could project her developmental issues to the outside world through such agency. There has since been a proliferation of government and private media organisations, with broadcast deregulation that includes many more private broadcast media in Nigeria. These all, along with government owned Nigerian media, foreign news agencies and foreign diplomats depend on the services of NAN for in-depth news about developments in Nigeria. The question now, given changes in the mediascape is this – “To what extent do media houses still rely on NAN?”

Data for this research was obtained using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative method employed was in-depth interviews with editors. A quantitative content analysis using both primary and secondary data of the output of a sample of newspapers was also conducted.

### **Study Sample**

Studying all relevant content or interviewing every stakeholder in a field for research is impracticable. It is therefore important to properly define the population of study from which the samples for the study will be drawn. These were determined in accordance with set research objectives. With its attention to the print media, the population for this study consists of Nigerian newspapers. Two sources were considered to be used as sampling frames. The first, Newspapers Inventory (2014) was obtained from the Nigeria Press Council website. These comprised of newspapers, magazines, periodicals, state government gazettes and other local publications. This was much too comprehensive given the focus of the study.

The other source is the list of subscribers using contents produced by the News Agency of Nigeria. This was sourced from the Marketing Department of the Agency. The department produces "Record of Nan Output in the Media", a weekly record of its media contents. As at December 28 2013, the record indicated that NAN had 55 print subscribers. Though just a segment of the agency's total 160 subscriber base, it was considered to be more directly relevant thus more appropriate for this study. For the interviews, a sample of five subscribing newspapers was selected, using a random sampling technique. This technique was favoured as it helps to ensure that all subscribers have equal chance of being picked for the study. The five newspapers in the sample are Daily Champion, The Guardian, The Nation, National Mirror, and Punch. All these are national newspapers, published in Lagos though by virtue of ownership, regional allegiances may differ. Daily Champion for instance is widely regarded as the voice for the Igbo (South East). One senior editor was interviewed from each of the five selected newspapers.

### **The Interviews**

Qualitative researchers "seek data that represent personal experience in particular situations" (Stake, 2010:88-89). These would be included in the analysis if they were pertinent to the research, if they helped move toward understanding how something works or does not work". In like manner, this study evaluates qualitatively, how NAN service aids news gathering process of Nigerian newspapers.

Interviews, like questionnaires, are techniques for data collection. Sapsford & Jupp, identified four types of interviews vis: 1) face-to-face interview employing an interview schedule (semi-structured) 2) the telephone interview, 3) postal questionnaire and 4) face-to-face interviews in a free (unstructured) format (2006:93-94). This study adopted the semi structured face to face interview as personal contact offers the ability to observe and respond to individual interviewees. Those interviewed were the Deputy Editor/Head of On-line Desk of Daily Champion; the On-line Editor of The Guardian; the Deputy Editor of The Nation; the Daily Editor of National Mirror; and the On-line Editor of The Punch. The interviews were conducted separately, with a focus on the following questions:



- To what extent is the News Agency of Nigeria aiding the operations of the Nigerian newspapers?
  - To what extent do Nigerian newspapers use materials from NAN?
  - To what extent do Nigerian newspapers rely on the NAN in sourcing news?
  - How have the internet and social media affected the operations of NAN?
  - What is the frequency of usage by Nigerian newspapers of the services provided by NAN?
- Some of these questions were better addressed during the content analysis.

### **The Content Analysis**

The second part of the study consisted of a quantitative method – content analysis. For this three newspapers were randomly selected to be reviewed for a period of three months in the 2013. Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R., & Newbold, C. defined content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. (Hansen et al. 1998:94) Sobowale states, that it is one of mass communication's major contributions to social scientific inquiry.

*“.....It is claimed that mass communication scholars devised it and have used it most.*

*Its major unit of analysis is the written messages and other records. . . . Content analysis focuses on the manifest content of communication. That is, only messages that have been coded by way of formal presentation can be content analysed.” (Sobowale, 1983:18)*

For the purpose of this study, content analysis was used to assess the level of dependency on the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) found in the sample of Nigerian newspapers. The period October, November and December, 2013 was selected given its proximity to the time of study. In the end, the sample size for the content analysis was determined using the number of publication days within the period. The last 92 days in 2013, starting from October 1 to December 31. Cumulative figure for the three newspapers to be analysed was therefore 276, as 92 editions – from Monday to Sunday within the set period – were reviewed for each newspaper title in the sample.

A special coding sheet was used to collect data first by tallying and then by analysing using a simple frequency count. The study accounted for three formats - core news, features and pictures. It accounted for the prominence of each item in the publication using the following categories - front page, back page and inside pages. The space allotment was also considered in four categories - full page, half page, quarter page and others. Crucially, the coding sheet sought to identify sources from which NAN items were obtained. The variables considered under sources were: Government, Corporate, NGO/Labour, Community/Courts and Sports.

### **Data Presentation, Analysis And Discussion Of Findings**

The study assessed the dependency of Nigerian newspapers on the services of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). This is with a view to measure its relevance in the media industry and how it has weathered the storm in the face of the challenges posed by the new media aided by the internet. Following are the findings of the Interviews with key decision makers from a sample of five newspapers, thereafter data from the Content Analysis of three newspapers – The Nation, The Punch and Vanguard making a total of 276 daily publications content analysed.

### **Interview Findings**

With reference to the earlier itemised questions, responses to the first question on the extent to which NAN aids the operations of Nigerian newspapers, suggest that News Agency of Nigeria does aid the operations of the Nigerian newspapers, especially in coverage of areas or on subjects where newspapers do not have comparable staff reporters. Even in areas where they have offices, some newspapers find NAN copy to be more useful because of its timely delivery. The Deputy Editor of The Champion noted,

*“..... you cannot rule out the contribution of the NAN because we have vast areas in the country and you cannot be everywhere at the same time. NAN has correspondents in virtually every state in the federation, just like we do have correspondents in some states. But it is not economically viable for us to maintain offices in all those places. So in places where we don't have physical presence, NAN [news]casts come handy. Even in areas where we have reporters, our reporters cannot be everywhere, so they (NAN) come in with some story leads ....”*

This attests to the superior breadth of NAN operations compared to the newspapers' especially in terms of national coverage. This might be due to the federal might backing the agency, and the civil service structure within which it operates.

Responses to the second question, on the extent to which Nigerian newspapers use materials from NAN, confirmed the observations made on the first; they both acknowledge how crucial NAN service is. Editors confirmed that they use lots of NAN copy, especially news from areas where such subscribers have no reporters. In any case, NAN was deemed to offer useful complementary service as Deputy Editor (News Desk) of The Nation explained:

*“.....The Nation does not have correspondents in some states, especially in the north and so in those places we rely more on NAN reports. Even where we have reporters, NAN reports have helped to complement what our reporters are doing. So we've been using NAN to get our stories from those areas where we do not have reporters.....”*

Responses to the third question was mixed. This may be indicative of the varied resource base of the newspapers. While a picture of heavy reliance on NAN was painted by one respondent, some others seemed not so yoked to the national news agency in sourcing news for their organisations. The Deputy Editor of The Champion described the reliance glowingly:

*“.....There are some times you come to the office and start scouting everywhere, searching and searching [for] good materials, not just about throwing [items in] and filling the pages; that is why most of us get grey hair quickly. So NAN is aiding our operations a great deal. We rely on NAN copy a lot...”*

Other respondents seemed adequately resourced to the point of being comfortable or indifferent about any prospect of having no output from NAN. For instance, the Daily Editor of National Mirror explains why reliance on NAN copy can only be partial, “. . . It is difficult for us to depend or rely heavily on NAN because whatever is coming from NAN is not exclusive to us. So to that extent, we can say well NAN has been helping us to source for news, particularly local news in areas where we are not effectively covering. . .”

It is clear from this that some respondents consider items sourced from NAN as mere complements to those filed by their reporters. It is therefore likely that the strength of a media organisation, which determines its ability to employ enough staff to enable it penetrate the vast country to source or follow up stories exclusively, informs the extent of their reliance on NAN. Where they are handicapped, organisations will take solace in or rely more on NAN.

Responses to the fourth question on how internet and new media affect NAN operations suggest that the new media and easier access to the internet is fast eroding the relevance of the NAN in the media industry. On this, the Daily Editor of The National Mirror expressed the view that:

*“... [Internet] has really affected [our reliance on] the operation of NAN. In the first case, we don't rely on NAN for exclusive stories, but given the influence of the internet and new media, now the IT world has turn[ed] the whole world into a global village and I think NAN will also need to quickly respond to that demand seriously and heavily too. NAN should get out of government control or government schedule: Working [with] a civil service orientation does not work with the concept of journalism.....”*

However, some respondents still believe that despite the vibrancy of new media, the internet aids theirs and NAN's operations without rendering them redundant. The On-line Editor of The Guardian explains this:

*“...the social media these days is gradually taking over from, (let me say) the proper media now. For instance if a story breaks, the social media will give you what I will call the breaking news; they might not have the details. They might just tell [the audience that] this has happened but that may not be enough for your use...”*

Undoubtedly, new media affects the operations of mainstream media; breaking news is now received faster by individuals who using their GSM phones for example, can access social media - Facebook, Twitter, Skype and such. Example of this was the June 3, 2013 Dana plane crash in Lagos. Many people got the news first via social media. They were also able to disseminate it in their personal networks. Traditional media reports trailed these later. This is to be expected in times of crisis going by the Media Dependency theory. Yet, as noted in the quote above, new media opportunities are available to readers as well as newspaper organisations and the NAN itself. It should therefore not be concluded that the NAN's relevance is being eroded.

Besides, it also emerged from the interviews that there were reservations in certain quarters about the fact that the agency operates within a bureaucratic government structure. Some respondent were of the view that the agency needed to be more dynamic as a typical media outfit should be. One daily editor (identity withheld) expressed the following view:

*“I think the most important thing is that they [NAN] should get out of this government yoke of civil service mentality. This idea of operating only between 7:30am to 3:30 pm is not ideal; so what happens after that? Journalism has gone beyond that except you want to serve as information officers for government houses or for ministries and parastatals. If it must run on commercial basis to break even, NAN needs to also break away from government apron [strings] . . .”* Daily Editor [identity withheld]

Such critical views are indicative of attitudes that undermine respect for the agency, perhaps even uptake of its output though this has not waned over the years. Regarding frequency of use, it emerged that heavily reliant subscribers use NAN copy on a daily basis. This was attested to by the Deputy News Editor /Head of On-line Desk at The Champion who found NAN copy was immensely helpful: “[. . .we use it] on daily basis. We use NAN news to keep our online platform updated . . . [filing] news [stories] as they come. So NAN has been helpful in this regard . . .”

This is revealing, though inadequate measure of the frequency of use. The content analysis offers better answers to this question.

### **Content Analysis**

The News Agency of Nigeria has an internal mechanism for measuring its performance - assessing the how its services are used by its clients. These include

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media organisations, governments, diplomatic missions, foreign media organisations and other media content consumers among others. The mechanism consists of weekly data tagged “Record of NAN Output in the Media”; it is generated by the Marketing Department. A designated officer compiles a record of media content sent to subscribers, then monitors how these have been used in the media. They read through newspapers and record which NAN stories and pictures had been used, and how prominent they were in the publication - front page, back page or the inside (run off pages) of such publications. For the purpose of this study, records for the months of October, November and December, 2013 were obtained for analysis as shown below.

Table 1 NAN OUTPUT BETWEEN OCTOBER AND DECEMBER 2013

MONTHS	STORIES SENT	PICTURES SENT	APPEARANCES		P R O M I N E N C E					
			STORIES	PICGS	FRONT	BACK	INSIDE			
					STORIES/PICS	STORIES/PICS	STORIES/PICS			
October	4697 (38.6%)	675 (35.4%)	1686 (38.8%)	1215 (44.6%)	16	126	1670	1082	-	9
November	3911 (32.1%)	595 (31.2%)	1382 (31.8%)	836 (30.7%)	9	68	1373	760	-	12
December	3559 (29.3%)	635 (33.3%)	1272 (29.3%)	672 (24.7%)	10	70	1261	601	1	5
T O T A L	12167 (100%)	1905 (100%)	4340 (100%)	2723 (100%)	35	264	4304	2443	1	26

SOURCE: Marketing Department, News Agency of Nigeria (adapted)

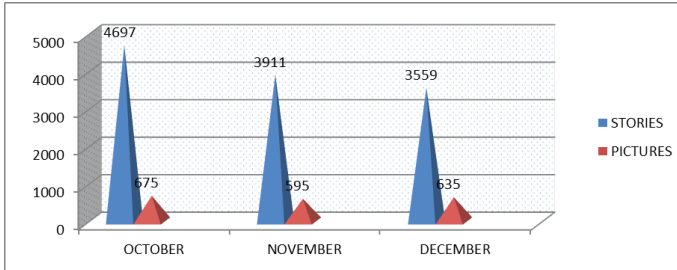
Table 2 NAN OUTPUT UPTAKE: COMPARING APPEARANCES AND ITEMS SENT

	APPEARANCES STORIES	% of Total SENT	APPEARANCES PICTURES	% of Total SENT
October	1686 (38.8%)	35.9	1215 (44.6%)	180.0
November	1382 (31.8%)	35.3	836 (30.7%)	140.5
December	1272 (29.3%)	35.7	672 (24.7%)	105.8
TOTAL	4340 (n) (100%)	35.7	2723 (n) (100%)	142.9

The tables above indicate that 12,167 stories and 1,905 pictures were sent to subscribers in the last quarter of 2013. Overall, it appears that only a fraction of the stories disseminated in the period was used (slightly more than a third or less, of the stories had more than one unique appearance). Some pictures must have been used repeatedly as there were more appearances than pictures sent. The data suggests that on average, pictures may have been used more than once especially in the month of October. In any case, this pattern suggests a greater dependence on NAN for pictures than for stories.

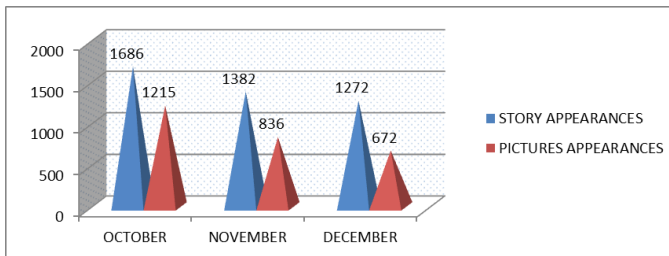
The tables and charts below considers each of the variables separately.

Figure 1: NAN Stories and Pictures Sent to Subscribers - 4th quarter 2013



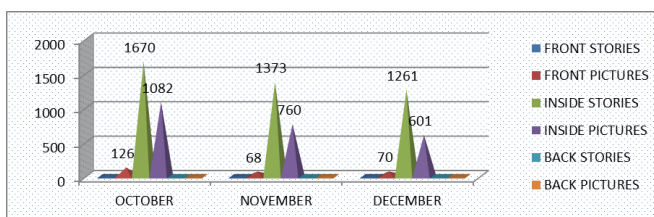
From the above chart, October appears to be the busiest month for news. (This was not investigated though there are likely to be clues to explain this in the social context). NAN sent out 4697 stories in October, higher than 3911 in November and 3559 in December. Similarly a total of 675 pictures were sent in October, higher than 635 and 595 pictures sent in December and November respectively.

Figure 2: Appearance of NAN Stories and Pictures in Subscribing Newspapers - 4th quarter 2013.



From the above chart, it can be deduced that October accounted for 38.6 per cent of the stories sent out by NAN during the study period which is the 4th quarter of 2013. This was followed by November with 32.1 per cent and December with 29.3 per cent. Yet there was not much difference in the monthly uptake of NAN stories by the papers (about 35 per cent in each case - See Table 2 above). This suggests a steady frequency in the use of NAN output by its regular subscribing papers.

Figure 3: Prominence of NAN Stories and Pictures in Subscribing Newspapers - 4th quarter 2013.

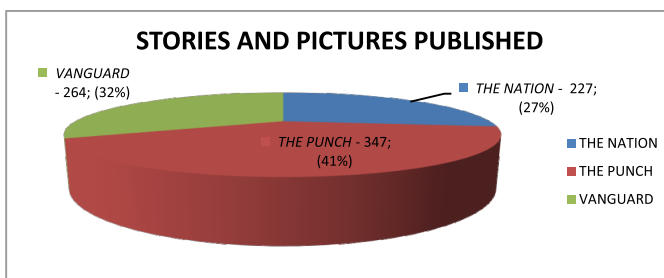


From the above bar chart, it is also clear that a large proportion of the stories sent out were used though merely as fillers for the inside pages of subscribers' publications. Except in few instances, as can be seen from Figure 3 and Table 1 above, NAN copy does not enjoy much prominence in front or back pages. It should be noted that the above analysis was based on secondary data. The analysis thus applies to all newspapers subscribed to NAN at the time, including the sampled titles.

**Content Analysis of Primary Data from Sample Newspapers:**

To afford closer scrutiny, primary data was obtained from a sample of three Nigerian newspapers – The Nation, The Punch and Vanguard. Attention was focused on the format, prominence, space and source of the stories. Regarding presentation format three variables were considered - Core News, Features and Pictures. To study the prominence accorded the stories three variables were considered - Front page, Back page and Inside page stories. Space allotted to the stories was classified into four variables – Full page, Half page, Quarter page and Others. Lastly, consideration was also given to where the stories originated from. Here, the five variables studied were Government, Corporate, NGOs/Labour, Community/Courts and Sports.

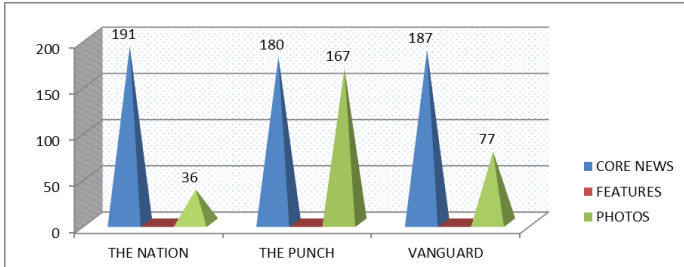
Figure 4: Pie chart of stories and pictures published by the newspapers reviewed in the 4th quarter 2013



The pie chart above indicates that The Punch newspaper uses more NAN output than The Nation and Vanguard. The Punch published 347 items, accounting for 41 per cent of the total number of NAN items published during the 4th quarter. Vanguard follows with 264 items, accounting for 32 per cent, while The Nation published 227 items,

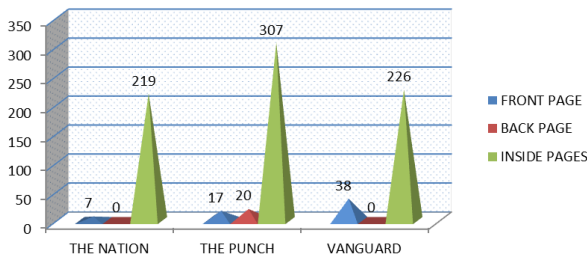
accounting for 27 per cent of the total output published in the period under review.

Figure 5: Presentation Formats of NAN Output in Sample Newspapers - Stories and Pictures - 4th quarter 2013



The column chart above indicated that with regard to the sample newspapers NAN copy was used mostly as core news and pictures. The newspapers did not use any feature articles from the agency throughout the 3-month period under review. The Punch used 167 pictures while Vanguard and The Nation used 77 and 36 pictures respectively. While the core news accounted for 66.7 per cent, the pictures accounted for 33.4 per cent. In this regard, Punch which was the most prolific user of the service is closer to the pattern observed earlier, where there was greater use of pictures than stories. That pattern however became more evident when prominence of output was considered.

Figure 6: Prominence of NAN Output - Stories and Pictures in Sample Newspapers - 4th quarter 2013

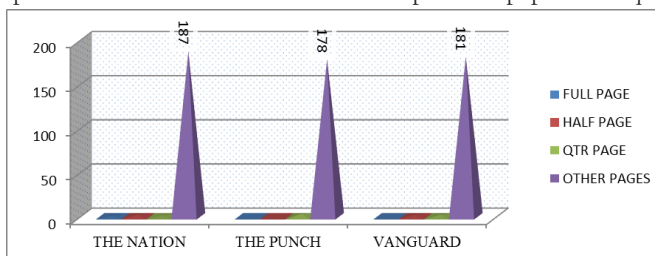


From the chart above, one discovers that NAN output got little or no prominence going by placement on the front or back pages of the newspapers reviewed. In all three papers, most of the NAN output were tucked away inside the papers. Some NAN pictures gained prominence having been featured on the front pages. Vanguard published 38 NAN pictures on its front pages. The Punch published 20 NAN stories on the back pages, whereas The Nation and Vanguard did not publish any NAN output on their back pages during the period. However, it is interesting to note that each publication had used some NAN output (story or picture) on their front pages



even if these were few. That said, another variable worth considering is the space allotted to NAN stories.

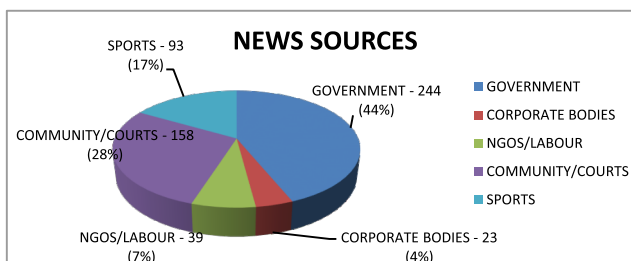
Figure 7: Space Allotments to NAN Stories in Sample Newspapers - 4th quarter 2013



From the above chart (Fig 7), it becomes evident that no single NAN story occupies a Full page in any of the three newspapers in the study sample. It was only The Nation that featured one NAN story on its front page (though there was more of such prominent use of pictures). More than 95 per cent of the stories used were placed just to fill vacant spaces, or merely as one strip -columns.

Lastly, the sources or categories of NAN stories were considered. This was to enable the researcher know the pattern of reporting whether the reports were government dominated or otherwise. Stories were classified along the following lines - Government, Corporate bodies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO)/Labour, Community/Courts and Sports segment.

Figure 8: Pie chart of Sources of NAN Output published in Sample Newspapers



From the above pie-chart (Fig 8), it is evident that most (more than 4 in ten) of the published NAN stories were government stories. This was no surprise, given that the agency is government owned. Community / Courts also accounted for a good proportion (just under three out of ten) of NAN output used by the newspapers. This pattern is consistent with usual news definers and the views of the editors as revealed in the interviews. Sports accounted for 93 out of the total 557 stories analysed (17%).

### **Summary Of Findings And Conclusion**

The study set out to understand how dependent Nigerian newspapers were on NAN especially in the face of new media. It was interested in the manner in which the agency aided newspaper operations, and the frequency of using NAN output. A combination of techniques was used in collecting data and this consisted of primary and secondary data. A sample of newsroom managers, (senior editor cadre) was drawn from five of the national newspapers on NAN subscription. Similarly, its record of the uptake of its output was analysed. Content from a sample of three newspapers was collated and analysed. This sample was drawn from the 55 newspapers that subscribed to NAN copies during the study period which was limited to the last quarter of 2013 being October to December. A total of 92 publications from these three media organisations were studied. This mix techniques helped to clarify the data particularly with regard to the frequency and pattern of use.

In spite of easier access to a variety of internet enabled services and a wider range of sources, the study found that NAN was still a pillar in the newspaper industry. Even if much of its output were not prominent within the newspapers, on the average 1 out of 3 (35%) of the stories sent were used. There was greater reliance on the agency's pictures but news stories were still widely used, most often on run-off pages. The study provided evidence that NAN output was used by newspapers on a daily basis, especially by the papers which were more reliant.

Though some editors do not regard this as indispensable service since they rely on staff reporters for most of their crucial stories, these alone cannot make the publications. Perhaps due to its unique advantage as a government agency, or to established positions on the newsworthiness of government activities, NAN output which can hardly be ignored are government stories. In this way, the agency still keeps faith with the thinking that informed its birth – being the voice of government. It remains a valuable means of professional coverage of far flung courts and local communities. Within established newsroom practices, these are staples of each news-day which may challenge national papers.

One fact that came to bear is that because of its vast reach - with NAN offices in many parts of the country – the agency's service still remains relevant and indispensable in the media industry. Almost all respondents in the interviews attested to the fact that NAN has an edge in the coverage of grassroots. They noted that no newspaper could afford to open offices in all 36 states of the federation, talk less of covering all (774) local governments in the country. So, news managers found subscription to NAN was more economical than investing in offices all over the nation. This did not stop some of them from being critical of what some regarded as NAN's bureaucratic operational structure.

So overall, the following conclusions could be drawn from the study:

- The postulations of the Media Dependency Theory came to play in this study as findings show that Nigerian newspapers greatly depend on NAN in filling the pages of their respective publications because they found it cost effective.
- It was also found that despite its wider coverage and potentials, NAN clientele do not depend on it for quality (lead stories or content fit for use in prominent spaces) and for breaking news.
- While many of its core news do not get prominence because they are placed on inside pages, its photographs compete favourably, appearing in the front and back pages of Nigerian newspapers.
- The ability of NAN to break news fast is also dwindling due to the use of new media on the internet.
- It is perceived in certain quarters, that NAN's ability to satisfy its subscribers is being impeded by the civil service structure, in which it operates.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the foregoing, I wish to recommend as follows:

1. NAN should build on existing strengths by strengthening its photo service, and posting more correspondents to rural areas that are veritable sources of news. The agency should equip them with information and communication technology that would enable them gather and process news without delay, then file news to processing centres instantly. Fast delivery of news is one of the highest codes of wire service. NAN must embrace this afresh mindful of the competition posed by non-specialists due to ready access to the internet.
2. In order to remain relevant as media content provider, NAN should brace up to the challenges posed by the new media. It should employ more qualified reporters, train them especially in the art of wire service operations and improve on its existing mobile alert services.
3. To be able to compete favourably with counterparts in the global arena, NAN may need to break away from the civil service structure under which it currently operates. Embarking on self-sustaining business that could enable it expand its services in such ways that are currently lacking. The uptake of its feature articles is one issue, its scope of coverage is another. Though not covered in the study, NAN is well placed to feed Nigerian newspapers with foreign news that are relevant to the Nigerians just as it does with rural news. In any case, this voice needs to carry more robust content.
4. Educational institutions should also develop curriculum for wire service in order to strengthen capacity in news agency operations and promote academic attention to the sector.

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