EDITORIAL WRITING: AN ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL APPROACH

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CHAPTER 1
MEANING OF EDITORIAL

The mass media as a social institution is a court of public opinion. Through Radio, TV, Newspaper expressed to members of the public. The mass media also serve as an avenue for marketing of ideas as they determine public thinking and set agenda for public discourse. The media is a tool for altitudinal change and public orientation.

Editorials in print media especially newspaper have profound powers of bringing robust change in the society. This chapter takes a look at the meaning of editorial.

The term editorial is defined by different scholars and professional from different perspectives. A veteran Newspaper editor, William Allen White once described editorial as “an expression of opinion based on factors which present truth in a new light; something that everyone knows which no one ever thought of.”

Lion Flint in his book, *The Editorial* sees editorial as an expression of the editor while M. Spencer captured the subject matter as “a presentation of facts and opinion in concise, logical, pleasing order for the sake of entertaining or interpreting significant news in such a way that its importance to the average reader will be clear.”

The opinion function of the mass media has made editorial writing a celebrated concept for serious-minded newspapers just as news commentary is to broadcast media. From historical angle, the term editorial used to mean an article written by the Editor. In the early part of the nineteenth century, a notion of journalistic objectivity was developed. It was reasoned that there was need to separate news from the editor’s opinion. This was to enable the reader to be exposed to news without fear or favour and to give the opinion column appropriate labeling.
As far back in 1830, the term editorial was used as a label to designate a statement of the editor’s opinion. Later in the 20th century, the history of editorials witnessed a remarkable breakthrough. Around this period, newspapers across the globe had designated a separate editorial page for editorials and letters to the editor.

This distinctive location or positioning of the editorial page around this era is worth noting. It is always in a left hand page, usually in the front section.

Today, modern newspapers have expanded, dignified and enriched the editorial page to an extent that they use the facing page for lengthier opinions by columnist and guest writers. This is known as op-ed, meaning, opposite the editorial page.

Editorial as a concept conveys deeper meaning. Iyorkyaa (1996) defines editorials as “a journalistic essay which attempts to: (a) inform or explain; (b) persuade or convince; (c) stimulate insight in an entertaining or humorous manner.”

Okoro, N & Agbo, B (2003) looked at editorial as “a critical evaluation, interpretation and presentation of significant, contemporary events in such a way as to inform, educate, entertain and influence the reader.” According to them, an editorial affords a publication the opportunity to be more than just a “work factory”, something more than a common information carrier. This opportunity enables the publication to exercise a positive force in its area of circulation.

Simply put, editorial is a corporate opinion, voice or expression of media organizations on topical issues of public significance. It is a robust article by a news organization, which expresses an opinion rather than attempting to simply report news. Because of this, an editorial is supposed to be devoid of biases.

A lot of factors determine the taste and direction of an editorial in a newspaper set-up. Interpretation of opinion in newspaper industry is fundamentally guided by the policy and philosophy of the newspaper.
Ownership influence is also a cardinal factor that determines the direction which an editorial canoe could be paddled to.

It is important for us to take a look at two editorials, for a deeper appreciation of the subject matter.

Sample 1: **Unlimited Campaign Expenses**

No association, other than a political party, shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election – section 221 of the 1999 Constitution.

The implications of the law quoted above are obvious. The spirit of the law must have been to make the electioneering terrain more even for all and not allow money to dominate politics which should essentially be a battle of ideas.

How were these laws observed in these elections? They were serially breached as was the case in the elections since 1999. The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, which is meant to effect compliance, seems unaware of the law. Obviously, many of the presidential candidates, many who sought office of governor, and legislators smashed the limits.

Noting will happen to the offenders because INEC has not been prompted about the importance of this law. Or is INEC concerned the law would affect some of the favoured candidates? INEC’s lack of interest in this law, is contrary to its tenacious contention of some constitutional provisions, of a draining engagement that contributed immensely to fracturing the elections?

INEC again turned a blind eye to the violations of these provisions. The result was that there were various groups raising funds for the benefit of some candidates, in the same way that Corporate Nigeria did for President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003.

It is not just against the law for candidates to unleash humongous amounts of money on campaign; it also foretells the tendency of such candidate
if they get into office. How else will they recover their investment or reward those who contributed to their war chest?

Another salient issue would be the source of the money. How would we be sure that money from dubious sources was not mobilized for the elections? Sections 225 and 226 of the constitution mandates INEC to audit the accounts of political parties annually and gives INEC powers to seize funding from abroad. Has INEC done these? Why is it uninterested on how parties and candidates are funded?

INEC’s self-appraisal that has awarded it high marks, for conducting elections that it would appear INEC was reluctant to execute, is an indication of the laxity with which INEC approached an important assignment.

If INEC knew the Constitution’s expectations from it, it would bury its head in shame over its conduct of these elections that have marked Nigeria out again as an undeveloping nation. The most nauseating part of it is that INEC is really celebrating this success.

Source: Vanguard, Wednesday April 25, 2007

Sample 2: Etteh and the multi-million Naira renovation scandal

Less than three months after assuming office, the speaker of the House of Representatives, Mrs. Patricia Olubunmi Etteh, is already in the midst of a sickening scandal. She is alleged to have spent a whopping N628 million to renovate her official residence, as well as that of her deputy, Babangida Nguroje. Amidst the crossfire, the Chairman, House Committee on Information and National Orientation, Dino Melaye, said that an approval of N232 (not N238 million or N628 million) was sought and got for the renovation of the speaker’s official residence alone. This claim has been debunked.

Even then, what is the difference if the issue is that the amount (whichever of the two) was spent on renovation? That contract for the jobs were allegedly advertised only on the notice board of the National Assembly compounds the situation.
But a scandal of such magnitude should have no place in this era of transparency. It therefore should not be a surprise that some other members of the House of Representatives are angry over the matter, with some threatening an earthquake (in a country which has never experienced this kind of natural disaster) when the matter is brought before the House for discussion after its recess on September 4.

Even if the official quarters renovated were of Arabian-night standard in terms of opulence and size, they should not have gulped the amount of money expended on them. Would it not have cost the nation far less to build, outright, new apartments for the two principal officers?

Even if Melaye’s claim of an approval of N232m were true, there is still something fundamentally wrong with the way public funds are wasted or stolen, especially through inflated contracts.

This renovation imbroglio stinks to high heavens, and only a diligent probe can remove the odour. Right now, the buck has been passed to Mr. President to clear the filthy air, that is to say how much he knows about this buzzing, booming confusion and tell us whether he approved of this colossal expenditure for the renovation as claimed by some of Etteh’s supporters. It is not the problem of the House alone as the president claimed.

The real problem in this ugly episode is people’s over-reliance on government largesse. Chief Obafemi Awolowo has said it all when he advised people never to enjoy in government what they cannot enjoy in their private lives. It is very unlikely that any national person would want to spend as much as that to renovate an official residence if such money were to come from a private purse. All public officials must imbibe Awo’s stated ideal as the beginning of wisdom as far as spending of public money is concerned.

This scandal is a litmus test for the House of Representatives resumes today from recess. This is not a ‘family affair.’

Source: The nation, Tuesday, September 4, 2007
EDITORIAL WRITERS

Editorial writing is not a one-man show. It is a product of collective deliberations arrived at through the consensus of editorial board member.

In some newspaper establishments, editorial writing is mainly the task of Editorial Page Editor who is assisted by other editorial writers within an organization. This therefore means that if a writer is assigned to write an editorial, he/she must submit the piece to the editorial page editor who in turn edits it before it gets published. The Editorial Page Editor is usually an experienced and knowledgeable fellow, a tested and acknowledge person in the art and science of editorial writing.

In some newspaper organizations, editorial writers are usually drawn from different professional and intellectual backgrounds. They are pooled together under the auspices of editorial board members. Such men of high intellectual prowess are appointed by media establishments based on their reputation and analytical powers of complex and topical issues.

Under such arrangement, the editorial board chairman, usually appointed on merit often preside over the editorial board meetings. The editorial board chairman assign topics to other editorialists and also edits their works. As a rule of the thumb, the editorial board members must submit their write-ups to the editorial board for microscopic scrutiny before publication.

Whether editorials are written internally by in-house board members of a newspaper outfit or written by external board members, one thing is certain: the topics must be topical. The topics are usually selected and discussed at brainstorming sessions after which they are endorsed for publication by editorial board members.

Editorial board members, especially the external ones, are entitled to certain allowances or honorariums depending on the financial strength of the media organization.
Generally speaking, a good editorial writer must possess the following qualities:

i. **Intellectual curiosity**: This refers to the ability to probe issues from academic and critical point of view.

   Samples 1: The ASUU strike: A post-mortem

   Following the personal intervention of President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua, the prolonged and debilitating strike embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to press home its demands for improved working conditions was suspended during the weekend. In the words of the ASUU President, specially, the last strike declared on March 26, 2007 “is the direct outcome of consistent Nigerian Governments’ neglect and refusal to pay the necessary attention to education particularly the University system”, now on the verge of collapse.

   Across the country, undergraduates and parents heaved a sigh of relief. Parents who had been distraught over their wards’ prolonged stay at home were indeed relieved that the Ya’Adua administration with support from other well-meaning Nigerians, had managed to persuade without concretely addressing the issues in contention. It is possible a deal was reached between the President and the Union.

   **Source**: Extract from the Guardian’s editorial, Tuesday, July 5, 2007.

ii. **Analytical mind**: The editorial writer must be able to look deep at the pros and cons of an issue and harmonies both the opposing and supportive variables in an editorial superstructure.

   Sample 2: Naira and Soludonomics

   Three years after Professor Chukwuma Soludo, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, announced a bang that compressed the number of Nigerian banks from 89 to 25, he has come with another shocker, probably more resounding and shocking than the first.
While consolidation, as the firming up of the capital base of banks to 25 billion naira was known, was a policy in the files of CBN before Soludo’s arrival, its quick implementation against vociferous oppositions, from those who reminded him that he was not a banker bore the marks of Soludo. Nigerians were introduced to Soludonomics, a brand of economics with soludo’s signature.

Source: Extracts from Vanguard’s editorial, August 20, 2007

iii. **Mastery of language:** An editorialist must have a good command of the language in which the editorial is to be written: For English speaking audience for instance, a good command of English language is a non-negotiable factor. It is, indeed, a child of necessity.

Sample 3: **Between Honour and Sychophancy**

In recent times, President Ibrahim Babagida has been a recipient of several awards, commemorations and proposed honorary degrees. In many states of the federation, many major streets and public buildings have been named after him. Monuments of historical significance have also had their original names replaced with President Babagida’s name. When a leader is so recognized, he and his programmers are assumed to be popular. Every leader craves for such recognition.

Source: Extracts from The Guardian’s editorial, June 9, 1991

iv. **Care for details:** In editorial writing, issues are supposed to be logically and meticulously trashed. It is only people who care for details that can unveil tiny but significant molecules underlying any conceptual phenomenon under probe.

Sample 4: **Happiest people on Earth**

The recently published study, by the British New Scientist magazine, which rates Nigerians as the happiest people on earth, appeared at first glance to be funny. On closer reflection, it is curious, thought-provoking, confounding and at the same time controversial. How on earth can you anyone conduct a
study and come up with a determination that the happiest people in world live in Nigeria? This is a country that is fast attainting the status of a failed or failing state. This is a country where nothing seems to work. This is a country where a lot natural resources and huge human potential which is for 43 years have been so mismanaged as to render majority of citizens among the poorest in the world. No other country perhaps surpasses Nigeria in the record of confounding and bizarre events. These range from murder of a federal attorney-general, to the unconstitutional abduction and attempt to remove an elected governor. This is also the trivializing of serious national issues as “family affair”, bribery and corruption in high places and of course, protracted inter-ethnic wars as wells as frequent anti–people policies that tend to deepened the abject poverty in land. Nigerians are presently embattled with high prices of fuel, which nonetheless is unavailable. Yet in the midst of penury, a handful of elite live a glamorous and extravagant lifestyle comparable with the richest and the best in the world. The list of ludicrous episodes in the country is endless. Such incidents occur with striking regularity and frequency that is rare.

Source: Extracts from the Guardian’s editorial, October 12, 2003.

v. Good knowledge and professional skills of writing for the mass media:
The fact that somebody is a professor or a doctorate degree holder in an area does not automatically make him/her a good editorial writer. In-fact, there are some academics who can make a monumental mockery of editorial writing if they are not drilled in the art of writing for the mass media. An editorial writer ought to understand the workings of mass media outfits including the house style of the establishment he/she is writing for. The knowledge of writing for the mass media is very crucial for any editorial writer.

Sample 5: The President, Media and Nation Building

If reports in the media of a recent meeting between President Olusegun Obasanjo and the Nigerian Guild of editors are anything to go by, the meeting obviously was one-sided. The president reportedly told the visiting editors that
their media organizations are still involved in “militant journalism” the era of which according to the number one citizen is gone. The president used the occasion to advise journalists against practices that are not in the interest of Nigeria. He specifically canvass for development journalism, stressing that as an instrument of nation building, the media should form a partnership with the government in fostering peace, unity and development in the country.

..It would seem that the publication of these public reactions along with analyses and interpretation by the media is what government considers “militant journalism.” The government ought to realize however that the media work is incomplete if it only reports government to the public without reporting the public to government.

From Mr. President’s tone, government would rather that the media did not report public reactions. This is not feasible.

Source: Extracts from the Guardian’s editorial, November 7, 2003

vi. **Rational Reasoning:** Editorial writing is a serious-minded business for serious-minded people. It is a house that cannot be built on bricks of emotionalism which cannot stand erect in the sea of reasoning. Strong and profound editorials can only be built on rational and logical raw materials mixed with concrete facts.

Sample 6: **JAMB and remedial programmes**

The announcement by the Registrar of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Professor Adedibu Ojerinde that remedial programmes in Polytechnic, monotechnics and Universities will no longer be accepted for admission of students into higher education for many young persons.

Professor Ojerinde says this has become necessary in order to protect the integrity of the admission process. While the point about integrity is inconvertible, the country should be more interested in broadening access to
education. Constricting the already limited space should be an option as we strive to develop the education sector.

..The matter is not as simple as the JAMB registrar has made it to appear. JAMB should be more interested in raising the integrity its examinations and confidence in its ability to conduct reliable tests. Too many of our qualified young men and women have been frustrated by procedural difficulties that they encounter in sitting for JAMB examinations. The NUC, JAMB and the higher institutions should work towards expanding the space for thousands who want to enjoy the benefit of a university education, without compromising standards.

Source: Extracts from the Guardian’s editorial, August 23, 2007
CHAPTER 2
TYPES OF EDITORIALS

Generally, editorials fall into four broad area namely: news, policy, social and special. However, just as a typical editorial parade three major parts the introduction, the body and the conclusion. Three types of editorials can be identified. These are:

1. Interpretative Editorials
2. Controversial Editors
3. Explanatory Editorials

1. INTERPRETATIVE EDITORIALS: These kinds of editorials are written primarily to explain issue at stake by placing facts and figures at the door post of readers for proper illumination of the day’s intelligence. Here, the editorial could be positive, negative or even neutral in posture or approach.

Sample of Interpretative Editorial: Nigeria’s future

A report by a US intelligence agency on the future of Nigeria by 2020 has generated concerns. The global report of the US National intelligence Council examined the social, political and economic future of countries and continents, identified areas of strengths and weakness worth consolidating or redressing, and made some projections.

Specifically, the report predicted that Nigeria might break up within 15 years disregard people’s wish and insist on an unworkable union. According to the report, the country’s “leaders are locked up in a bad marriage that all dislike but dare not leave.” The document expresses the possibility of “a junior officer coup that destabilize the country to the extent that open warfare breaks out in many parts in a sustained manner;” adding rightly that a failed Nigeria will be difficult to reconstitute.

The report also notes that Africa’s hope of benefitting from globalization will depend on the extent to which each country improves governance, reins in corruption, resolve conflicts and firms up the rule of law.
Leadership, the report says, will be the key to progress for sub-Saharan countries that are lucky to evolve it. The report does not spare the US, which it says might lose its global economic dominance to upcoming China and India.+

While dismissing the report as a “glib talk” by detractors, president Olusegun has confessed that the gloomy forecast poses a serious challenge to him and all Nigerians. He has, therefore, passed the report to the national Assembly for action.

There is no doubt that almost everyone wants a united Nigeria. But the injustices that precipitated the 30-month civil war in 1967 appear to have grown deeper and more widespread. Over the years, successive governments have failed to forge a national identity. So, the citizens still feel more comfortable sticking to their ethnic identities. Since democracy reemerged in 1999, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in ethno-religious crises that sprouted from the unsettled national question over indigene/settler dichotomy. There are standing ethnic militias in the north, south, east and west. Just recently, President Obasanjo reportedly gave out several millions of naira as ransom to stave off the threat to blow up oil installation by a Niger Delta militia group.

Expect the deceitful ones, therefore, only a few would require a US intelligence to predict that Nigeria’s fragile unity may snap if urgent steps are not taken to redress a flawed and unjust structure that has only fueled mass poverty and frustration. For now, the ruling class may continue to delude itself that there are no dangers ahead. Blinded by the filthy reward they get from a corrupt and dysfunctional system, the nation’s unruly politicians often wrongly assume that the citizens will forever tolerate injustice via rigged elections; executive rascality in flagrantly disobeying Supreme Court verdicts; and abuse of incumbency powers to brutalize or kill political opponents. Obasanjo’s anger that government’s ongoing promising reforms were not
reckoned with in foreseeing a brighter future for Nigeria is instructive. But the truth is the reforms are half-hearted and so yield slow, insignificant and unnoticeable returns. Six years of reforms, for instance, has produced a more epileptic regime of power supply, posing a serious threat to industrialization and job creation. That is just one indication that the nation's economy is far from being export-oriented and, therefore, vulnerable to the adverse impacts of globalization.

To prevent the doomsday forecast from being fulfilled, the nation’s leaders must be bold enough to dismantle an unjust fiscal structure that has alienated the constituent parts. The nation’s unity depends on how quickly the centre is whittled down for a truly federal Nigerian state to emerge.

Source: The punch, June 2, 2005.

2. **Controversial Editorials:** Controversial editorials are written with the particular mission or mandate to propagate a particular or specific point of view. Such editorials attempt to convince the reader on the desirability or inevitability of a particular issue while painting the opposing side in bad light. These kinds of editorials are either positive or negative. There is no room for neutrality in such editorials because they can out rightly or support or oppose an issue with all vehemence. Sample of **Controversial Editorial - Kalu’s Comedy of Errors**

The People’s Democratic Party (PDP) is undoubtedly a big party. Its bigness derives from a lot of variables. These variables include, size, geographical spread, membership and even quality of individual members. For a country whose previous democratic collapse could be party traced to the failure of electoral politics, the PDP held hope for the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

Yet, its strength contains the ingredients of its weakness. As a rainbow coalition, it was an amalgam of all-corners. There was no attempt to use the
factor of antecedents to sift membership. The resultant effect is the emergence of some leaders who ordinarily should not be admitted into a serious party. More embarrassing and depressing is the fact that some of them hold offices that can make one equate them with the party.

Such a person is Governor Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State. Right from the beginning, he comes across as an undisciplined party-man. He seems to have an inflated opinion, not only of his popularity in his state of Abia, but of an erroneous position in Nigerian history. He plays all forms of pranks to reconfirm his fable of historical expectation. He situates his ambition on very faulty premises and dishes out to himself over-seasoned salad of political relevance. Ordinarily, one should not be bothered about such illusion except for the Yoruba adage which counsels that if your neighbor chooses to eat dangerous insects and you refuse to caution him, his restlessness at the dead of the night would disturb your own sleep.

Governor Kalu’s latest antics relate to an alleged assassination threat on his life by Chief Tony Anenih, the Chairman Board of Trustees of the PDP. An accusation of murder or threat of it, is so grievous that the ingredients of such accusation must be unassailable. In Kalu’s case, he said his Deputy Governor, relayed to him the threat of assassination after meeting casually with Chief Anenih. The Deputy Governor has since denied that he relayed such a message. In fact, his memo to Governor Kalu on the chance meeting with Anenih does not contain such an accusation.
But Kalu’s bag of mischief and character assassination seems inexhaustible. He had earlier accused the same Anenih collecting over N300 billion Naira as minister without anything to show for it. Official figures revealed that within the period of his ministerial responsibility. Anenih collected a little over N200 billion. One would ordinarily expect a state governor to speak with reliable facts and figures in honour of respect of the office he holds.

Even on the assassination threat, Kalu added a cheap shot seek the support of the Yoruba people by alleging that Anenih said he would deal with him, the way he dealt with a short chance meeting to be so frivolous and flippant like a chatter-box to let loose. More so, when the meeting was in the presence of other people.

A simple dictum in law is that, he who asserts must prove. The onus of proof lies on Kalu. But it seems to us that he has not, and cannot, discharge such a burden of proof. The problem is compound by the juvenile reliance on his mother anytime he chooses to run into problems. When he engaged in an undue adversary relationship with President Obasanjo sometimes ago, it was his mother who was raising the olive branch for peace. In the current one, the flag of surrender is being raised by his mother. Governor Kalu as a public officer holder must be told to grow or at worst, be made to grow. The image of a baby who causes problems outside and runs to mama home is repulsive at this of our political development.

The Hope believes that Governor Kalu’s dangerous drama can heat up the polity and even perhaps dislocate it. The PDP as a political party should by now have an effective machinery of disciplining its members irrespective of how highly placed. The PDP for now holds in its hands the destiny of this country and the action or inaction of any of its members can truncate the democratic experiment. This is why it must urgently cage Kalu and polish him to measure up to the image of a matured state governor.

3. **Explanatory Editorials**:- As the name suggest, explanatory editorials only open up thought provoking issues of socio-political and economic interests for the attention of readers and allow them to judge. Such editorials only identify a problem and leave it to the reader to find solution to it.

Media expect in contemporary society are negatively disposed to this kind of editorials. Their argument is hinged on the fact that it is unreasonable to identify a nagging problem of any magnitude without proffering solution to it.

Explanatory editorials which only photocopy problems as they appear are gradually fading out of the mass media because they are seen by most media professionals as no editorials.

Sample of Explanatory Editorial – **Taylor and the Interpol**

Since the united nation–backed special court for the trial of those who bear the greatest responsibility for the war crimes in Sierra Leone indicated and issued a warrant of arrest on Charles Taylor of Liberia, several curious twists have dogged the development. The indictment and the warrant of arrest were made on Taylor in June, last year, while he was still a sitting Liberian President attending peace talks in Ghana on his country’s civil war. His status as a sitting president presented a dilemma for his arrest, for it would contradict the law of nations to arrest an incumbent president. Of course, Nigeria, Ghana and other African leaders in attendance at that meeting rightfully ignored the order and never arrested Taylor.

Subsequently, owing to the pressure for peace in Liberia, Nigeria, reportedly backed by the United States’ government offered asylum to Taylor in order to remove him from the Liberation political scene and create some prospects for peace. During his tour of four African countries in July, last year, President George W. Bush was reported to have said that Nigeria’s offer of asylum to Taylor was timely and the best solution to the Liberation conflict.

In fact, the peace that is gradually returning to that country today is partly a function of the removal of Taylor from Liberia via his asylum in Nigeria. But
the curious twist and irony to it all is that the same United States government implicitly flawed the asylum by offering a $2 million ransom on Taylor. Although the ransom on Taylor has been fruitlessly denied by the US government, the International Police, Interpol, has followed the US footsteps to issue a warrant of arrest on Taylor. And since interpol’s own warrant of arrest, a Britain firm has offered to kidnap Taylor in Nigeria.

Without prejudice to the merit of the special court’s case against Taylor, what we caution here is against using it to trample on Nigeria’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. By putting a ramson on Taylor, and by subsequent warrant of arrest by the Interpol, an encouragement is being given to international brigands to violate Nigeria’s sovereignty by illegally abducting Taylor has become a sufficient albatross to the Nigerian government, great care should be taken to ensure that he is not forcibly removed or abducted from Nigeria by any gang, whether sponsored by a foreign government, organization or not. Meanwhile, the Nigerian government should seriously spare a thought on how to dispose off the Taylor matter in order to bring these undue wrangling and harassment of Nigeria to an end.

Source: Daily Sun, Friday, December 19, 2003

FUNCTIONS OF EDITORIALS

Irrespective of whatever kind or type of editorials, the editor’s biases; ownership and reader influence economic factors as well as competition among magazines and newspapers are great determinants that often chart the course for editorial decision. Having noted that, it is expedient to discuss the desirability and inevitability of editorials in the mass media. Editorials in modern newspapers and magazines perform numerous functions. They intelligently and eloquently:

i. **Criticize or attack socio-political, economic and moral dilemmas of the society:** An editorialist sometimes performs, the job of a human right activist, raising alarm on blatant abuse or annihilation of certain norms
and acceptable social order in the society. Exploitative and autocratic
government policies can also be attacked by editorials. On the side of the
governed, when a particular section of the society decides, for instance, to
take laws into its hand, editorials are bond to criticize such as anomaly.

**Sample 1: Abacha as the parties candidate**

The way and manner the parties have gone about recruiting Gen. Abacha is objectionable. It is lacking in common sense and decency. It is an affront of all known rules of equity. Just a few weeks ago, the UNCP, for example, sidelined some well-meaning aspirations whose credentials are excellent any day for the National Assembly. Such aspirants, the UNCP claimed, had not been in the party for up to 12 months and have also not made “substantial contributions” to the growth of the party. And yet, the same party has turned 360 degrees to alter its constitution and has adopted a non-party member to represent it in an election. What do this party member to represent it in an election? What do these party leaders take Nigerian for? That we can be so gravely insulted and kicked?

**Source:** Extract from The Guardian’s editorial, May 5, 1998

ii. **Illuminate the day’s intelligence:** Editorials perform this function by throwing more light on complex issues of the day. Editorials often try to look at the two sides of an issue. They highlight and analyze the strength and weaknesses of public issues while proffering solutions to complex issues of public concern.

**Sample 2: To tackle corruption**

The Catholic Bishop and Obasanjo are both right on target. Corruption is largely responsible for the seeming collapse of everything we hold dear in the society. It is not only systemic, it has become so institutionalized that no aspect of our national life is spared. Corruption starts in the minds of men. It is propelled by greed, cynicism and a determination to cheat the system. It manifest in real terms, in form of the destruction of standards. The erosion of
constitutional checks and balances by protracted military rule has, in fact made transparent government impossible. Public offices are seen as avenues for self enrichment, other than service. In the private sector, being successful in Nigerian terms means living above one’s means. We lack, in consequences, the public spirit: every other player in the economy is seeking to build a comfort zone for himself there has been no more dramatic illustrations of this phenomenon, in the recent times, than the sordid revelations of corruption at the highest levels during the Abacha administration.

Tacking corruption ought to be a starting point for strengthening our relationship with the international community. It is regrettable, but it is true, that Nigerians are regarded the world over as con-men and scam artists. Investors are afraid of being funds to Nigeria because they are afraid of the system that we have created. Visiting foreigners are openly asked for bribe at the nation’s ports. Year after year, Nigeria is listed as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. For two years running, the country had the distinction of being in the No. 1 position on this list of infamy. Nigeria search for a position of respect in the world will depend on how well it tackles corruption and restores confidence in its system.

Source: Extract from The Guardian’s editorial. May 18, 2003

iii. **Bring to fore debatable issues and provide an intellectual compass for society to discuss and resolve burning issues:**

Sample 3 – **Call for an Oil Minister:**

... The country needs an executive authority for the petroleum that we can be held accountable if things go wrong. Well defined structures ought to be put in place to oversee all aspects of petroleum production refining and distribution to replace the somewhat arbitrary arrangement that currently exists. The president of Nigeria at helm of an evolving democracy is not in the best position to additionally take on the tasking role of the minister of petroleum for which there is a statutory provision. Also, it is remarkable that of all the OPEC
members, Nigeria, the sixth largest in the group, is the only one without a substantive oil minister. By calling for an effective and responsible authority to oversee the nation’s petroleum industry, the legislators have made the incontrovertible point that the current arrangement is unsatisfactory. Alhaji Rilwanu Lukman who is the adviser on petroleum is also the Secretary General of OPEC, a busy job that keeps him away from Nigeria most of the time. In the nature of things, he cannot split his abilities in such manner as to provide qualitative service in both positions as either calls for the full exertions of an officer. Doubling as Secretary General of one of the world’s most active organization whilst at the same time acting as a quasi minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is not the best way to optimize ability. Nor is the president’s position in this matter acceptable. Last Monday, he had declared during a television media chat that he would not appoint an oil minister. “We are in the presidential system. I am the executive of all ministries. That is what executive president means. I appoint a minister where I think a minister is necessary” the president said. We think he Is wrong…

Source: Extracts from The Guardian’s editorial, March 1, 2001

iv. Defend the underdogs in the society:- In every given society, there exist different dimensions of natural and artificial economic gaps between the rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, the educated and the uneducated, etc. When the rich for instance, tends to unjustly exploit and manipulate the poor, editorials rise up in defense of the latter. The relationship among different members of the society is often monitored by the media and an advocacy role is been played by editorials to defend the cause of the wretched of the earth. That is, the lumpens.

Sample 4- The scare of secessionists

The organization in the south-west insists that Nigerian federation is unjust and unworkable and is, therefore, in urgent need of negotiation. The refusal of the government to recognize these core issues has driven more people
into various forms of vanguards. It is unhelpful to criminalize these reactions as “secessionists “plots.

The situation in the Niger-Delta and south political zone provides a more indicating evidence against the government. The injustice against the region cries to the heavens. A 30–year-old plunder of oil and gas resources has rendered the area impoverished. President Obanjo’s administration was expected to bring urgent succour. This has not happened. Even the payment of the 13 percent derivation funds guaranteed in the constitution is being subverted through arbitrary cuts. After more than a year, the Federal Government cannot point to one substantial project that could bring jobs and improved income to the people of a region that accounts for over 95 percentage of public revenue…

….It is not enough for the president to express alarm about the existence of aggrieved groups. The populace wants to see what government is doing to ameliorate the conditions that generate the protests. An obdurate law-and-order approach will not help, nor will the invocation of Nigeria’s potential greatness and indivisibility. There are deep-rooted structural, economic and political issues. The government continues to ignore calls for national conference to address these matters. Rather than condemn them, the president should dialogue with aggrieved groups and convince them that democratic rule can improve their a lot. That was what he was elected to do.


v. **Endorse or support an issue of public significance:**

Editorialists are not dogmatic set of barking and biting professionals, whose stock in trader is only is to attack, they also support noble causes of public concern. For instance, any time policy formulators and executors are on the right track, some editorials acknowledge and applaud their efforts. In supporting or endorsing a policy, there might be some grey areas where the “supportive “ editorials may call for fine-tuning. The Nigeria government
owned media establishments are fond of supporting the policies of their proprietors through their opinion column for public acceptability.

Sample 5 - **A new Bank for Farmers**

...The government is right in re-establishing a financial institution for agriculture. It is all the more worthwhile that the new body is formed from the reorganization of similar agencies that were handicapped in the carrying out of their tasks. Even with increasing oil revenues, agriculture remains one of the few viable options through which the government can push for early economic recovery. It is an industry that has a large pool of people with abundance of basic skills and is probably the biggest employer of labour in the country.

Agriculture provides more than 70 percentages of the nation’s food requirements, offers employment to most of our rural and semi-urban population, serves as the market for products from industry and in turn provides raw materials for that sector. It is, therefore, so strategic to our national survival that no degree of official support can be considered excessive. In fact, the problem has been that of inadequate government investment. In industrialized countries, agriculture receives tremendous backing from governments through tax breaks and other subsidies…

**Source:** Extracts from The Guardian’s editorial October 25, 2000

**To influence policy formulation or decision making on certain issues:** Editorials galvanise policy makers to set proactive agenda for good governance of the society.

Sample 6- **Retirements Benefits for former leaders:**

Three days to his exit from power, General Abdulsami Abubakar endorsed the supplement of official Extra-ordinary Gazette 33 which announced a new warfare package for all former heads of state. Each of them will now earn N350, 000 a month. He will also be provided with three vehicles, which will be replaced every four years. Similarly, previous vice-presidents or chiefs of
general staff will get N250,000 monthly. The gazette also makes provision for the families of deceased heads of state and vice-presidents, who are to receive a yearly stipend of N1 million and 750,000 respectively. All former leaders are also entitled to free medical care, paid vacation and free office accommodation with telephone services.

...Nigerians should have no difficulty rewarding a good leader. Some have argued that the former leaders do not need the facility because they were already wealthy by the time they left office. This is an unhelpful generalization. All over the world, past office holders at such national level are well cared for. Our leaders deserve no less attention. This is the thinking behind the policy. We welcome it, provided it applies only to democratically elected leaders.

Source: Extracts from The Guardian’s editorial, June 25, 1999.

vii. **Appeal or Persuade:** Editorials appeal or persuade the readers to accept the rightness or wrongness of an issue. Some editorials often woo individual members of the society, corporate bodies or government to accept a particular course of action for the interest of the society. Such editorials are sandwiched with concrete facts and spiced-up with tantalizing persuasive technique which create indelible marks on the psyche of readers.

**Sample 7 – Ending the Reign of Guns**

The Federal Government’s plan for a nationwide disarmament exercise to reduce the number of small weapons in the country is a welcome and timely move. It is believed to be part of a strategy to stem the tide of communal violence and armed robbery both of which have been an alarming upsurge in recent times. The decision was apparently informed by the spate of communal and ethnic conflicts involving communities in Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra, Tiv-juken in Taraba, Tiv-Hausa in Nasarawa, Ijaw-Itsekiri in Delta, Yoruba-Hausa in Ogun and Kano, Ijaw-Yoruba in Lagos. The carnage in Jos, the Plateau state capital during which thousands of people lost their lives is also a
background to disarmament plan. The menace of armed robbery has continued unabated. It is not only in the economic nerve centers that robberies occur. The incursion of bandits through the North Eastern flank of Borno, Adamawa, Taraba and other border areas are also part of these dangerous and disturbing trends

Source: Extracts from The Guardian’s editorial, October 2, 2001

Capturing the characteristics of editorial in harmony with the aforementioned functions, Idemili (undated) in Uwakwe (2005) observers:

a. That the editorial helps the reader to bring order out of chaos of news.
b. That on the editorial page, special reporters or columnists have a place for the explaining behind-the-scene events and that freedom of style and deep back grounding is permitted.
c. That the editorial can fight battles for the newspaper reader.
d. That the editorial plays agenda setting functions or role: exposes public debate, the good and bad ideas in circulation.
e. That the editorial page should give readers the opportunity to air their views by providing space for letters to the editor.
f. That the editorial makes it possible for the editor to express his views and:
g. That the editorial serves as a source of personality to the newspaper.
CHAPTER 3
PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES IN EDITORIAL WRITING

Persuasion is a process that occurs when the communicator (sender) influences the values, beliefs, attitudes or behaviours of another person (receiver); Weaver, R and Hybels, S (2001).

For editorials to be arresting and catchy, certain literacy techniques must be employed in their usage: introduction, comment and conclusion. Some of these techniques which I prefer to call “editorial essential balms” are as follows:

1. **Keeping writing simple but mature and corporate:** Don’t write to intimidate the reader with bombastic grammar. Write to communicate. An editorial should be simple and compact for easy understanding by the audience.

2. **Mind your language:** Language is the pillar of communication. Even though the editorial audiences are mostly sophisticated in terms of education, the editorial writer has to mind his/her language in order not to censor the barely literate out of communication. The language must be unambiguous, punchy, concise and meaningful.

3. **Create a remarkable first impression:** The introduction or opening paragraph of an editorial must not be dull. It should not be sleepy or lifeless. That would put the readers off. The first, second and third paragraphs of an editorial must be inviting so as to “transport” the audience to the body and conclusion of the opinion piece.

4. **Sustain the first impression:** Having created a remarkable first impression in the opening paragraph of an editorial, the writer must sustain the piece with solid and concrete facts drawn from credible sources and authentic documents. An editorial would potently sustain the interest of the reader if it is rooted in uncontestable facts. The first impression therefore can be sustained with undiluted facts; the use of parallelism and proper enumeration.
5. **Say exactly what you mean:** Don’t beat about the bust or meander into the forests of ideas or semantics before delivering your message. If you do that, you may loose some impatient readers.

6. **Make use of repetition:** Salient points in the editorial must be re-echoed again and again to ensure that the reader is at home with the message. **Caution:** This persuasive technique if not well employed can be abused by inexperienced editorialist. The technique must therefore be used tactically and intelligently.

7. **Use of a lot of literary devices:** Literary devices polish the tone, style and approach of the editorial. Devices like metaphors, similes, to mention only a few, should be used judiciously in an editorial in order to achieve the desired effects. The essence of using these devices according to Iyorkyaa (1996) is to “create a permanent mark on the mind of the readers or the audience so that they will have one thing remember you for. If they fail to remember you for the worth of facts, for the parallelism, for enumeration, they should at least remember you for the congruent style for which you have used or the approach.”

8. **A strong closing appeal:** for the average editorial reader to be persuaded, the piece has to change him/her up. The construction of strong, memorable appealing words towards the end of an editorial persuasive dose to call your audience into action. You must leave them with something to giggle about. It must be extremely arresting and highly captivating.

**Propaganda Techniques and Editorial Writing**

A part from persuasive techniques, every good editorial writer must be conversant with the use of propaganda techniques. Although propaganda techniques may not be ideal tool for editorial writers because of their manipulative effects, understanding them would in no small measure widen the logical and mental horizon of the editorialists. This gesture, by extension, may be an added advantage in editorial writing which deals with case making.
Okoro, N & Agbo, B (2003) argued that effective editorial writing requires a thorough knowledge and mastery of the techniques for propaganda. The propaganda techniques according to them would enable the editorial writer gain superior edge over competition and win support in the process of crusading a cause or executing a campaign.

Ukonu, M (2005) defines propaganda as “the (rational) use of argument as well as (sound) emotional appeals to influence behaviours or thoughts either for good or for bad. It is information manipulation to sway people over to a predefined course of action.”

The fact that propaganda can be put to positive uses, Ukonu (Ibid) agreed that the editorial writer may apply its techniques in persuasion but advised the writer to “be careful not to portray bias and empty argument by blindly misrepresenting issues.”

Let us examine some of the propaganda techniques.

1. Glittering generalities
2. Name calling
3. Cards tacking
4. Bandwagon
5. Testimonial
6. Transfer device
7. Plain folk
8. Appeal to popularity
9. Appeal to sympathy
10. Appeal to special interest
11. Appeal to change
12. Appeal to status quo
13. Appeal to bread and butter
14. Appeal to truth
15. The attack strategy
**Glittering generalities:** This propaganda technique is usually used to make a broad report about an entire group. During the dark days of late Nigerian Head of State, General Sani Abacha, one Kanu, the then co-ordinator of the Youth Wing of Abacha’s self-succession categorically stated that all the youths in Nigeria would go on hunger strike if Abacha refused to continue in power. That was a sweeping generality. Not all Nigeria youths were contacted on the issue but they were scooped by the generalization.

Again, some white men often describe Africa as a dark continent where crime and cannibalistic atrocities abound. This, also, is a glittering generality. Again, words like national interest, motherhood, bachelor-hood, etc used as glittering generalities.

**Name calling:** Name calling technique could be used either negatively positively.

According to Okoro, N and Agbo, B (2003), “bad name is given to whatever the propagandist wants the public to reject or condemn without examining the evidence. For example, the opponents may be labeled detractors, labour union executives as destabilisers.”

On a positive and softer perspective, names like honey, sweetie, darling, and my dear to mention only a few carry strong torrents of love, which flows from the addresser to the addressee.

**Cards tacking:** This device or technique is the act of presenting one side of the coin. The propagandist advertises or highlights some aspects in an issue he wants the public to know and covers up or down plays those he doesn’t want the public to know.

Here, strong and concrete facts, vivid illustrations and profound statements are used in achieving the desired effect.

**Bandwagon:** This technique is anchored on the belief that if you can’t win them, join them. It is the act of joining the Jonesses, following the crowd, the reigning idea or thing.
**Testimonial:** This takes place when you have a celebrity or well known person in society to endorse a product, idea or an issue. This is an appeal to authority of the personality involved in an issue. Editorial writers can make use of quotations from powerful and celebrated personalities at the national and international level to put across their message with high fidelity and credibility.

**Transfer device:** Certain symbols communicate the prestige and authority of some things. The propagandist should identify and interpret those symbols with a view to putting across his message. The propagandist here have to transfer the prestige in the symbol and bring it to bear on his message.

**Plain folk:** This strategy entails coming down to the level of the people you want to win their affection and presenting yourself as one of them. You identify their aspirations and yearnings of the people and play, weep and laugh with them where necessary.

**Appeal to popularity:** This entails judging a person, an idea or an issue based on successful past experience. “He had done it before, therefore, he will do it again. Let’s follow him.” Appeal to popularity can trigger the fire of bandwagon effect, as people are likely to join the winning man, party, idea, etc.

**Appeal to sympathy:** The use of words like marginalization, monitorities, discrimination, e.t.c is a deliberate strategy of invoking sympathy. A politician who makes a pledge before women gathering to dismantle male chauvinism if voted into office is likely to win the sympathy of the woman folks. The editorial writer can use this technique to lunch his message into the heart of readers.

**Appeal to special interest:** This is a kind of appeal which goes to a special group of people who have common interest which the editorial writer is trying to defend or protect.

**Appeal to change:** This is the opposite of appeal to change. Here, the editorial writer is satisfied with the socio-political and economic order in motion and votes for its continuity. It is an appeal to religiously keep and preserve the old order.
Appeal to bread and butter: This has to do with addressing some basic economic problems like provision of jobs, reduction of prices of commodities like fuel, garri e.t.c. Appeal to bread and butter may also include provision of free health services, education and so on.

Appeal to truth: There are certain universal facts, truths and beliefs which both individuals and the society hold sacred in the course of their dissemination of message as any form of violation of the truth will offend the feelings and sensibilities of members of the public.

The attack strategy: This is predicated on the notion that attack is the best form of defence. Here, the propagandist and editorial writer attacks views or ideas that are not in conformity with his.
Chapter 4
SOURCING FOR EDITORIAL MATERIALS

Editorial materials can be sourced primarily from topical events that are reported from the mass media. It could be from Radio, TV, Newspapers or magazine. The reported events must be explosive and of public interest.

Also from the mass media, “letters to the Editors ” column in a well read newspaper can serve as barometers to measuring public opinion. Issues raised at the feed-back column could directly or remotely influence an editorial topic among other considerations.

In writing an editorial, the writer can also do justice to the topic by discussing with experts especially if the issue under consideration is a technical one. A newspaper organisation, for instance can clear certain legal controversial issues from a legal practitioner before writing in order to avoid sailing in troubled waters.

In this jet age, internet is a good facility for editorial writers to source for materials. Interest contains a bazaar of information on virtually all the topic under the sun. Editorialist can browse through the internet and down-load useful materials to “cook” an editorial menu of high public taste.

The position of research in editorial writing cannot be underestimated. A good editorial is no doubt the product of good research. To be able to create a meaningful impact in the market place of ideas, an editorial subject or topic must be thorough researched right from the conception, gestation up to the birth stage. That would enable the editorial audience to appreciate the source of the running-fever issues that may explode for public attention.

By so doing, the editorial writer must have unearthed in a deeper perspective the pros and cons of an issue and illuminate same for the interest of the society.

Because an editorial is the corporate voice of a newspaper organization, everything humanly possible should be done to ensure that it is error free. This
is because, the editorial audiences are the sophisticated type of people who often question the content, style and grammar of the opinion piece among other variables. Any mistake on the editorial page or column of a Newspaper irrespective of its magnitude would be seen as a corporate mistake of the media establishment.

To avoid unpardonable mistakes, authoritative book like dictionaries, thesauruses and encyclopedias should be consulted when one is in doubt.

Editorial is a serious-minded issue. It should not be written based on hear-say or scoops from mere throw-away dialogues from members of the society. Analysis of issues from knowledgeable and expert quarters either in media or non media situations would oil the wheel of editorial writing.

A good editorial as a matter of fact must have news peg or nuances. Be that as it may, the mass media whether of fact must have news peg or nuances. Be that as it may, the mass media whether print or electronic are the best sources for editorial materials.

Journals, books, government gazettes, biographies/assembly proceedings, constitutions and other authoritative sources can be useful in editorial writing.

**EDITORIAL AUDIENCE**

Mass communication by its nature is the process of transmitting messages, opinions, values, attitudes, beliefs, more e.t.c to the relatively large, heterogeneous and anonymous audience simultaneously. The process is made possible through the mass media-radio, TV, Newspapers and magazines.

The heterogeneity and anonymity of the mass media gives a clear impression that the communicator is dealing with people of different ages, sexes, educational, cultural and economic backgrounds. These people are unknown to the communicator. That explains the ‘anonymity’ variable in the definition of mass communication.

The above premise takes us to the issue of audience, which will be examined here from the standpoint of editorial.
From a broad perspective, newspapers and magazines have three categories of audience. These are:

- **The sophistical audience**: These are serious-minded people who patronize the mass media for serious articles on politics, economics and editorials.

- **The less sophisticated audience**: These are people who buy newspapers for light-hearted and mundane stories. The category of people often finds pleasure in things like pool betting, cartoon, love and entertainment stories.

- **Specialized audience**: We have specialized audience in technical field like sports, science and technology, business, etc. Specialized audiences are lovers of their disciplines or areas of interest. They buy newspapers to keep themselves abreast of latest trends, innovations and personalities in their areas of interest. Anything outside their area of specialization is unlikely to attract them.

Editorial audience can also be looked upon three perspectives or dimensions. We have the following editorial audience:

1. **The very skeptical audience**: These are sophisticated audience with high aura of excellent. They question facts, figures, grammar, tone, style and content of every editorial until they are satisfied. They are the learned and curious beings who are conscious of their fundamental human rights. They believe in the power of public opinion.

2. **The very selective audience**: These are specialized audience who care only about what goes on in their chosen fields. They are addicted to the knowledge in their field or disciplines and are glued to same without bothering about things outside their area of interest or profession attachment.
For an editorial writer to meet the yearning and aspirations of this group of people, he/she has to segment his market (editorial) in tandem with the selectivity posture of this audience.

Experts argue that an editorial can hardly be for everybody at the same time. Therefore, the editorial writer must mentally define his audience before writing his piece.

3. **The obscure or obstinate audience:** This group of people are blind critics. Anything that is said outside their frame of reference by someone else is wrong. Their world view is very limited and does not go beyond their local assemblies where they often feed on rumour mongering and worthless **abracadabras** of the day. This group of people are more of intellectual lumpens and they believe that holding an opinion is a transgression against public order. They are mere chatter-boxes who read editorials not to learn anything but to attack the writers with blind, worthless and unconditoned criticisms.

According to Iyorkyaa, (1966) this group fortunately “does not belong to power. It does belong to the group shaping Beer Parlour Policy (BPP)”.

That means that this group of people is irresponsible members of homosapiens who are fond of analyzing public policies from the shallow and alcoholic point of view.

In writing an editorial, the writer should outrightly jettion this group of people. This is because, obstinate audience are no audience and cannot appreciate the robust illumination of public policies and case making stuff which editorials deal with.
CHAPTER 5

CLASSIFICATION OF EDITORIALS: THE DEBATE

One major debate among mass communication scholars and professional journalists bothers on why and how editorials should be classified.

It is important to note that editorials need to be classified for three major reasons. One, the classification will assist journalism and mass communication students to appreciate and distinguish various forms and types of journalistic write-ups from editorial. Two, the development will equip media practitioners to establish a clear-cut distinction and relationship between opinion writing and factual news reporting. Three, the classification will empower mass communicators to locate the exact domain of editorial writing and establish its relationship with other write-ups.

There is a school of thought which sees editorial as a pure independent subjective write-up. However, some professionals and scholars of mass communication vehemently oppose that line of argument. Such people believe that the best approach to classify an editorial is to view the concept as a systematic graduation of other journalistic write-ups to an advance and higher realm of writing. Proponents of this school of thought see editorial not as an independent super structure but as a continuum of both factual news reporting and other opinionistic write-ups. This view is opposed to the contentious objectives-subjective dishotomous classification of the subject matter.

From the diagram above, it is clear to stress that virtually all editorial stuffs have news nuances. An editorial topic or subject cannot emerge from the blues. It must be a topical issue that has been reported in the mass media (print & electronic) either by way of hard news or features. Such an issue must attract public attention and debate.

In some cases, thought-provoking letters to the editor are often used to guage public opinion. When critically exploited, letter to the editor could serve as useful raw material in constructing an editorial superstructure. This is
possible because some letters to the editor can give an editorial writer some useful insight into emerging controversial and topical issue of public significance.

An editorial should be seen as a continuum of other journalistic write-ups because it has its blood flowing from the veins straight forward news reporting and other subjective write-ups. If an issue does not emerge as hard news and generate attention by way of features, opinions or co certainly, it cannot be editorialized upon.

It can be stated clearly that other journalistic write-ups often smoke out issues which are thoroughly feasted upon by editorialists.

Let us therefore appreciate the graphic illustration of the continuum structure of an editorial:
The arrows from A to B and B to C clearly show the continuum dynamics of an editorial. The above illustration highlights the objective-subjective portioning of journalistic write-ups and locates the place of editorial.

**CLASSIFICATION OF EDITORIALS**

For professional and academic purposes, editorial can be properly classified in three major ways. These are:

- Classification according to part
- Classification according to purpose
- Classification according to types

**Classification according to parts:** Basically, a typical editorial has three parts. These are (a) statement of the issue, subject or thesis (b) comment on the problem and (c) conclusion which normally contains solutions to the problems identified in the editorial.

It is instructive to note the arrangement of the parts of editorial is not a dogmatic affair. Some skillful editorial writers may turn the above formula outside down and begin the editorial piece with conclusion followed by comment and then statement of the issue or thesis.

Another logic is that other writers prefer to integrate statement of problem with comment in a single sentence or paragraph and then move to conclusion.

Yet other editorialists believe that an editorial is having only two parts-statements of the problem and comment. Their arguments are predicated upon the notion that like an artiste, the editorial writer needs not provide solution to the problems identified. Such editorials are bound to be unpatronising, unattractive and unpersuasive because the central or cardinal instrument or ingredient of persuasion is missing. The missing link, which can only be appreciated from the standpoint of solutions to the problems, can affect in no small measure, the body and soul of the entire editorial.
**Classification according to purpose:** For everything under the sun, there must be a purpose. The same thing is applicable to the concept of editorial writing. Editorials are usually packaged to meet multi-dimensional purposes. While some editorials are designed to inform or explain an issue, others are crafted with the burning desire to persuade, amuse or amaze the audience.

Editorials whose mission or purpose is to persuade are supposed to be loaded with concrete facts so as to achieve the desired effect.

**Classification according to types:** This form of classification is closely related to the second category of classification. Here we have three major types: Interpretative editorials, Controversial editorials and explanatory editorials that perform their unique functions.

**DETERMINANTS OF EDITORIAL SUBJECTS**

In writing an editorial for whatever audience, the writer must be guided by the following factors:

1. **Ensure that the topic is relevant and timely:** In order to achieve this, the editorialist must factor into consideration the way and manner people converse with one another. In every society, people discuss basically in three ways: (a) People talk about people (b) people talk about things/events (c) People talk about ideas.

Editorials that focus on people discussing people are likely going to be pedestrian in approach and may invoke the temptation of using fowl or abusive language. Such editorials are hardly profound as they might provide avenues for character assassination rather than opportunities for robust societal thinking.

Editorials that deal with people discussing things or events are a little bit advanced and more preferable than the first people talking about people. However, these editorials cannot stand erect in the market place of ideas because they lack the fundamental oxygen that shapes public opinion or enliven public discourse.
The best kinds of editorials are those platforms are erected on ideas. Ideas are vehicles that drive or move the society forward. Therefore, ideas-oriented or anointed editorials are most profound, celebrated and acceptable in the mass media.

2. **The chosen topic might be local but the treatment should not be parochial:** In writing an editorial, a local, conservative and unusual topic could be raised but its treatment should be sound and logical. The writer should be able to bring out issues from the local event that are of national or international significance.

   For instance in 2005, there was an editorial in *The Guardian*, about the extinction of wild animals from the University of Ibadan (U.I) zoo. Naturally, the topic was local but its treatment was superb.

   The piece traced the history of the U.I zoo as one of the first generation zoos in the country and remembered with pains how the zoo used to attract local and international tourists during its good days.

   The editorial blamed the ugly development on the nation’s leadership and society and wondered why a society that is unable to meet the yearnings and aspirations of its citizenry would be friendly to animals.

   The editorial called for urgent steps from stakeholders to redress the injustice against the animal kingdom and warned that nature and posterity would judge our generation for its hostility against wild and special species of animals.

3. **Editorial topics should be drawn from socio-political and economic issues:** This would enable editorialist to juxtapose thorough background of the event with clear illumination of the day’s intelligence for the enrichment of public opinion, forecast the probable out-come of some issues and pass a moral judgment on same.

4. **Topics could be borne out of the desire to amaze or amuse:** There is no gainsaying the fact that editorial writing is a serious-minded affair. However,
it is not all the times that the writer would feed the audience with serious-minded stuff. There are some situations where an editorial topic could be given light treatment with a view to entertaining the audience while feeding them with concrete facts. This is done to ease their tension and dilute the stress, which usually goes with analysis of burning issues.
CHAPTER 6
THING TO AVOID DURING EDITORIAL WRITING

It is not everything that can be harnessed and husbanded in an editorial writing. In writing a professionally acceptable editorial, the following things must be avoided:

A. **Avoid Afghanistanism:** The concept of Afghanistanism presupposes a situation where the editorial writer focuses on issues in far-away places that had little or no relevance to the people he/she is writing for. Such a practice is unacceptable. There must be geographical and psychological proximity between the editorial audience and the topic.

B. **Avoid being seduced by public Relations Men:** The job of Public Relation (PR) men is to ensure that their organizations are always captured in good light by media practitioners. To achieve this, publicists often embark on overt and covert lobbying strategies to ensure that press men including editorial writers are always on their side. One of these measures is the offering of gratification to journalists to guarantee favorable mention of their establishments in the media. The editorial writer as an activist and social crusader must avoid the temptation of dancing to the rhythm or tune of PR men by refusing to be censored by any posture of inducement.

C. **Avoid the temptation of falling flat in the name of being timely:** Just like news is timely, editorial writers are also fond of presenting their facts and arguments in a timely manner. However, most editorialists in their quest of being pace setters or emergency experts fall into this temptation. They rush to write editorials on emerging news issues without carefully examining their pros and cons. This could be dangerous and counterproductive as such a practice might prevent the editorial writer from digging deep into the heart of an issue.
D. Avoid making predictions about issues pending in a law court: The judge will not take it kindly with any interference in his area of jurisdiction. The editorial writer must know that passing a judgment on issues that are pending in the court is an act of subjudice, an offence against the court. Since nobody is above the law, the editorial writer should steer clear of such an act.

KEY CONCEPTS IN EDITORIAL WRITING

There are many concepts that are useful in the analysis of editorial as a subject matter. Let’s take a look at some of them.

A. Policies and Orientation: Editorial policies and orientation refer to the beliefs of a media organization which it would like to manifest in terms news coverage. A policy by way of definition, is a definite course of action selected from among alternatives to guide and determine present and future actions.

An editorial policy according to Okoro, N and Agbo, B (2003) refers to the overall attitude, position or outlook, which governs a publication. It is a path a newspaper elects to follow as it answers two basic questions:

i. What shall we publish?

ii. How shall we publish it?

Newspaper policies and orientations may be influenced by the following factors:

The readers’ interest; personal interest; the socio-political and economic environment in which the media establishment is operating and competition in the industry.

The editorial policy could be determined by:

- News stories the paper carries
- The paper’s slogan (motto) which is often carried in the nameplate or below the masthead.
Explanatory editorials usually written as occasion demands to restate its editorial policy.

Platform code in which the paper enumerates the number of projects or principles for which it stands. (Okoro, N and Agbo, B 2003)

The important question now is, how can a newspaper express its editorial policy?

A newspaper can express its editorial policy through the following means:

i. **First editorial or leading article, news story published by a newspaper:** Is the paper going to have a local, regional, national or international out-look? All these things are part of the editorial policy.

ii. **Editorial cartoons:** These are caricatures that reveal the editorial dimension or direction of a newspaper. Editorial cartoons are editorials in pictorial form with high level of editorial elegance. According to Okoro, N and Agbo, B (2003), editorial cartoons communicate editorial messages “forcefully and graphically…..the leading editorial page feature uses editorial cartoon which is an adaptation of the comics techniques to an editorial topic.” The desirability and inevitability of editorial cartoons is that they have the power to extend readship to illiterates. Editorial cartoons can appeal to both the sophisticated and mundane audience. According to Ukonu M (2005), cartoon may argue, criticize or explain an issue or a phenomenon.

iii. **Platforms:** Platforms are other avenues where a newspaper may convey its policy or philosophy to its heterogeneous audience. Platforms are usually published at the beginning of the editorial page often under the “flag” or “masthead.” They usually enumerate a number of projects or principles for which the newspaper stands (Okoro, N and Agbo, B 2003).
iv. **Slogan:** An editorial policy can also be expressed through slogans, which are remarkable statements of policy with significance, which often appear on editorial pages and are expressed as the newspaper’s motto.

B. **Editorial Credibility:** This refers to the paper’s ability to trustfully disseminate information to its readers. Editorial credibility has to do with how believable the readers, listeners, or viewers are to the content of editorial information that has been exposed to them. A trustworthy reporter and editor would enhance the editorial credibility of his newspaper by using truth as his guidepost. Editorial credibility guarantees continued trust and patronage of a particular medium.

C. **Editorial Appeal:** Editorial appeal refers to the power of an editorial piece to win the attention of the readers. Editorial appeal is a situation whereby the newspaper message elegantly penetrates the emotions and feelings of the reader thus having a place in his/her heart. Editorial appeal is possible where the reporter employs persuasive techniques in putting across his message to the audience.

D. **Editorial Transitional Devices:** Transitional device are words used to achieve unity through different themes and paragraphs in a news story or editorial. They enhance smooth flow of ideas in an editorial or story. Transitional devices are connective words and phrases, which connect the various paragraphs of an editorial in unity.

**Types of Transitional Devices**

There are different types of transitional devices in editorial writing. For the purpose of this book, we are going to consider only four. These are:

1. **Transitional device of time:** This device stresses time in the editorial. Example Earlier, therefore, soon after, meanwhile, thereabout, simultaneously e.t.c.

2. **Transitional device of contrast:** This is a connective word of phrase that binds two paragraphs by contrasting situations involved in an editorial.
Example on the other hand, but, unless, in spite of, despite, yet, nevertheless, however, in another development e.t.c.

3. **Transitional device of place of contrast**: This device emphasizes places and locations used in an editorial. Example—back at home, locally, not far away, at another point, in the same place, a few kilometers away.

4. **Transitional device of action**: This is a connective or linking word that seeks to give the description of an action. Example—suddenly, all of a sudden, losing gallantly, holding on to e.t.c.
COLUMNS & COLUMNISTS

INTRODUCTION

Columns in modern journalism have added editorial elegance in print journalism. Columns promote individual journalism and establish a psychological bond between the columnist and the reader. This window of personal contact encourages friendship, comradeship and the likes.

Columns and editorials are like Siamese twins. They resemble in tone and substance, especially public affairs columns. According to Onabajo (2000, p. 203), “Many public affairs columns will fit comfortably in the space given to editorials in some newspapers and magazines.” However, he identifies a mild distinction between columns and editorial. According to him, most editorials have institutional flavours, while columns have personal flavours, a distinction that goes beyond the use of ‘we’ and ‘1’.

Columns are desirable in print media because they can provoke an insightful discussion of a public issue in a detailed and robust style. Through columns, serious minded and disaster oriented issues could be presented in a humorous, jocular and entertaining manner so as to evoke smiles on the faces of readers. This brand of journalism characteristically expresses itself through the author’s byline and personal style.

MEANING OF COLUMNS

A column is a kind of feature which exposes your personality excessively to readers. The readers will always remember you for your expressions, your styles and your treatment of issues in your own personal ways. (Duyile, 2005, p.59).

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines a column as “an article on a particular subject by a particular writer that appears regularly in a
newspaper or magazines.” Columns are therefore, specially written for publication in the print media which wear the toga of writers.

**TYPES OF COLUMNS**

There are three major categories of columns. Firstly, we have opinion columns which are based on concrete facts which the columnist believe could tackle topical issues of public interest. Secondly, some columns have a gossip posture or aroma. Such columns are usually crafted from the behind-the-scene human scoops of the life of celebrities for public scrutiny. The third category of columns is the humour type, which basically plays the entertainment function for the readers.

Mott (1968, p.179) in line with the above outlines the following category of columns:

1. The personal editorial or easy columns
2. The round about town or gossip department
3. The humour columns or “colyum”

Onabajo (2000) identifies five major forms of columns. These are:

1. Public affairs columns
2. Advice and forum columns
3. Anecdote, paragraph and gossip columns
4. Entertainment columns
5. Essay and humour columns

**Public Affairs Columns:** These dominate newspaper editorial pages, as well as the pages opposite them. Public affairs columns, need not be couched in such sober phrases, is to scare off many readers. Self-conscious seriousness, should give way often to lighter presentations.

**Advice and Forum Columns:** Many advice columns are turned into forums, with readers invited to respond to letters from other readers, or to relate their own experiences. Forums also include:

a. Letters to the editor
b. Poetry corners

c. Jokes

d. Anecdotes contributed by readers (short amusing stories about some real person or event).

**Anecdote, Paragraph and Gossip Column:** Anecdote columns are full fledged little stories about people. Whereas gossip items sometimes consist of only a few words about well known persons, paragraphing is a very brief editorial expression, usually two or three lines, making subtle and usually surprising comments. It is usually humorous, not often satirical or inspirational.

Paragraphing was once an art practiced almost exclusively by editorial writers, but few paragraphs now appears among the more conventional editorials.

**Entertainment Column:** Entertainment covers a wide range of subjects and many newspapers now devote a page to cater for the entertainment needs of its readers. Editors of this page are now referred to as entertainment, life and style editors. This column offers tidbits on current music, fashion, films e.t.c. as well as interview and their performances.

**Essay and humour Columns:** The leisurely informal essay are fast disappearing on the pages of newspaper. Most editors prefer that columnist use the little space they have for commentary that makes its point immediately. Many personal essays that explore the writer’s psyche are now more often presented as humours. Sometimes this columnist can use ordinary events as basis for comments, however showing his disgust in his commentary on the event.

Writing a column according to Duyile (2005, p. 61) calls for “in-depth knowledge of events, and a meticulous quizzical mind.” Good columns in his views should build large readership. Duyile (2006, P. 61) gives the features of good column thus:
A good column should reflect the intelligence of the writer. It must be newsworthy and should be interesting as to relax the nerves of the readers….should possess a note of authority derivable from the personality of the columnist, apart from its note of individuality

**STYLES IN WRITING COLUMN**

Writing a column is a rewarding exercise. This exercise according to Duyile (2006, P. 60) calls for “dedication, patience and an ability to master the use of English Language used by the newspaper to communicate. The ability to write persuasively and the limitless acquisition of action…….”

The question now is, what style can one adopt in writing column?

Duyile (2005, P. 62) recommends the anecdotal, the unified and question and answer styles.

**Anecdotal:** The anecdotal style does what it says, when one has gathered materials which the feature series of unrelated topics, he brings his anecdotes together and examines them under subheadings and separates them from each other with asterisks.

**The Unified Style:** This is applicable to a single thought, or just one topical Idea or a single subject. When the writer wants to address his observation and comments to only one central issue and writes on that issue only, either arguing a point or trying to convince his reader on what course to take, he employs the unified approach. It is a simple approach. It could be formal or informal. It is used by political or sport columnists.

**Question and answer:** This style is used when the columnist has some questions on an issue to answer for the information of the readers. They may be questions sent to him by readers and answers are provided by the columnists and directly printed under each question. They should not be mistaken for a dialogue type or conversation. It is not.
COLUMNS AND EDITORIALS

Wosely and Campbell (1957, P. 411) define the editorial or column as “a journalistic essay which comments on the news, its purpose being like so much else in journalism: to inform, influence or entertain.” They argued that the editorial and the column both provide the publisher with his greatest opportunity to prove that he is not what they described as a cash register custodian but a “keeper of the public conscience.”

Woseley and Campbell (1957, P. 411-413) classified editorials and columns according to their purpose to inform, influence and entertain.

They contended that informative editorials and columns define and explain issues by “identifying persons and factors, providing historical and geographical background.” Such editorials and columns according to them may also examine the motives of persons or suggest the consequences of various courses of action. Woseley and Campbell (1957, P. 412).

Editorial and columns that influence often wear argumentative toga. While informative editorial and column define and explain a problem, argumentative editorial or column according to Woseley and Campbell (1957, P. 412) tells what should be done. They assert:

*If the writer, uses the scientific method, he defines his problem, examines all evidence available, and then, perhaps tentatively suggests a solution. This, he may do by using the devices of any debater, orator, or controversialist, by arguing generalization or analogy comparison or contrast, cause to effect or effect to cause. He should be quick to expose irrational observations and unwarranted assumptions.*

On editorials and columns that entertain, Woseley and Campbell (1957, P. 412) observe that “they evoke a smile, a chuckle, a laugh, and often have a point gently and subtly suggested.” Such columns and editorials offer the reader a relief from serious minded and disaster-laden stories, which are the major stock in trade or newspaper.
On a general note, columns and editorials are interwoven by way of functions, however the former carries a personal flavor while the latter carries institutional flavor.

COLUMNS

Qualities of good Columns

A columnist according to Agba (2003) cited in Ate (2007, P. 58) has “a good deal of freedom to express personal views in a regular commentary on local, national and international affairs.” Such freedom bestows certain powers on columnists who write personally without recourse to the paper’s policy.

A columnist has a wider freedom to discharge his social responsibility functions to the society. In 2004, I left the newspaper industry to Igbinedinion University, okada. I had a column known as Andew Asan Ate’s Mega vibes with the Ondo State tabloid, The Hope, my former place of work. Because of the freedom I enjoyed as a columnist, I was able to critically examine the policies of the government of the day without fear especially the Federal Government. The column because a hot cake at the local level and the governor’s attention (Dr. Olusegun Agagu) was drawn to it by some praise signers who felt uncomfortable with it. The governor then summoned both the editor and the managing director of Owena Press Limited, publishers of The Hope, and warned them about the column. According to the governor, “it is better for somebody to attack my wife and I than to attack President Obasanjo to that extent.” The editor called me and pleaded that I should dilute the column. I was left with two option—to dilute the column and commit professional suicide or to withdraw the column from the paper. Of course, I went for the last option in other to maintain professional integrity in the eyes of my numerous readers.

A good columnist must possess certain qualities. These are:

i. Individuality: They must have definite philosophy or life and stand on topical and controversial issue.
ii. Ability to discern or demystify complex issues: For columnist to achieve this, they must “see” further than the readers. They must “circumcise their ears what the readers could not hear.”

iii. Creativity and originality: Every columnist must be creative in thought, ideas and arguments. They must be original in style and tone.

iv. High imaginative and analytical powers: A good columnist cannot afford to be a mediocre in imagination and analysis of issues of the day. For critical societal problems to be resolved their origins must be traced analytically and solutions logically preferred.

Duyile (2005, P. 61) opines that a good column, should possess a note of authority derivable from the personality of the columnist. According to him, it should “be thought providing and should be capable of producing latent or delayed feedbacks or immediate reactions.” A columnist with the above qualities will surely deliver the dividends of personal journalism to the readers.

**NIGERIA COLUMNISTS**

In Nigeria’s media firmament, we have a good number of columnists who have established a bond with their readers.

The above statement is true because Nigeria has been, and is, a haven of gifted and reputable columnist. In olden days, the likes of Alhaji Lateef Jakande (John West); late Bisi Onabanji (Aiyekoto) Herbert Unuegbu (Unu-Habib) Peter Pan and many others were famous in the art and science of column writing especially on political issues.

Alade Odunewu who operated under the pen name of “Allah-De” in the *Daily Times* of old was also an outstanding columnist. Duyile (2005, P. 59) captured the attributes of Alade Odunewu:

His style was soft diction with a clever handing of sarcasm and other figures of speech. Like Peter Pan, he had a large audience of fanatical readers in his days. His was both a serious and at the same time high hearted column…..
Alade is currently the chairman of the Nigeria Press Council. Also renowned during their days as columnist were Areoye Oyebola (“Omo-Oye”) Daily Times. Ajibade fasina-Thomas (“Paul Pry”) Daily Times, Gbolabo Ogunsanwo-Sunday times, e.t.c.

Today, we have different good columnists who write for our local and national newspapers. These are Eric Osagie (The Flipside) daily Sun; Reuben Abati (Cross roads) The Guardian. Mike Awoyinfa (Saturday Press Clips)- Sun, Funke Egbemode- Sun and Sam Omatyese (different newspapers) Sun, The Nation.

Others are Edwin Madunagu, femi Adesina, Lious odion, Olu Obafemi, Dimgba Igwe and many others who are keeping the flag of personal journalism flying in the nation’s newspapers.

Columns and columnists offer tantalizing delicacies to newspapers and magazines in Nigeria and beyond. It is therefore expedient for journalism/mass communication students and teachers to be conversant with the role of columns and columnist in modern newspapers. This will ensure the survival of this special breed of journalism.
CHAPTER 8
BROADCAST COMMENTARY

Meaning of Broadcast Commentary.

A commentary according to Onabajo (2000: 175) is simply a descriptive spoken broadcast account of an event or performance. It is an act of speaking on an issue, sometimes expressing it the way it is conceived.

News commentaries are reasoned by Kombol (2008:1) clarify complexity and gives depth to events reported in the news. A news commentary according to him is a periodic (sometime daily) and opinionated piece of writing on a topical issue that is aired at the end of the bulletin. Kombol (2008:2) explained that the writer of the news commentary is identified at the end of the bulletin and the opinion expressed is that of the writer.

To make the commentary authoritative, the writer usually presents concrete facts to support his point of view to persuade the audience to accept his point of view.

Distinction between Commentaries and Critical Writing

Broadcast commentaries and critical writing in terms of semblance are all about opinions. Onabajo (2000:169) contend that “critical writing can be equated with a news analysis of issues, policies and events in the broadcast media, which have been properly conceptualized, articulated and documented before they can be transmitted through the airwaves”

A commentary is an expression that is based on personal or expert opinions. According to Onabajo (2000:178), such a comment may “be spiced with some analyses that are based on educational background, experience and interactive ability of the commentator.”

Where as, in critical writing, he argued that they are said to be objective but “many at times, they are subjectively objective, because when experts views are given, they are a product of the givers horizon, environment, exposure,
education and interactive ability.” In other words, critical analyses are based on facts on ground.

Critical writing is deeper than broadcast commentary. It is a professional and systematic way of looking at an issue from the perspective of strengths and weakness based on facts available.

Critical writing transcends the boundary of broadcast media because sound judgment of work of arts, music e.t.c can be accommodated in both print and broadcast media, besides it is more demanding because it requires more research, time, space and energy than broadcast commentaries.

TYPES OF COMMENTARY

There are different types of commentaries, which are used in the mass media. In other to fully understand the nature of commentaries, Kombol (2008:3-7) identified diverse types of commentaries in various academic fields. These are:

- Book Commentary
- Broadcasting Commentary
- Scriptural Commentary and
- Events Commentary

**Book Commentary**

A commentary about a book is written to explain, criticize or illustrate a given point about the book. In some cases, the book commentary is added to the book and forms part of the preliminary pages of the book, while in other instance, it is published in a separate journal or magazine.

**Broadcast Commentary**

Here we have: (1) News Commentary which is usually aired at the end of news broadcast. It is based on a topical event. It is introduced with the introduction of the writer and a brief description of the writer’s occupation. The opinion expressed is the news commentary is solely that of the writer. Unlike the newspaper editorial that expresses the views of the entire members of the
newspaper organization, the news commentary is solely the creation of the writer. (ii) The sports commentary is useful to enable the audience at home follow the games played on the field. The audience is not physically present at the venue of the game. Thus, they rely on the sports commentary to follow the game. The International Game Developer Association (2006:1) defines sports commentary as a voice-over of spoken remarks that explain or enhance the game sequence’s visual presentation. With the growth of sport on a global scale, sport commentary is an integral aspect of broadcasting. (iii) Public Events Commentary. Certain public events are of immense social significance that members of the public need to follow proceeding of the event, thus they need a commentary to guide through. Public event such as: Convocation; Swearing in of government officials; Independence day; Children’s day; Democracy day; State visits by Presidents and Monarchs e.g the US President, the Queen of England, the Pope e.t.c. The proceedings of such events are followed by minute commentary. (iv) Commentary on the internet. Special websites on the internet offer surfers the opportunity to paste their own comments on the website for others to see. These special websites are called blogs. Comments on the internet are based on specific social issues. However, blogs are used for a variety of other reasons. For example, a blog can be used by a team writing books that are separated by distance. Some Nigerian websites allow surfers the opportunity to paste their comments about current issues.

Scriptural Commentary

In religions and theology, commentaries are written about sections of the various books found in the Bible, Koran, Thora (Jewish) and other sacred scriptures. Innvista (2006:1) defines commentary in the religious sense, stating that us a treatise in annotation or explanation of the Scriptures. Scripture commentary throws more light on religious verses so that people have better understanding of it.
Social Commentary

Riverdable (2006:1) defines commentary as an organized group of remarks or observations on a particular subject; an interpretation, usually of an important social issue. Social commentary is that act of sharing one’s opinion on the nature of a society to another person.

Events Commentary

Events such as wedding, birthday, child dedication, e.t.c employ some form of commentary provided by the master of ceremony (MC). The MC directs the occasion and tells people what is happening next. The audience follows what the MC say because it gives direction and orderliness to the occasion.

WRITING NEWS COMMENTARIES

Essence of News commentaries

News commentaries according to Kombol (2005:1) clarify complexity and have depth to the event reported in the news. He reasoned that news commentaries and editorials may be first “cousins” but they have their differences. Commentaries are therefore editorials of the air.

Stages in Writing a Broadcast Commentary:

There are three basic stages of birthing a typical broadcast commentary. These are:(i)The preliminary stage (i.e before writing) (ii)writing stage proper (during writing) and (iii) Editing stage (i.e after writing). Kombol (2005:17-24) takes us through these stages.

1. Preliminary Stage (i.e before Writing)

The following steps should be taken in preliminary stage of broadcast commentary writing:

- Identify a topic
- Collect information
- Collate gathered information
The first task in writing a broadcast commentary is identifying a topic. What will the commentary be based upon? Topics for broadcast commentaries can be identified based on the following intra-personal personal processes:

a. Observation
b. Intuition
c. Conviction

The broadcast commentary writer must note that the topic should be focused on issues that are though provoking. Furthermore, does that topic serve overall public interest, or does it “stroke the egos” of only a few members of society? The broadcast commentary writer should consider these questions seriously. Apart from the intra-personal process listed above, topics for broadcast commentaries are obtained from:

a. News Stories
b. Interaction with people in society
c. Government policy
d. Actions of institutions and corporate bodies

Once the topic of the broadcast commentary is identified, the writer goes out to collect information on the topic. This important stage involves digging up the facts wherever it lays hidden. The broadcast commentary writer should be make sure that sources of information are trustworthy and that the facts gathered are true. In gathering information for broadcast commentary writing, the following tools are necessary:

- Personal interviews
- Book, Journals, Gazettes and reports
- The internet
- Newspapers and magazines
- Discussion programmes

[2] Writing stage proper [i.e during writing]
News commentaries have a basic structure namely;

[a] The Introduction
[b] The Body
[c] The Conclusion

However, it is important to note that the newspaper introduces the news commentary before it is read [this serves as a cue in that prepares’ listeners for the news commentary] and after it is read, also gives a closing note. Examples of introductory note [i.e. cue in] and closing notes are gives below:

**Introductory notes**
Example: Today’s news commentary is written by “Esama” 76th Iconomic Birthday’
Source: Independent Television, Benin City.

**Closing Notes**
Example: The news commentary was written by