



Religious-News Agenda-Timeline and Proximate News Locations' Relativity of Similarly Situated National Newspapers

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Abstract

In view of rapid sophistication of contemporary media news management, it has become enticing to question certain aspects such as the extent of similarity between religious-news coverage of media organizations operating within similarly situated national media. Even in a more diverse intercultural mass contemporary societies, some nations have insisted and foisted certain religion as state-religion. While most persons consider religion as a powerful avenue for gaining awakening, identity information, the mass media is then used as the means to frame and narrate such perspectives. Hence, this content analyses derived data research is presented. With a valid Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, Krippendorff's Alpha instrumentation result of between 0.826 and 1; originally scaled at $\leq 5\%$ error = 2 [Reliable]; $> 5/ \leq 10\%$ error [fairly reliable] = 1; $> 10\%$ error = 0 [not reliable], the major finding point that overall coverage of religious and spiritual news among the randomly selected newspapers is very poor. However, across the four national dailies, local religious news coverage was well higher than those of international and foreign coverage.

Keywords: Religious-News; Spirituality-News Agenda-Timeline; Proximate News Locations; National Newspapers.

Introduction

In almost every society, religion is practiced. Even in a more diverse intercultural mass societies, some nations have insisted and foisted certain religion on state-religion. In the mix of the prominence of religion, the role of the media is eminent. Religion and media are complex interplays of contemporary societies (Jooji & Oguchi, 2018). While most persons consider religion as a powerful avenue for gaining awakening, identity information, the mass media is then used as the means to frame and narrate such perspective. Most religions and relative denominations even own media organizations dedicated to not just their religious messages, but also to influence opinion and attract fellowship beyond ardent worshipers.

The media can be targeted for censorship and criticized because of religion. Irrespective, most of those who criticize the role of media in religion, are religious, and often become sober when addressing the role of religion in the broader society. Indeed, media readily serves as a means of mass religious indoctrination, information, education, expression, and even dialogue. The mass media indeed retain the capacity to frame reality and re-narrate situations such as seen in health controversies (Akinwotu & Nyam, 2018), and politics (Atime & Nyam, 2018; Nyam & Olubodede, 2019; Balabanova, 2007); and human rights (Balabanova, 2015; Balabanova 2017; Balabanova, 2019).

In certain some instances, the media also provides interreligious dialogue (Cantwell & Rashid, 2015). In related circumstances, the relationship between religion and media spans into economics and politics. While the role of technology on media activities has spanned into more complex interplays (Bellagio Centre White Paper, 2017; Brock, 2013; Faris; Roberts; & Etling et al. 2017; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Forenbacher, Husnjak, & Cvitić et al. 2019; Freedman, 2010; Kemp, 2020; Khalil, Dongier, & Qiang; 2009; Schmitz Weiss, 2013; Schmitz Weiss, 2018). Such media technological influence can also be observed between religion and media, the relationship has further evolved and has continued to shape culture, history, health practices and even development. historical, cultural, political, and technological factors (Akinwotu & Nyam, 2018; Atime & Nyam, 2018).

There is a continuing belief that religion and media are two interrelated contemporary experiences. The moment one engages with the media, there is rapid deliberate religious message targeting. Sometimes, it seems religions even compete for quantity of information more than the quality of religious messages. Indeed, long history of the interwoven nature of the use of the mass media for religious purposes has evolved into a phenomenon (Hoover, 2012). Different media types are variously used for religious purposes. In a country such as Nigeria, religious activities seem to have grown faster than industry (Jooji & Oguchi, 2018). The connection of the role of media on religion dates to the invention of the printing press. However, evolving media technologies have equally been more remarkable. In turn, the media has been influenced by religious practices, values, and ideologies. In view of the foregoing and the rapid sophistication of contemporary media news management, it has become enticing to question certain aspects such as the extent of similarity between religious-news coverage of media organizations operating within similarly situated national media.

Statement of the Problem

It is indeed noted that media plays a crucial role in ancient and contemporary societies (Liu, 2023). Due to such knowledge and related scholarship, much research has dwelled on the role of religion, the connection between media and religious practices (Jooji & Oguchi, 2018), the power of religion on media gate keeping principles, as well as the converging nature of media and the place of religious news coverage. While there appears to be some doubts about the attraction of religious news, much of modern politics and economy is strongly tied to religion (Jooji & Oguchi, 2018). The role of media in the mix is therefore not going away soon. However, there is almost no knowledge of the nature of religious-news agenda-timeline similarity among media operating within the same conventional media space.

Lack of such knowledge leave much to assumption about how newspapers in particular given attention to religious activities and relative messages. Besides, emerging data by Nyam (2021) provides an opportunity to examines religious news coverage along not just agenda-timelines, but along delineated news locations. Currently, no study has given such emphatic attention to how similarly situated conventional newspapers approach the coverage of religion. Besides, how local, international, and foreign religious news coverage unfolds in relation to conventional newspapers news priorities remains obscured. Such media undertones as relates to alluded importance of religion and the news priorities of conventional newspapers prompted this research.

Research Questions

This article is based on the following research questions:

1. How appreciable are the religious-news agenda-timeline similarity of randomly selected national-newspapers?
2. To what extent is there religious-news theme coherence amongst the randomly selected national newspapers?
3. How are proximate news locations implicated in the religious-news timeline-based theme coherence amongst the selected national newspapers?

Review of Relevant Literature

Agenda-timeline refers to the time within which a given media issue or theme is given coverage. Proximate locations allude to where news is from. These locations can be local, international (involving more locations across national boundaries) and foreign. How national newspapers cover certain cogent themes like religious activities therefore forms the nucleus of this research. Indeed, how religious believers and relative institutions depend on the media is critical. The manner of similarity (or otherwise) of such religious news coverage from newspapers hosted within similar geo-location stands to be informative. Via religious activities that are in turn propagated by the mass media, communication tools prime and frame religious narratives, constructs, practices, identities and in some instances, bridge gaps of misunderstanding.

However, the interplays between media and religion can also become controversial towards even outright conflict and misunderstanding. As such, media representations of religious activities in any given news environment would either strive for coagulation or varied representation. Different religious interests, values and perspectives do shape how media in turn approaches religious news coverages. Persuasive theories of the media may in turn possibly applied to convince opposition views and encourage followers (Nyam & Olubodede, 2017; Nyam, 2022; Nyam & Olubodede, 2023). Media can be deemed to misrepresent or stereotype some religion for various reasons. However, such can also be because of lack of professionalism and or relative knowledge. In other instances, the newspapers may be accused of subjectivity, outright bias, and sensationalism. In return, opposing religious ardent followers may criticize or resist media for being secular, immoral, or intrusive. Convertibly, media and religion may also compete for the attention of expectedly loyal audiences in an increasingly polarized global and pluralistic world.

In multicultural societies such as Nigeria, there are equally multi-religious activities (Nyam & Oyewole, 2019). How newspaper editors abide to pre-existing template of news selection and placement may become more challenging. In turn, poor coverage of religious activities may be investigated by differing enthusiast. In places like Nigeria, religious leaders sometimes accused some media organisations of neglect, and have gone on to select rival media or even institute in-house press. Such attitude is manifested with the notion that religion plays a significant role in the lives of Nigerians (Nyam & Oyewole, 2019). In fact, religious influences also affect most Nigerians get exposed to media contents. The diversity of the country is characterized by serious religious sentiments that even affect partisan politics and well as relative developmental opportunities (Jooji & Oguchi, 2018).

Around the world, some major religious groups include Islam, Christianity, traditionalist, Hinduism, Buddhism. However, Islam, Christianity and traditional religions are the dominant religions in Nigeria (Jooji & Oguchi, 2018; Nyam & Oyewole, 2019). Most of the world's religions even have dedicated media outlets, such as newspapers, magazines, television stations, radio stations, mobile applications, and other online platforms. Some even have social media handles, pages, and platforms (Nyam & Oyewole, 2019). These media outlets provide avenues for peculiar expressions of faith, and offer nuanced information, education, and entertainment for relative audiences. Such media channels also serve as means of expression and propagation faith-based values. Generally, religion build the fabric of most people. Some religious organisations have gone on to even own schools, hospitals, and international development agencies. The extent to which these venture assist towards enhancement of relative religious ideologies may not be clear. However, such efforts point to how crucial efforts have been made towards maintenance of indoctrination or relative religious independence.

Overall, the interplays between the media and religion across societies is complex. In places like Nigeria, the nexus of religion-media relations is so complex that it sometimes becomes very challenging agree on varying civil engagement perspectives (Nyam & Oyewole, 2019). Indeed, since the derived content analysis data used for this research was collected from Nigeria, it is cogent to address to discuss more about the relationship between religion and media from the perspective of the country. Nigeria is a country with diverse religious beliefs and practices, and hate speech is also increasing amidst social media adoptions (Ademosa & Oyeleye, 2019). Like in most other places, religion serve as the platform for social, economic, and political development of Nigeria. Religion influences the values, norms, and behaviours of Nigerians, as well as their aspirations and expectations for the future (Nyam & Oyewole, 2020). Religion can enhance peaceful coexistence, unity, tolerance, and social justice among different groups and communities. However, religion can also quickly become the flash point of disagreements (Nyam & Uwujougu, 2021). In other encouraging circumstances, religion can inspire acts of goodwill and charity (Hoover, 2012). However, religion can also become an unhealthy obsessive engagement, and foster a sense of subjective identity (Lövheim, 2004). In countries like Nigeria - just as in many other places, religion can also be a source of violence, bitter crisis, and even war. In Nigeria, religion sometimes even serve to justify discrimination, oppression, extremism against people of other faiths, and may even result to bases of civil disobedience.

The notion of religious news content from conventional media is built on the premise that religion can also hinder development (Cantwell & Rashid, 2015; Nyam & Oyewole, 2020). This is possible via inculcated dogmatism, intolerance, and conservatism that resist change and innovation. Via religious beliefs, religion can also enhance the gap between the rich and the poor. This is because some religious leaders use the media to drive religious propaganda and exploit gullible religious followers towards certain selfish gains. Empirically, data points that people rarely confuse religious news contents. There is a very high chance that once religious news is spread, audiences and readers will readily recognise such news as being religious. Example, research by Nyam (2021) found that two independent coders had 100% agreements amongst them when they coded newspapers contents according to 19 properly delineated themes. Results of the test showed Sum of $d^2(\sigma d^2) = 0$, with an R-Value of 1 [perfect correlation value for religion/spirituality newspapers contents]

This article is theoretical anchored on agenda-setting theory and proximate locations theory. While agenda setting theory is used because of the expected role of the media to set agenda Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso 2008; Deuze & McQuail, 2020; the proximate locations theory is used to frame the notion that media in any given location would not just cover activities in the immediate environment, but also activities in extend proximate news locations (Nyam, 2019). Overall, the two theories imply the role of newspapers in covering religious activities and highlighting varying religious narratives. Such newspaper coverage is not just for the sake of relative religious agenda, but how such agenda is considered across other proximate religious news locations that are considered by the newspapers -which are randomly selected but operating within similar situated news environment (Nyam, 2021).

Method of Research

The content analysis research method was used for collection of the original data upon which this article is based. The content analysis was by Nyam (2021). Content analysis is a critical method of data collection used in media and communication research such as this (Wimmer and Dominic, 2011). However, the entire process and outcome of the research was carefully reviewed towards certainty of research quality and relative derived data. Aspects that were examined include the overall research method, population of study, the samples of the selected newspapers. The said newspapers were all considerable prominent national dailies circulating in Nigeria. However, it was ascertained that all the four randomly selected newspapers cover news activities beyond Nigeria. This enables this article to cover the earlier mentioned proximate news locations. The content coding guide used for the in the original research was also re-examined for content coding validity and reliability. This enabled this research to attain reasonable level of derived content analytical data validity, consistency as well as external validity. (Nyam, 2021).

The randomly selected national newspapers were [*Daily Sun, The Guardian, Vanguard, The Punch*]. Overall, 360 editions constituted the population of study. However, using an interval of 1:4, 21 editions were selected from each newspaper. All the newspapers were considered within the same agenda-timeline of 3 months. The total sample size of 21 editions multiplied by 4 resulted to a grand sample size of 84 (Nyam, 2021). The final sample was found to be at more than 95% confidence level -which is generally acceptable (Rasul, 2009). Test of alidity and

reliability showed a religious news RHO (Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient) of 1 [Sum of $d^2(\sigma^2) = 0$, with P-Value of 1 [perfect positive correlation]. RHO for the respective proximate news locations (local, international, and foreign) were all at 1 as well as.

While the inter-coder validity and reliability test of respective proximate news locations showed that *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* had 100% percentage agreement, with Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha all at 1 *Vanguard* and *The Punch* newspapers both had 66.7% percentage agreements and respective X-Y inter-coder Scott's pi of -0.2; 0 Cohen's kappa of; and 0 Krippendorff's Alpha. However, there was only 1 disagreement in each of the 3 cases for proximate news locations. This means the 3 N-cases affected the final intercoder scores. All proximate news locations' intercoder validity and reliability test scores were interpreted on a scale of $\leq 5\%$ error = 2 [reliable]; $> 5\% / \leq 10\%$ error [fairly reliable] = 1; $> 10\%$ Error = 0 [not reliable] (Nyam, 2021).

In terms of actual news contents, *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian*, and *The Punch* still had 100% percentage agreement. Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, Krippendorff's Alpha were found to be impressively at 1. However, *Vanguard* had 94.7% X-Y inter-coder percentage agreement; Scott's pi = .825; Cohen's kappa = .826; Krippendorff's Alpha = .829. Nevertheless, there were 0 disagreements amongst the 19 test cases, and 38 decisions. Scale of interpretation was $\leq 5\%$ error = 2 [Reliable]; $> 5\% / \leq 10\%$ error [fairly reliable] = 1; $> 10\%$ error = 0 [not reliable]. All tests were conducted using X and Y independent coders (Nyam, 2021).

Data

Table 1: Coverage of religion/spirituality

| Key: F =Frequency | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------|-----|
| Media | Content Types: Hardcopies | | | | | |
| | Local | | International | | Foreign | |
| | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| <i>Daily Sun</i> | 28 | 2 | 2 | 0.8 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>The Guardian</i> | 53 | 3.6 | 1 | 0.3 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Vanguard</i> | 38 | 2.1 | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.4 |
| <i>The Punch</i> | 21 | 1.6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cumulative Evaluations (F) | Local | | International | | Foreign | |
| Mean (Average) | 35 | | 1 | | 0.25 | |
| Standard Deviation (SD) | 13.88044 | | 0.8165 | | 0.5 | |
| Variance (SD) | 192.66667 | | 0.66667 | | 0.25 | |
| Population SD | 12.02082 | | 0.70711 | | 0.43301 | |
| Variance (Population SD) | 144.5 | | 0.5 | | 0.1875 | |
| Cumulative Evaluations (%) | Local | | International | | Foreign | |
| Mean (Average) | 2.325 | | 0.35 | | 0.1 | |
| Standard Deviation (SD) | 0.87702 | | 0.33166 | | 0.2 | |
| Variance (SD) | 0.76917 | | 0.11 | | 0.04 | |
| Population SD | 0.75952 | | 0.28723 | | 0.17321 | |
| Variance (Population SD) | 0.57688 | | 0.0825 | | 0.03 | |

Source: Derived Content Analysis Data, 2023

Results of data shown in table 1 implied that the newspapers did not give substantial attention to religious and spiritual news coverage. However, across the four national dailies, local religious news coverage was well higher than those of international and foreign coverage.

Table 2: Respective positions of the coverage of religion/spirituality

| Media | Content Type: Hardcopies | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Local | International | Foreign |
| <i>Daily Sun</i> | 12- | 10+ | 0+ |
| <i>The Guardian</i> | 13- | 14+ | 0+ |
| <i>Vanguard</i> | 13- | 12- | 8- |
| <i>The Punch</i> | 14- | 0+ | 0+ |
| Point-Biserial Co. Coefficient | r = NaN [Not Sig.] | r = NaN [Not Sig.] | r = NaN [Not Sig.] |
| Cumulative Evaluations | Local | International | Foreign |
| Mean (Average) | 13 | 9 | 2 |
| Standard Deviation (SD) | 0.8165 | 6.21825 | 4 |
| Variance (SD) | 0.66667 | 38.66667 | 16 |
| Population SD | 0.70711 | 5.38516 | 3.4641 |
| Variance (Population SD) | 0.5 | 29 | 12 |
| Position Legend | + = Tied Position | 0 = No Position | - = No Other position |

Source: Derived Content Analysis Data, 2023

Similarly, data in data table 2 portray a similar levels of local religious news coverage. Irrespective, it can be observed that the religious and spiritual news coverage positions according to international and foreign news locations were more varied. The data further confirms the postulation of the proximate locations -that similarly situated media organisations are very likely to have similar levels of agenda-timeline and potions of coverage. However, the emphasis on local and international religious news coverage were more cohesive than foreign religious news. This implies that how low, the newspapers gave attention to religious activities that had not connection with the immediate media environment.

Table 3: Test of significance of coverage of religion/spirituality

| Sub-Table 1: Local locations | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------|----------------|
| Test Series | Test Entities | X ² | P-Value | DF1 Rendition |
| Ho1 ^A | <i>Daily Sun vs. The Guardian</i> | 0.4 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho1 ^B | <i>Daily Sun vs. Vanguard</i> | 0.002 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho1 ^C | <i>Daily Sun vs. The Punch</i> | 0.04 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho1 ^D | <i>The Punch vs. The Guardian</i> | 0.79 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho1 ^E | <i>The Punch vs. Vanguard</i> | 0.07 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho1 ^F | <i>Vanguard vs. The Guardian</i> | 0.40 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Sub-Table 2: International locations | | | | |
| Test Series | Test Entities | X ² | P-Value | DF 1 Rendition |
| Ho2 ^A | <i>Daily Sun vs. The Guardian</i> | 0.22 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho2 ^B | <i>Daily Sun vs. Vanguard</i> | 0.22 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------|----------------|
| Ho2 ^C | <i>Daily Sun vs. The Punch</i> | 0.80 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho2 ^D | <i>The Punch vs. The Guardian</i> | 0.30 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho2 ^E | <i>The Punch vs. Vanguard</i> | 0.30 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho2 ^F | <i>Vanguard vs. The Guardian</i> | 0 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Sub-Table 3: Foreign locations | | | | |
| Test Series | Test Entities | X ² | P-Value | DF 1 Rendition |
| Ho3 ^A | <i>Daily Sun vs. The Guardian</i> | 0 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho3 ^B | <i>Daily Sun vs. Vanguard</i> | 0.4 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho3 ^C | <i>Daily Sun vs. The Punch</i> | 0 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho3 ^D | <i>The Punch vs. The Guardian</i> | 0 | <0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho3 ^E | <i>The Punch vs. Vanguard</i> | 0.4 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho3 ^F | <i>Vanguard vs. The Guardian</i> | 0.4 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Sub-Table 4: Proximate news locations differences amongst the newspapers | | | | |
| Test Series | Test Entities | X ² | P-Value | DF 3 Rendition |
| Ho4 ^A | Relative local locations | 1.01 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho4 ^B | Relative international locations | 0.9 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |
| Ho4 ^C | Relative foreign locations | 1.20 | >0.05 | No. Sig. Diff. |

Source: Derived Content Analysis Data, 2023

Statistical test of levels of respective proximate cations of religious news activities were not significantly different. In fact, the statistical figures between the respective newspapers and among the proximate religious news coverage showed were so slim and even zero in many instances. Religious and spiritual news coverage is herein shown to have poor but very similar attention among the randomly selected national newspapers.

Discussion of Findings

The newspapers did not give substantial attention to religious and spiritual news coverage. This does not align with popular literature about religion -that religious activities may attract much attention and become heated (Jooji & Oguchi, 2018). However, the data does confirm that media activities around religious activities are likely to be similar covered Nyam & Oyewole, 2019).

The implication of local religious news coverage -at a very similar level across the newspapers also confirms that similarly situated conventional newspapers are likely to have very similar attitude towards religious activities. Proximate locations theory is therefore confirmed to hold scholarly relevance towards understanding of religious activities and relative media attention (Nyam, 2019). This research also points to agenda setting attitude of similarly situated newspapers -with also aligns with the broader postulation of agenda setting theory (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso 2008).

Conclusion

Considering relative data resented in this article, religious and spiritual activities appear not to be generally seen as substantial development-themes. The overall coverage of religious and spiritual news among the randomly selected newspapers is very poor. However, local, and international

religious activities have a higher cohesion than foreign religious activities. This means irrespective of the low coverage, newspapers similarly situated are more likely to have similar religious news locations, agenda-timelines, development-theme profile, and overall news coverage priority.

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