

## AN EXPLICATORY ANALYSIS OF TIMELINESS CRITERION IN NEWS REPORTAGE

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper is a discourse on the mass media with reference to the observance of the timeliness criterion in the reportage of news. It was argued that for news (especially hard news) to make the desired impact, timeliness is a core demand. It is a yardstick amongst others, which is always employed to assess the worthiness of an event. It also contended that the broadcast media (radio and television) have effectively fulfilled the demand of this criterion better than the print media (newspaper and magazine). This is as a result of the nature of the broadcast media and the emergence of modern broadcasting technologies which have helped to enhance immediacy in the reportage of events. It further argues that much as the broadcast media have been acclaimed to be very timely in their account of events in Nigeria, the privately owned broadcast media have been adjudged to be timelier than government owned broadcast stations. This is based on a number of factors including the availability of modern equipment as well as well trained and motivated journalists. It was concluded that there was a fundamental need for the mass media (both private and government owned) to observe this criterion in virtually all their reports to attract the attention of the audience.*

**KEYWORDS:** Timeliness, Criterion, News, Reportage, Explicatory

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### INTRODUCTION

At the heart of news reportage is timeliness. It is a fundamental criterion for newsworthiness. For news (especially hard news) to make the desired impact, timeliness is a core demand. It is a yardstick amongst others, which is always employed to assess the worthiness of an event. Laying credence to the above assertion, Okunna (1999, p.46), affirmed that “the quality of newness is the most fundamental of the criteria for determining what should qualify as news”.

Supporting Okunna’s assertion, Uwakwe, (2005, p.50), affirmed that; The more recent an event is at the time of going to air or publication, the more timely and interesting it becomes. The closer the event, the more interesting it is; currency gives news life. Remember, “Nothing is as dead as yesterday’s news”. This “latest development” gives news its last minute effect.

Obviously, the factor of timeliness is no doubt very necessary when reporting events, including the emergence of crisis. Code 1.4.3 of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code asserts that; “In calling attention to crisis, timely basic information shall be provided to assist the public and to facilitate rescue and other forms of amelioration. In so doing, the practitioners shall be protected by the commission”.

The above assertion is no doubt, an obvious attestation to the necessity of timeliness in conflict reportage. In fact, it is very correct to state here that timeliness is a social responsibility which

places a demand on the media to give timely account of events. Here, it goes far beyond just giving account of events. Rather, timely account is seriously expected of the media. This is very fundamental. As Ozoh, (2000, p.2), opined;

News is often regarded as a perishable commodity. Therefore, it must be timely if it is to have value. This is in the sense that if an account of an event is not rendered as soon as it happened, such an account may become stale later on. In essence, therefore, one of the principle consideration in deciding on the newsworthiness or not of an event is whether an account of such an event at the given time is timely.... Television and radio excel in this regard.

Furthermore, Okunna, (p.46), in agreement with the assertion of Ozoh, affirmed that; Timeliness is the newness of news. A newsworthy event should be reported after the shortest possible time interval following its occurrence otherwise, it ceases to be news. More so, Ngwu, (2000, p.38), opined that;

We regard news as a perishable commodity. As such, it must be timely in order to have value. This is in the sense that you render an account of an event as soon as it happened. In other words, the account must have recency. If the account is not timely, the news becomes stale.

Ngwu, (p.52) further contends that “because news has always been regarded as a perishable commodity, which is capable of getting sour, and coupled with competition from other mass media organizations, the reporter always find himself faced with deadlines for filling news reports”.

The various assertions and critical opinions are clear indications that very often, media reports thrive on the platform of timeliness. As affirmed by notable scholars cited above, media reports must be timely to make the desired impact.

### **Fulfilment of the Timeliness Criterion by Print and Broadcast Media**

The broadcast media (radio and television) have proved to effectively satisfy this criterion. This is as a result of the nature of these broadcast media and the emergence of modern broadcasting technologies which have helped to enhance immediacy in the reportage of events. Most often, broadcast media relay live events as they go on. Affirming this, Ngwu (p.38) stated that “in terms of recency, television and radio excel most, while newspapers and magazines (print media) take a longer process in news production, and so are not that fast”. Ozoh, (p.2) also affirmed that television and radio excel in this regard. Newspaper and magazine, because of their considerable longer production process are not as fast as radio and television”.

The broadcast media, as affirmed earlier, observe this criterion of timeliness very effectively and much better than the print media. This has been made possible by its nature and technological build-up. This has afforded them the avenue to bring very timely reports to their

audience. The Nigerian Broadcasting Code (code 1.4.1) stated that, “immediacy enables broadcasting to bring information on issues of national concern and crisis to the audience”.

The above assertions are pointers to the efficacy of the broadcast media in satisfying this demand of timely reports. They are equipped with communication gadgets/technologies which ultimately enhance the emergence of timely reports.

### **Observance of the Timeliness Criterion by Private and Government Broadcast Media in Nigeria**

Much as the broadcast media have been acclaimed to be very timely in their account of events, the privately owned broadcast media have been adjudged to be timelier than government owned broadcast stations. Scholars have contended that timely reportage of developments/events is better performed by privately owned broadcast stations. Okafor, (2011, p.51) gave credence to the above argument. In a study he carried out, it was discovered amongst others that privately owned broadcast stations disseminate timely information more than government owned. The study further unveiled that based on the fact that the privately owned broadcast media are well equipped with modern equipment, and their staff well remunerated and motivated, they tend to give reports of events as soon as they unfold.

More so, John (2012, p.40) upheld Okafor’s findings when he discovered in his study that Channels TV (privately owned) gave timely account of conflicts more than NTA (government owned).

Furthermore, Essien (2012, p.84) unveiled in his study that privately owned media were timelier than government owned in their reportage of Jos crisis. Also, Okorie (2012, p.76) revealed in his study that privately owned broadcast media have been timelier than government owned in their reportage of the Boko Haram crisis.

### **CONCLUSION**

This place of timeliness in news reportage cannot be over emphasized. It is one of the key factors that attract audience attention to the news. In this regard, there is a fundamental need for the mass media (both private and government owned) to observe this criterion in virtually all their reports to attract the attention of the audience.

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