GATEKEEPING AND OBJECTIVITY IN NEWS REPORTING: A STUDY OF THE NATION AND DAILY TRUST NEWSPAPERS IN NIGERIA

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN MASS COMMUNICATION

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DECLARATION

I declare that this Dissertation entitled **Gatekeeping and Objectivity in News Reporting: A Study of The Nation and Daily Trust Newspapers in Nigeria** has been carried out by me. The information obtained from relevant literatures have been duly acknowledged and the citations provided. I also declare that no part of this dissertation was previously presented for another degree or diploma at any institution.

Anthony Osigbeme AKOWE _____ _____

Signature Date

CERTIFICATION

The Dissertation entitled **Gatekeeping and Objectivity in News Reporting: A Study of The Nation and Daily Trust newspapers in Nigeria** by **Anthony Osigbeme AKOWE** meets the regulations governing the award of the Degree of Masters of Sciences of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to Mrs. Paulina Akowe, my lovely wife, my children, Sharon and Gideon and all Journalists who work day and night to make our society a better place

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First, I want to express my gratitude to my creator, the maker of Heaven and Earth for His grace upon my life and for granting me healthy life and the enablement to complete this programme and for His unquantifiable love for me and my family.

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Abstract

Objectivity and gatekeeping are two of the most talked about concepts in journalism practice globally. However, because of the way facts are presented to journalists by news sources, there have been cases whereby media audiences assume that journalists are biased. This explains the idea behind this study on objectivity and gatekeeping in the Nigerian media, using two national daily newspapers in Nigeria (The Nation and Daily Trust newspapers). Using the Social Responsibility and the theory of media ownership, the study focused on the objective nature of journalism and also examined how the gatekeeping function of the media is affecting the practice of objectivity in the Nigerian media. With the aid of the systematic random sampling method, the research found that while attaining absolute objectivity in the media may be difficult, it is however achievable only if the reporters shy away from prejudices, pre-conceptions, feelings and ambitions. He must be able to keep his biases in check. The research also found that even though absolute objectivity may not be possible except as a target, proper adherence to the gatekeeping functions of the media can go a long way to actualize the objective principle of journalism profession. This can be done by sticking to verifiable facts, excluding inferences, judgement and slanty reporting. It recommends that efforts should be made to improve on journalism training in the country while media organizations should ensure that those saddled with the responsibility of handling media contents are constantly reminded of what is required of them.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In journalism and media discourse, objectivity is a concept that is discussed almost on a daily basis both by media practitioners, newsmakers and new readers alike. It is one of the major news concepts often mentioned or discussed. It is the most central concept in media history relating to information quality (Ekwueme, 2009). News objectivity is an ethical aspect of journalism practice which has helped to isolate individual journalistic biases and opinions from the actual state of events. The concept of objectivity in journalism according to Potter (2006:9) developed almost a century ago as a reaction to the sensational, opinion driven reporting that was common in most newspapers. The term was originally used to describe a journalistic approach or method; Journalists would seek to present news in an objective way without reflecting any personal or corporate bias. Objectivity means the absence of personal biases, feelings, influence or opinion in writing news stories as it may apply to reporting.

Objectivity hinges on separating independently verifiable 'fact' from subjective values (Schudson 1978:293). Commitment to objectivity in Journalism can be defined as meaning that a person's statement about the world can be trusted if they are submitted to established rules deemed legitimate by a professional community. Schudson stressed that "objectivity norm guides Journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts. Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional in tone, taking pain to represent fairly, each leading side in a political controversy. According to an objectivity norm, the Journalist's job consists of reporting something called the "news"

without commenting on it, slanting it or shaping its formulation in any way (Schudson 2001:150).

However, in discussing objectivity, another issue that readily comes to mind is the issue of gatekeeping in the media as well as what the public expects from the media. As a fundamental practice in journalism, gatekeeping describes the process by which news stories are filtered by journalists and editors for dispersal in any medium. The process comes into play every time a blogger chooses to feature a story in a website's top position, a news producer decides to cover one issue but not another or a magazine reporter selects a source to interview for a report. Interestingly, the gatekeeping function of journalism has shifted under the changes of the digital information age. While the Internet has forever altered the way people read the news, the principles of gatekeeping still apply in many instances. In other words, it can be said that the issue of gatekeeping cannot be divulge from the objectivity role of the media. This is so because in the process of performing the role of a gatekeeper, the Journalist determines what the public should or should not know and in the process of doing this, objectivity may be affected. It must be said that gatekeeping is a prime factor in Journalism practice globally. The idea of gatekeeping is aimed at sifting the information the media release to the public, deciding what to leave out that may be potentially injurious to the society. Likewise, newsmakers and government officials also play the role of the gatekeeper when giving out information to the reporters. The truth is that no media establishment can transmit all messages it receives on a daily basis. Some people have to decide which information goes out, which ones to defer, which ones to modify and which ones to delete. Such individuals literally open and close the "gate" that stands between the information source and the recipient.

However, gatekeeping is not restricted to accepting and rejecting information, but also involves shaping, display, timing, repeating the message for emphasis, and so on. In other words, the Journalist is first a gatekeeper, before becoming a reporter, a sub-editor or an editor. Quoting Ekeli, former General Manager of Delta Publishing Company, Folarin (1998) said that gatekeeping is nothing but voluntary self-censorship performed by the media themselves which emanate from the understanding by journalists that apart from legal restrictions on what is to be published, the journalists have a duty to be socially responsible to their readers in whatever materials they package for them.

Discussion on objectivity in the media may not be complete without mentioning the gatekeepers whose responsibility it is to safeguard the content of the media. It is common knowledge that the gatekeepers play a very important role in media practice across the globe.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The media has become one of the most important aspects of life in today's world and plays a major role in shaping events across the globe. In Nigeria, the media is known to have played a major role in the nation's independence, the struggle for the return to democratic rule and the abortion of the third term bid by former President Olusegun Obasanjo. This is apparently in line with the belief by media scholars that the media sets the agenda for the society. Taking into consideration the fact that there are certain people in the media that determine what should be published and what should not be published and the requirements for an objective reporting, this research work attempted to provide answers to pertinent questions in the industry.

However, in performing this gatekeeping role, media practitioners are expected by the society to display a high level of objectivity. They are also expected to report events without any form of personal bias and opinion while selecting events and issues that the public should know. Although there have been divergent views on the objective nature of the media. While some media scholars believe that there can be no complete objectivity in the performance of media function, others think otherwise. Also, in recent times, the effectiveness of the gatekeeping function of the media has been called to question by the society they tend to serve. Since the advent of online news and the social media, the reporting speed required of news services has increased steadily. It has made gatekeepers even more likely to rely on prepared material and handout which may not be in line with objectivity and gatekeeping practice. This apparently explained why McQuail (2010) argued that despite its usefulness and potential for dealing with many different situations, the gatekeeping concept has a built-in limitation in its implication that news arrives in ready story form at the 'gates' of the media, where it is either admitted or excluded. This forms the basis for this study to determine the level of influence of the various gatekeepers on the objective reporting of issues and events by the media.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions were addressed:

a. How do objectivity and gatekeeping influence news reporting by *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* Newspapers?

b. What are the factors responsible for the performance of *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* in relation to objectivity and gatekeeping?

c. How do self-censorship, ownership and control affect objectivity in news reporting in the Daily Trust and The Nation?

1.4 **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study was to find out the level of objectivity in news reporting by journalists in Nigeria and how the performance of the gatekeepig function of the media impact on this objectivity role. However, the specific objectives of this study therefore are:

a. To find out the extent to which objectivity and gatekeeping influences news reporting by *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* Newspapers?

b. To find out the factors responsible for the performance of *Daily Trust* and *The Nation* in relation to objectivity and gatekeeping?

c. To find out how self-censorship, ownership and control affect objectivity in news reporting in the Daily Trust and The Nation?

1.5 Scope of the Study

In the course of the study, the researcher intends to focus on two selected national daily newspapers namely, Daily Trust newspaper and The Nation newspaper. Daily Trust is selected to represent daily newspapers in the north, while The Nation newspapers represented newspapers in the southern part of the country. The two newspapers were selected in view of their wide spread in circulation and area of coverage in the country.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the practice of news journalism in Nigeria as it looked at the practice of journalism in the country amidst of proliferation of information on the Internet which has diminished the power of journalists as gatekeepers. It is also significant because the proliferation of information has the capacity to either positively or negatively affect objectivity in news reporting in the media. Inspite of this, the journalists still play a role in sorting, interpreting and lending credibility to news reporting. The fact that journalists choose which stories to cover and which ones to leave out by attempting to determine the overall newsworthiness of an issue makes the study important considering the fact that a number of factors goes into this decision-making process by the journalist. Although there are those who believe that the journalists no longer function as the primary gatekeepers of news reportage because the proverbial gates have been blown wide open by the proliferation of digital information. Inspite of this, the journalists still hold the key and play critical roles as watchdogs.

In a society where information and misinformation is so easily distributed, journalists can provide services as fact-checkers who hold stories up to the light of objectivity. Objectivity called for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information. However, there is a dispute about whether objectivity can really exist. How would people know the truth since journalistic objectivity is an effort to discern practical truth? Reporters seeking genuine objectivity search out the best truth possible from the evidence they can find. To discredit objectivity because it is impossible to arrive at perfect truth is akin to dismissing trial by jury because it is not perfect in its judgments. Gatekeeping and objectivity are the two major requirements to be considered as very important in daily practice of journalism. This study therefore will add to the stock of existing body of

knowledge on news objectivity and gatekeeping in Nigeria and possibly improve on the debate on the two concepts. Researchers carrying out study in similar area can use the finding of this research to support their own study and can also serve as an empirical reference material for further study.

1.7 Justification of the Study

These two newspapers are studied due to their adequacy in content and the fact that they constitute some of the newspapers with the widest circulation in the country today. While Daily Trust is chosen from among the newspapers owned and published in the northern part of Nigeria, The Nation is chosen from those owned and published in the southern part. The two newspapers have correspondents across the 36 States of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory. Similarly, these two newspapers are believed to parade some of the best hands in journalism practice in the country today, with what followers of the papers regard as the "fearless brand of journalism". Since there is a general belief among media followers that the two newspapers practice some level of fearless journalism, they were chosen for this study to ascertain their level of objectivity and gatekeeping practice. While The Nation is believed to parade some of the best crop of writers in the industry today, at the time of this study, Daily Trust was about the only media house in the country with an ombudsman.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

In carrying out study of this nature, one major limitation has always been the dearth of quality of information on one hand and people willing to give such information as and when needed. On the other hand, the major limitation of this study was the difficulty in

obtaining past studies combining the two concepts in the study. In other words, while materials were readily available on objectivity and gatekeeping, it was practically impossible to obtain materials combining objectivity and gatekeeping in one study. Considering the importance of the two concepts to journalism practice, it appears that scholars have always study them individually and not considering how one affects the other in the day-to-day practice of journalism. This obstacle no doubt has its own impact on the outcome of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature in relation to objectivity and gatekeeping functions of the media. In addition to the review of relevant literature, the chapter also looks at the theoretical framework and its justification for the study.

2.2 Concept of Objectivity

Akpan & Onyebuchi (2012) citing Anim, (2006:7) believe that the concept of "objectivity" in the news business has become rather contentious among communication

scholars. This is because of the view by some media scholars which Akpan & Onyebuchi (2012) subscribe to, that the very idea of story selection from among the very many events that occur in a day is fraught with subjectivity. They said "we cannot deny that some stories in the mass media lack objectivity". On the other hand, Ekwueme argued that:

> The penchant for the Nigerian mass media especially the news magazines to eulogize and chant the praise songs of some non-performing governors to the chagrin of the masses. In some very shameless cases, these magazines devote their centre-spread on the advertorials and supplements of these rogue governors displaying phantom projects in which countless millions are allegedly spent. If, in fact, such supplements and advertorials reflect truly the height of development in the country, we would not be suffering from the infrastructural problems that are today our collective lot (Ekwueme (2009:97)

On his part, McQuail (2010) noted that objectivity is a particular form of media practice and also a particular attitude to the task of information collection, processing and dissemination which should not be confused with the broader notion of truth, even though it is one version of truth. He said further that objectivity requires a fair and non-discriminatory attitude to sources and to objects of news reporting all of which should be treated on equal terms.

According to journalistic standards of objectivity, Journalists' personal experiences… ought to be irrelevant and left at the door step in the process of news gathering. Their personal history and identity should not enter their work. The celebration of objectivity as a standard for news writing forces Journalists to erase themselves from their stories, distance themselves from their subjects and adopt a consistent pattern of cultural neutrality (Mahtani, 2005:300). Citing Alterman (2003), Schecter (2003), Robinson

(2002), Mahtani said “despite what we would like to believe, news reporting is not fair, democratic nor objective in nature”.

Harcup (2004: 60) believes that the gradual adoption of objectivity as a normative standard of news reporting may have been encouraged by a development of the wire service such as the Associated Press in 1848. Objectivity is not simply concerned with how a particular story is covered, but also with what is selected as a potential story and what is ignored. Journalists might see themselves as satisfying their professional commitment to objectivity by taking steps to look at both sides of the story; assess conflicting claims; assess the credibility of sources; look for evidence before going to press and not publishing anything believed to be untrue and seeing if they stand up (Harcup, 2004:67-68).

Objectivity deals with values as well as facts which have evaluative implications. Factuality in this context refers first to a form of reporting which deals with events and statements that can be checked against sources and are presented free from comment. It involves several truth criteria such as completeness of an account, accuracy and an intention not to mislead or suppress what is relevant. In general, what affects most immediately and most strongly is likely to be considered most relevant. Related to this is the concept of impartiality which presupposes a neutral attitude and has to be achieved through a combination of balance as between opposing interpretations, points of views or versions of events and neutrality presentation. The main information quality requirement here include the fact that the mass media should provide a comprehensive supply of relevant news and background information about events in the society and the world around. Also, it states that information should be objective in the sense of being factual in

form, accurate, honest, sufficiently complete and true to reality and reliable in the sense of being checkable and separating facts from opinion and that information should be balanced and fair (impartial) while reporting alternative perspectives and interpretations in a non-sensational, unbiased way as far as possible (McQuail, 2010:201).

2.3 Operationalising the Concept of Objectivity

Media scholars believe that objectivity has its intellectual roots in the past 300 years. While objectivity has many definitions, it may be considered simply as a mechanism that allows Journalists to divorce facts from opinion. It is a way of knowing, an episteme that connects human perspective with facts and then knowledge. Journalists view objectivity as refusing to allow individual bias to influence what they report. It is in Journalism that all facts and people are regarded as equal and worthy of coverage (Patterson & Wilkens 2008: 22). They believe that objectivity came along at an advantageous time when the mass press of the early 1900 was deeply and corruptly involved in yellow journalism. Accordingly, it is believed that:

> Fabricated stories were common; newspaper war was close to the real thing. Objectivity was a good way to clean up Journalism's act with a set of standards where seemingly none had existed before. It fits the cultural expectations of the enlightenment that truth was knowable and ascertainable and it made sure that readers of news columns would remain unoffended long enough to glance at the ads. (Patterson & Wilkens 2008: 22)

However, Kaplan (nd) is of the opinion that most journalists believe that they are under professional obligation to be objective and balanced. However, many journalists concede to the fact that it is impossible to be truly objective since everyone comes with their own sets of experiences and biases and therefore prefer to say that they are fair. But

sometimes, this objectivity or fairness proves frustrating inspite of the fact that it is a journalist's duty to present multiple voices on any given issue. Interestingly, Journalists seldom give equal time or space to issues. Newsrooms make editorial decisions about what weight to give the issues they cover. While objectivity is a goal for most professional news organizations. They believe it is good business and good journalism to try to present news and information in a fair, objective and balanced way. However, concepts such as 'truth' and 'reality' cannot be separated from the concept of objectivity. Hence, if one can speak of a paradigm within journalism, one might see such a paradigm in the requirement for objectivity in disseminating news. But it is one thing to operate with objectivity as a beacon, and something else to operationalise objectivity in the everyday task of journalism (Wien, 2005).

Attempts at operationalising the concept of objectivity can be seen in the work of Shaw *et al* when they opined that:

> When writing a story, journalists often balance the opposing sides of an issue as if their story is the only one that the public will see. Journalists do this because they want to be objective, or if that seems impossible, to be fair and balanced. This is true even though most journalists and editors have concluded that objectivity is impossible and, like magazine magnate Henry Luce, know they can only *aim* for fairness. Fairness and objectivity go together. Scholar Jay Rosen writes: "Objectivity is about informing the public; it tells us to worry about things like accuracy, balance and fairness" (Shaw, McCombs *et al*. 1997:303).

Wein argued further that the concept of objectivity is binary in nature, adding that one is either objective or subjective. To be subjective is to say that one's own assessments (attitudes and values) have influence on knowledge, while to be objective is to say that one is content to present that which is not affected by one's own assessments. McQuail (2010) stressed that one main feature of objectivity is the adoption of a position of

detachment and neutrality towards the object of reporting. Second, there is an effort to avoid partisanship and not taking side in matters of dispute or showing bias. Thirdly, it requires strict attachment to accuracy and other truth criteria such as relevance and completeness. It also presumes a lack of ulterior motives or service to a third party. The process of observing and reporting should not be contaminated by subjectivity nor should it interfere with reality being reported. However, because of an established convention of objectivity, media channels can distance their editorial content from the advertising matters that they carry and the advertisers can do likewise in respect of editorial content. Media audience appears to understand the principle of objectivity performance well enough and its practice helps to increase public credence and trust both in information and also in the opinion which the media offers McQuail (2010: 200-3) noted that:

> It has often been argued that following the rules of objectivity leads to new or less obvious forms of bias. Few would argue for impartiality towards evil deeds, but the concept does not help to find any line to draw. There are also possible inconsistencies with claims of media freedom which does not distinguish between true and false expression and diversity.

Objectivity is not unanimously regarded as necessary, virtuous or even possible to achieve. Ryan (2001) cited by McQuail (2010) reviewed and responded to critics of objectivity partly on the basis of a definition of objectivity that recognises conflict of fact and opinion and possible verification and interpretation. Ryan (2006) later suggested that criticism of the objective approach had so weakened its appeal to Journalists that it contributed to the failure of US news media coverage of the Iraqi war by opening the door to pro-war news and editorializing. However, two schools of thought have emerged regarding the concept of objectivity. For example, the British schools of journalism mix

facts with opinion while the American schools distinguish between facts and opinion in news judgment.

Many Journalists today concede the fact that total objectivity is almost impossible. Potter (2008) noted that:

> In 1996, the US Society of Professional Journalists dropped the word objectivity from its code of ethics. Journalists are human afterall. They care about their work and they do have opinions. Claiming that they are completely objective suggests that they have no values. Instead, Journalists have largely agreed that they must be aware of their own opinion so that they can keep them in check. The audience should not be able to tell from the story what the Journalist opinion is. By using an objective scientific method for verifying information, Journalists can report stories that do not reflect their own personal views. In other words, the story should be impartial and fair.

According to Burton (2010: 252), objectivity is a notion integral to news. It is an abstract, an idealized notion as well as an aspiration. But to say that news is or ever can become truly objective is nonsense. He added that it is a myth. However, Larson (1997) calls it the myth ritual of objectivity when arguing that it is bound up with the concept of professionalism in Journalism. The myth of objectivity… also allows media managers to pretend that they have special claim on the truth (Davies, 2008:112). Davies however dismissed the possibility of real objectivity in news. He stressed that:

> The great blockbuster myth of modern Journalism is objectivity. The idea that a good newspaper or broadcaster simply collects and reproduces the objective truth has never happen and will never happen because it cannot happen. All stories have to view reality from some particular point of view (Davies, 2008:111).

On his part, Herbert (2000) contends that although absolute objectivity is impossible, the quest for factual accuracy, balance and fairness remains the goal of every professional reporter and the desire is to create an aura around news to attach meaning of authority

and truth to news production. He further maintained that news values are potently cultural and partial, they are subjective. News stories are plainly constructed with an angle… The whole selection and decision making process of news is one in which degrees of subjectivity must appear. But Von Ginnekan (1998) said that objectivity can be seen merely as a set of rhetorical devices which do not necessarily express the truth. Anonymity of sources of newspaper Journalists and TV camera operators is one such device that contributes to the illusion of objectivity. According to Oso (1997: 5-6):

> Objectivity is regarded as a fundamental norm in Journalism. It is the cardinal creed in Journalism, the ground norm in professional practice, the hallmark of media establishment in democratic environment. Along with the concept are others like fairness, balance, truth, neutrality and the absence of value judgement... Objectivity in this particular instance puts forward the ideas that Journalists and the news media are detached observers, neutral from the social reality they report. This view which sees the media as the mirror of social events is commonly held by Journalists. It implies that the news media are value free and that if Journalists stick to their professional ethics, they can give the public the true picture of the world out there.

Citing Schiller (1981:2), Oso said objectivity facilitates the otherwise difficult belief that newspaper mirrors or reflects reality. Invoked conventionally, objectivity ostensibly preclude the very presence of conversations and thus mark the patterned structure of news, it is an invisible frame.

It is important to say that there are those who believe that complete objectivity is possible. Cunningham (2003) argues that "we all learned about objectivity in school or at our first job. Along with its twin sentries 'fairness' and 'balance,' it defined journalistic standards," but journalists struggle to reach a consensus on what the notion of objectivity really means. On his part, Ward (2009) noted that the twin concept of truth and

objectivity has ‘long roots’ in journalism running back to the advent of the periodic news press. Ward claims that “modern journalism ethics was built upon the twin pillars of truth and objectivity...today; the pillars of truth and objectivity show serious wear and tear.” He further argues that the notion of journalists objectivity has taken a serious battering from a post-modern scepticism of the objective truth, a cynicism of ethics in profit-seeking journalism, and a suggestion of the merits of non-objective writing in a ‘interactive’ media landscape populated by ‘citizen journalists’ and bloggers (Ward, 2009).

Bowman & Kasun (2010) opined that the notion of journalistic objectivity is intrinsically tied up with the purported journalistic quest for ‘truth.’ However, there is little doubt journalists believe themselves to be engaged in pursuing truth. But what must be understood is that journalists are aware of this elusive nature of truth. Gilles Gauthier cited by Bowman and Kasun (2010) maintains “the end of objectivity in journalism would spell the end of journalism itself”. He argues that the notion of “objectivity can only be legitimately raised with respect to … straight news reporting. In other words, he is of the opinion that objectivity is almost impossible in one on one interview, feature, editorial and opinion articles because these are tainted more with personal views of the writer(s). But Jason (1997) said the primary responsibility of the media is to report accurately and objectively and wherever possible, seek out the truth. Albashir (2002:6) calls it the pursuit of truth, but is concerned that the practice of truth has the potential of encouraging violence in any society. In a paper entitled “Who Watches the Watchdog”, the renowned Nigerian Journalist said “sometimes, practitioners sing that “tell the truth and shame the devil”. It does appear to me that in telling the truth, sometimes, we don’t

shame the devil but invite it to cause violence in society. The question now is, how much of the truth would we tell if in the process of doing so, the devil come in to cause several death?... It would appear it is a conflict between morality and social responsibility on the one hand and the demand for truth as an element of Journalism practice on the other… according to him, "where truth would expose society to severe violence, I would not hesitate to put a lie to it, so long as doing so would prevent the loss of lives" (Albashir, 2002:6)

Albashir is however harsh on Journalism practitioners in Nigeria saying that Journalists rank among the top-most biased professionals in Nigeria because they assumed a more dangerous trend. If all other professionals were to have been journalists, the entire Nigeria landscape would have been murdered long ago by the bias reporting alone. The point here is that there is hardly a Nigeria Journalist who does not know that practitioners respect their own code in the breach and people dare say that they do so with deliberate mischief, such that today, Journalists are feared like AIDS disease rather than respected (Albashir 2002: 10).

Although, there are controversial opinions on the issue of objectivity, while some scholars hold that reporters should be neutral completely, others opine that reporters should be allowed to input personal opinions into their news report giving the fact that it is to the benefit of the masses. The question then is, who determines the interest of the masses in a given news report? Is it the function of the news event itself or that of the journalist whose duty is to report an event? Either way, the basic issue is that news objectivity is a case of great concern and with the Internet in view, it becomes a more complex issue due to its vulnerable nature of accessibility (Akpan & Onyebuchi, n.d).

However, the irony of trying to be balanced or objective is that in practice, news organizations default to authorities and officials as surrogates for objectivity. Journalists sometimes substitute terms such as accuracy, fairness, balance or truth in place of objectivity to describe the prime goal that guides their reporting. Objectivity is a tough standard to achieve, particularly with so many critics and citizens charging that Journalists today do not even come close to achieving it.

Objectivity has become a professional norm in the media over the last century. As McGill (2004) puts it, Objectivity has at its heart the noble aim of presenting indisputable facts upon which everyone in society can agree, and build upon towards the goal of a better society. Unfortunately, the idea of objectivity as practiced in today's newsrooms has become a subtle but powerful means of self-censorship. He argued that objectivity has become a conglomeration of contradictory practices that serve the purpose of rationalization as often as investigation. It has become a crutch for journalistic practices that work against civic aims.

2.4 Gatekeeping as a Media Function and as a Theory

Gatekeeping is described by Roberts (2005) as the vanilla ice cream of mass communication theory. It may not be everyone's favorite, but nearly everyone can tolerate it. While it may have an unremarkable flavor, it serves as a building block for other theory and methodological approaches. According to Kovach & Rosenstiel (1999), gatekeeping is a media term used to describe the filtering of stars and coverage through television and print. This derives from the gate in a camera through which the film has to pass before it is broadcast to the targeted audience. A message has to pass through many

gates (filters) before it reaches its audience. This means that selections of media topics are chosen to be presented to different audiences through different forms of media. It is both a media theory and a media concept that is practiced daily by media practitioners. The theory is one of the most important mass communication tools of analysis. It is said that gatekeepers (reporters, news writers, newsroom editorial staff, news editors, editors etc) decide what information they will pass to the public and what to leave out. Even though the primary focus is about the media, it is important to say that even news makers and government officials also play the role of the gate keeper when giving information to the reporters. These gatekeepers decide what stories are important to release, thus controlling the news we see, read and hear.

Lewin (1947) is adjudged to be the first person to use the term “gatekeeping”, to describe a wife or mother who decides which food the family will eat at a particular time and which food should not be eaten. In other words, the gatekeeper is the man or woman who decides what passes through a gate. Although he applied his idea originally to the food chain, he later added that the gatekeeping process could include a news item released through some communication channels. This is the argument from which most gatekeeping studies in communication have been launched. Interestingly, it took the work of White (1964) to direct Lewin’s statement firmly towards journalism.

In the 1970s, McCombs & Shaw took a different direction to observe the effects of the gatekeepers' decisions when realised that the audience learned how much importance to attach to a news item from the emphasis the media placed on it. Thus, they related the gatekeeping concept to the new emerging concept of agenda-setting (McCombs *et al*, 1976). It is worthy of mention that on a daily basis, media organisations receive

thousands of news and photographs, but has limited space and airtime for all the news and pictures so generated. They are therefore left with the option of making selection on what to use and what to leave out. This starts from the reporter who decides which news to cover and which one to leave out while an editor decides which news to publish and which news to leave out. This is why they are referred to as "gatekeeper" because the nature of their job is just like a gatekeeper who has the powers to allow someone to go through the gate or stop him/her.

According to Moemeka (2000), gatekeeping is not editing… it is mainly concerned with meeting the assumed or identified expectations of the audience as interpreted by the gatekeeper. Unlike in editing, gatekeeping involves amendments to statements, adding to or deleting from message content or changes in format and direction in order to make the message what the gatekeeper thinks the receivers would like to hear, see or read. The gatekeeper is one who evaluates media content in order to determine its relevance and value to the audience and having determined this, goes ahead to do everything necessary to maintain them in relation to that particular media content before it is sent to the audience. Gatekeepers are therefore very important and powerful guards at check points in the flow of mass communication messages. There are many gates and keepers. The news source who with holds aspects of information he makes available to the media is a gatekeeper. The reporter/cameraman who slants a story the way he believe the public should or would like it is a gatekeeper. The most important and most powerful gatekeeper is the Editor through whom all media contents must pass on their way to the audience. The gatekeeping function of other media personnel appear insignificant when compared with that of the Editor. He can replace or rewrite a reporter's story with materials from

sources not accessible to the Reporter. He can also delete from the story what the reporter may have thought to be a very important item in the story (Moemeka 2000: 32-33).

According to McQuail (2010), the term gatekeeping has been widely used as a metaphor to describe the process by which selections are made in media work, especially decisions regarding whether or not to allow particular news report to pass through the gates of a news medium into the news channels. The idea of gatekeeping has a much wider potential application since it can apply to the work of literary agents and publishers and to many kinds of editorial and production in print and television. In a wider sense, it refers to the power to give or withhold access to different voices in society and is often a locus of conflicts.

However, Salcito (nd.) argued that gatekeeping in early journalism history was not considered a serious editorial problem because it was assumed that almost anyone could operate a press and express views. When presses became expensive and moguls created major news organizations, the problem of gatekeeping arose. He noted that as a system of rules, editorial checks and other verification processes became important to journalism ethics with the rise of the modern newspaper in the late 19th century, when newspapers advertised claims of their objectivity and factuality in news reporting. In this context, gatekeeping became a norm of responsible reporting, where editors and journalists checked their reports for facts and balance. He further argued that the news media's gatekeeping role used to dictate the newsworthiness of an event – in terms of its importance and also its validity.

The basic assumption of the gatekeeping theory is that it has the power to decide which information will go forward, and which will not. In other words, a gatekeeper decides

which of a certain commodity – materials, goods, and information may enter the system. The most important point here is that gatekeepers are able to control the public's knowledge of the actual events by letting some stories pass through the information transmission channel while keeping others out of it.

The theory also assumed that media organizations as well as key media professionals act as gates to the flood of information coming in from the larger society. The gates can either be opened to let some kind of information through for processing and publication or shut to deny other kinds of information the opportunity for processing and publication. Also, it assumed that the gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or by gatekeepers with the power to make decisions or to transfer. But the power is interdependent on other channel regions and ranges of impartial rules. Bittner (2003) gives three functions of the gatekeeper as follow:

1. To limit the information members of the public receive by editing this information before it is disseminated to them;
2. To expand the amount of information the public receives by giving them additional facts or views, and
3. To reorganize or interprete the information.

The institutions and organizations can also play the role of the gatekeepers. In a political and governmental system there are gatekeepers (individuals or institutions), who control access to positions of power and regulate the transmission of information. Gatekeepers exist in many jobs, and they have the potential to influence the mental pictures created in the people's minds about the events happening in the world around them. In the media organizations, decision-making is usually based on the principles of news values,

organizational routines, institutional structure and common sense. Gatekeeping is vital in communication planning and almost all of the media people play their role in gatekeeping according to their positions and powers in their media organizations. The gatekeepers' choices are a result of a complex plethora of influences, preferences, motives and common values. Gatekeeping is inevitable and in some circumstances, it can be useful. Gatekeeping can also be dangerous, since it can lead to misuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass. However, gatekeeping is often a routine, guided by some set of standard questions (Gupta, 2006).

On their part, Harper & Barber (1998) noted that for several years, gatekeepers have been some of the most powerful people in the media. They highlight particular stories, promote trends, sort the journalistic wheat from the chaff, and some would restrict the flow of information. They argued that gatekeepers can serve as filters for truth and accuracy. By staunching the flow of bad information, and only releasing information after careful and thorough vetting, gatekeepers ostensibly make sure the inputs to our worldview, beliefs and resulting decisions are based on their controlled information output of "better" information. This might be called "paternalism by filtering." Secondly, gatekeepers aim to steer the public's collective focus toward what matters, versus things that are trivial, irrelevant or inconsequential. Thirdly, gatekeepers may control the flow of information in an attempt to shape outcomes. In other words, traditional media might actively try to push content that supports a particular agenda—a step beyond bias by omission, to bias by inclusion. By so doing, media gatekeepers are only able to control the flow of their information through their owned properties.

The selection procedure of news takes place at every stage of the news manufacturing process. Bass (1969) presented a 'double action' model of news flow in a typical media organization, stressing that the news production process has two stages of selection or gatekeeping with the first being news collection, while the second stage is news processing. In the first stage, reporters and photographers gather raw news stories directly from the field. Being present on the actual location, they have a degree of choice on what aspects of an event they will select, and in which slant they will report them. When the story gets to the newsroom, it again passes through another round of selection. While in the newsroom, the editorial staff has many news stories to deal with, trying to balance the demands of different news stories; working in accordance with their organization's standards and values. The editorial staff are influenced in their decision making even more than the reporters in the field.

In the words of Shoemaker & Reese (1996), the media content is influenced by the personal attitudes and orientations of media workers; professionalism; corporate policies, corporate ownership patterns, the economic environment; advertisers; and ideological influences (p.1). Also, White (1950) suggested the selection process in newspapers and argued that news items were rejected for three reasons: 1.personal feelings of the gatekeeper; 2. insufficient space and 3. The story had appeared previously.

Despite its appeal and plausibility, the gatekeeping concept has a number of weaknesses and has been continuously revised since its application. The weak points of the theory are its implication of being one gate area and one main set of selection criteria, its simple view of the supply of news and its tendencies to individualise decision making. Although

the first gatekeeping studies presumed that news selection was guided by an expert assessment of what would interest the audience, however there has been mixed support. The concept has a built in limitation in its implication that news arrives in ready-made and unproblematic event-story form at the gates of the media where it is either admitted or excluded (McQuail, 2010:312).

Gatekeeping as a media theory has no doubt received its own share of criticisms. According to Folarin (2002), no media organization can transmit all the messages it receives in the course of the day's routine. Some individuals have to decide which information to transmit, which to defer, which to modify and which to delete. However, factors that determine whether this gate will be closed or opened are mainly organizational policy, audience needs and preferences, personal disposition of the communication professional, competition, legal restrictions, characteristics of information sources, nature of the media and professional ethics (Adepoju, 1999 cited by Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2006). There is the argument that the lack of gatekeeping undermines the credibility of emerging participatory news sources.

It also did not take into consideration the present trend of citizen Journalism and online media. In other words, while it was possible to gate keep before the current trend, contemporary development may have rendered the essence of the theory irrelevant and difficult to adhere to. It also arrogate so much power to the media to determine what the society should know and what they should not know, leaving out the fact that with increase in media expansion, what is denied the people by one media can be made

available to them by the other. In other words, it failed to take into consideration the concept of competition amongst media organizations and media professionals.

Similarly, the theory offers a weak analysis of the media industry. It fails to pay attention to the broad political, economic and social structures of the societies in which the media operates. The gate keeping theory reduces the news production processes only to the internal dynamics between editors and journalists. In doing so, this theory falls short of exploring the impact of dynamics and constraints that these gatekeepers are faced with, e.g. time frames, influences of advertisers, owners and audiences. Regardless of these shortcomings, gate keeping theory offers an insight into how powers bestowed to gate keepers may contribute to certain voices and agendas being privileged over others.

2.5 **Gatekeeping and Agenda Setting**

Gatekeeping cannot be divulged from the agenda setting. Tettey (2009) believes that the concept of agenda setting, is based on the premise that the media have the ability to shape the nature and focus of public discourse because of their control over the means of information dissemination. According to him:

> What is considered important in a country depends, to a significant extent, on the visibility and salience that the media put on it. 'Watch-dogging,' agenda setting, and democratic accountability are interrelated. What the media choose to monitor and report on shape the public agenda and elicit answerability from relevant actors and the imposition of appropriate sanctions by citizens or state institutions. The extent to which the African media play these intersecting roles will be the focus of the following discussion. The valuable role of the media in agenda-setting is borne out by the fact that initial investigative work by various journalists has provided the basis from which relevant state institutions have taken up and pursued lapses in performance, malfeasance, corruption in government, etc, and consequently brought those concerned to book (Tettey, 2009:7).

Norris & Odugbemi (2009) argued that as 'agenda-setters', the news media has a responsibility to raise awareness of pervasive social problems, helping to turn public attention to matter of common interest, to inform governing officials about social needs, and to inform the international community about development challenges. The central normative premise of agenda-setting is the claim that problems covered in the news media should serve to highlight the importance of these issues for the public and for politicians. In this regard, it is claimed that the press should operate like a burglar-alarm, sounding alarm warnings and rousing people to action when major challenges and crisis arise (Norris & Odugbemi, 2009).

Van Belle, Rioux & Potter. 2004 cited by Norris & Odugbemi (2009) noted that the coverage of these issues in the news media can inform the general public and government officials, potentially making people more responsive to social needs, humanitarian crisis, and development priorities, both at home and overseas. In practice, there remains some level of dispute about the primary direction of influence, including who leads and who follows among the news agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda.

Agenda-setting by reporters may arise from conscious editorial decisions in newsrooms or from common practices and organizational structures in media outlets. The process thereby calls attention to issues of concern among the general public and government officials. The news media are also believed to contribute towards framing issues, where reporting triggers familiar interpretive frameworks, shaping how we think about social problems and their potential solutions (Entman, 1993).

Waisbord (2009) believe that the press contributes to democratic governance by monitoring and holding the powerful accountable (watchdog), covering issues of public significance that require the attention of citizens and policy-makers (agenda-setting), and facilitating the expression of a myriad of perspectives (gatekeeping). From this perspective, the press should offer platforms for public dialogue, stimulate conversations on a wide range of public issues, and turn the attention of policy-makers and citizens to matters of relevant public interest. He noted that structural dynamics and professional biases also constrain the agenda-setting and gate-keeping roles of the press. As agenda-setter, the press should report on a variety of significant public problems that need attention from citizens and policymakers. As gatekeepers, journalists should facilitate dialogue among multiple perspectives by bringing out a range of views from individuals and organized groups (Waisbord, 2009)

2.6. Framing and Priming

According to Enthonans (1993) cited by McQuail, framing involves selection and silence. He said that frames define problems, diagonise causes, make judgements and suggest remedies. On his part, McQuail believes that framing is a way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated items of fact. He stressed that "it is almost unavoidable for journalists to do this and in doing so, depart from pure objectivity and introduce some unintended bias. When information is supplied to the new media by sources, it arrives with a built in frame that suits the purpose of the source and is unlikely to be purely objective". He argued further that the idea of framing is an attractive one that provides a strong hypothesis that an audience will be guided by Journalistic frames in what he/she

learns vis-a-vis frames. Citing Cappella & Jamieson (1978), he maintained that "the way the news is framed by journalists and how the audience frames the news may be similar or different".

In their work, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models", Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) argued that Framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by the audiences. They argued that Framing is often traced back to roots in both psychology and sociology. To this end, it is noted that:

> The psychological origins of framing lie in experimental work by Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984), for which Kahneman received the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics (Kahneman, 2003). They examined how different presentations of essentially identical decision-making scenarios influence people's choices and their evaluation of the various options presented to them. The sociological foundations of framing were laid by Goffman (1974) and others who assumed that individuals cannot understand the world fully and constantly struggle to interpret their life experiences and to make sense of the world around them. In order to efficiently process new information, Goffman argues, individuals therefore apply interpretive schemas or ''primary frameworks'' (Goffman, 1974:24) to classify information and interpret it meaningfully.

Scheufele & Tewksbury (207) therefore described Framing as both a macro level and a micro level construct. They noted that as a macro-construct, the term ''framing'' refers to modes of presentation that journalists use to present information in a way that reverberates with existing underlying schemas among their audience. In their words, this does not mean that most journalists try to spin a story or deceive their audiences. Citing Gans (1979), it was argued further that framing, for the journalist is a necessary tool to reduce the complexity of an issue, given the constraints of their respective media related to news holes and airtime. Frames, in other words, become invaluable tools for presenting relatively complex issues. On the other hand, they explained that as a micro-construct,

framing describes how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions.

Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) also said that Priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments. According to them, it is often understood as an extension of agenda setting. There are two reasons for this: (a) Both effects are based on memory-based models of information processing. These models assume that people form attitudes based on the considerations that are most salient (i.e., most accessible) when they make decisions. They believe that by making some issues more salient in people's mind (agenda setting), mass media can also shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about political candidates or issues (priming). Citing Iyengar& Kinder, (1987), McQual said that reference is often made to priming as a more specific aspect of agenda setting. In his words, Iyengar & Kinder observed that the idea of priming originated in Social Learning Theory and the study of media effects in aggression and argued that "the political issues that receive more attention also figure more prominently in public assessment of the performance of political actors. Priming effect is essentially one of promoting certain evaluative criteria and plays a part in an attempt to manage news". Bryant & Thompson (2002) said priming is a popular area of media effect research based on psychological principles of information processing by means of cognitive components. They stressed that priming theory often serves as a theoretical basis for particular studies in other areas of media effect research including agenda setting.

2.7 Empirical Review

According to Ayodele (1988), even though objectivity is the state or quality of not being influenced by personal bias, prejudice, feelings and opinions, objective news reporting is that which is devoid of inferences, judgement and slanting. They stressed that modern journalism is not altogether a professional practice in which the operators become simply, automatons, unthinking, unfeeling and without emotion. Thus, objectivity becomes a relative term, relative to the system that exists. Ayodele stressed that in media history, there have been two opposing argument about media objectivity. The argument has been whether objectivity is good or bad, and whether it is even possible to have objectivity in news reporting. According to him, one strong argument about objectivity in news reporting is that it is a myth, and theoretically speaking, a mere abstraction in absolute terms. Objectivity is said to be unattainable since it does not really exist. Ayodele (1988:108) said:

> The proposition is stretched further to indicate that what is impossible, what is non-existent, need not be attempted because such attempts Inevitably would prove unnecessary, unrealistic, as well as futile. From the philosophical premise of such logic, subjectivization of news content, or subjectivity in news reporting (which in the literature is often called "Interpretative journalism") would appear the only sensible, and realistic position or attitude open to the journalist.

The second school of thought holds that objectivity in news reporting is an attainable goal which one must strive for even in the face of opposing realities. He said that:

> Adherents of attainable objectivity in the media claim that the reporter need not shy away from his prejudices, pre-conceptions, feelings and ambitions. He need not pretend to be an automaton - unthinking, unfeeling, unemotional; "saying it as it is", with bland facts and figures, and no analyzing nor interpreting. Rather, the journalist is to struggle to place under leash his biases. From this stand-point come arguments that since subjectivity is to be avoided, and since absolute objectivity might not be possible except as a target, the media professional can go a long way to

> being objective by sticking, as much as possible, to what Severin & Tankard (1979:63) have explained as "verifiable statements".

He believes that since the journalist is a product of society with its various facets - traditions, beliefs, images, goals, constraints etc, he must inevitably influence, and be influenced by the society. The journalist help to shape the size and direction of what is communicated to the different publics of the media and they in turn set agenda about what he selects to communicate. He said "this dual yet interactive role has its implications for the constant barrage of charges of bias, prejudice, partisanship, untruth and especially sycophancy levelled against the media and its staff". Ayodele (1988) stressed that objectivity in the media is a relative term in Nigeria because government are ever changing… The Nigerian journalist is therefore objective in his presenting news only to the context to which he is or has been free of censorship, free from media owners control and free from personal biases.

Olajide, Benjamin & Ogundeji (2012) said members of the profession are expected to think objectively and inquiring about matters subject to orthodoxy and sentiment which limits intellectual exploration. This feature of professionalism, they said is dead in Nigeria journalism where emphasis on materialism is placed above intellectual exploration. Majority of journalists are not interested in story that will not enrich their pocket. Edegoh & Ude-Akpeh (nd) argued that journalists in Nigeria demonstrate the cherished ethical standard of fairness and objectivity in the discharge of their professional responsibilities, but at all times. They also conclude that journalists in privately owned media perform much better than government or public media in demonstrating fairness and objectivity in their daily reports. In his study of objectivity in television news

reportage and the occupy Nigeria campaign, Rishante (2014) establishes a model in objective reportage that extends and integrates the process of media evolution in relation to accuracy, truthfulness and public accountability to the information it provides.

On the other hand, Udomisor & Udoh (2015) said that there is a longstanding and cherished principle of media objectivity which still forms the bases of good journalism practice. Although some scholars and practitioners tend to ignore it, that does not undermine its existence or its inevitability in good and professional practice of journalism. They recommend that the media should at all times, value, uphold and apply objectivity in all its reportage by separating facts from comments for effective conflict management. However, Cark (2014) maintained that the maintenance of objectivity in journalism requires that journalists need to present the facts whether or not they like or agree with those facts. What this implies is that objective journalism needs to remain neutral and unbiased at all times regardless of the writer's opinion or personal beliefs. This tarries with the argument of Bovee (1999) who stressed that journalistic objectivity requires that a journalist should not be on either side of an argument. However, some scholars believe that it is often difficult to test the objectivity of journalists because it is the credibility of facts gathered by a journalist that lies at the heart of objectivity. Tuchman (2000) found it difficult to empirically test the idea of objectivity. The reason, he said is that there was no formula with which to measure news objectivity as the ideology turned out to be too philosophical in many ways. In his finding, Tuchman submitted that newsmen use the label news analysis to place a barrier on problematic stories that the managing editor cannot easily verify. According to him, in order to run a story a news reporter has compiled, the editor needs to call a number of sources to know

the credibility of the story, adding that this is the most problematic formal aspect of objectivity for the newsmen.

According to Tuchman (2000), the concept of objectivity has two norms through which it can be tested: (a) through the norm of factuality which requires that a journalist look at the truthfulness of information collected and its relevancy; (b) through the norm of impartiality which requires a reporter to detach and disengage himself or herself from the event he/she is covering. In the same vein, Asogwa & Asemah (2012) said while objectivity may be understood as synonymous with neutrality, it must be distinguished from the goal of objectivity in philosophy, which would describe independent facts, which are true, irrespective of human feelings, beliefs or judgments. For the media, objectivity is all about reporting the news in a fair and balanced manner. It is also related to professionalism in journalism. Thus, it is the ability of the journalist to recognise his personal leanings and his ability to control them. Journalists are duty-bound to report the truth. Roma (2007) is one media scholar who argued that objectivity is attainable. According to him, objectivity is the dominant ethos of modern journalism which underscores the notion of fairness, accuracy and lack of bias in the media.

Beryerstein (2005) on his part believe that objectivity and disinterest are often conflated in discussions of journalistic ethics, adding that journalistic ideal of objectivity stresses what laymen would call disinterest. Travers (2011) avers that objectivity means that when covering hard news, reporters do not convey their own feelings, biases or prejudices in their stories. They accomplish this by writing stories, using a language that is neutral and avoids characterising people or institutions in ways good or bad. But for the

beginning reporter accustomed to writing personal essays or journal entries, it can be hard to keep one's own feelings out of one's stories.

Reavy (2013) believes that there is the need to re-evaluate objectivity as ethical values in journalism. He stressed that perceived objectivity has a demonstrable impact on journalism, adding that some have asserted that a lack of objectivity has been responsible, at least in part, for journalism's reputational decline. He argues that objective journalism has grown stale, while advocacy journalism offers an opportunity to make it fresh and relevant in a society overloaded with information. News organizations, he maintained need to understand what the people mean when they express a desire for the press to be objective. On his part, Ward (1999) insists that objectivity is already at a loss, asking "why should we bother to save objectivity if it has so many problems? He advocated what he referred to as pragmatic news objectivity. According to him, while traditional news objectivity tends to reduce reports to collections of official facts; pragmatic news objectivity requires a complex weighing of standards. Uncertainty about objectivity he said, can lead to confusion in newsroom practice and the erosion of standards. Ward argued that reporters and editors need a clear idea of what objectivity is and why it is valuable, adding that in some newsroom setting, many reporters avoid the use of the word "objectivity" and instead prefer such words as fairness and balance, which are also as controversial as "objectivity."

Lehtinen (2012) stressed that while journalistic objectivity has been subject to charges of naive realism relating to dichotomies between subject and object, fact and value among others has been criticized for being too demanding an ideal. Mutter (2010) said it is time

to retire what he called the difficult-to-achieve and impossible-to-defend conceit that journalists are now, or ever were, objective. He said "let's replace this threadbare notion with a realistic and credible standard of transparency that requires journalists to forthrightly declare their personal predilections, financial entanglements and political allegiances so the public can evaluate the quality of the information it is getting". In other words, as objectivity was once designed to engender trust in news, now transparency is the means to achieve that – openness about sources, means, and interests.

While supporting Mutter's suggestion, Weinberger (2009) referred to transparency as 'the new objectivity', describing it as a means of encouraging trust through openness. According to him, transparency is now fulfilling some of objectivity's old role in the ecology of knowledge, pointing out that outside of the realm of science, objectivity is discredited these days as anything but an aspiration, and even that aspiration is looking pretty sketchy. He said:

> The problem with objectivity is that it tries to show what the world looks like from no particular point of view, which is like wondering what something looks like in the dark. Nevertheless, objectivity served an important role in how we came to trust information and in the economics of newspapers in the modern age. You can see this in newspapers' early push-back against blogging. We were told that bloggers have agendas, whereas journalists give us objective information. Of course, if you don't think objectivity is possible, then you think that the claim of objectivity is actually hiding the biases that inevitably are there (Weinberger 2009, Transparency is new. para. 2/3).

While arguing that transparency subsumes objectivity, Weinburger (2009) stressed that anyone who claims objectivity should be willing to back that assertion up by letting us look at sources, disagreements, and the personal assumptions and values supposedly

bracketed out of the report. According to him, objectivity without transparency increasingly will look like arrogance and then foolishness. Why should we trust what one person insists is true when we instead could have a web of evidence, ideas, and argument? … So, that's one sense in which transparency is the new objectivity. He said:

> What we used to believe because we thought the author was objective we now believe because we can see through the author's writings to the sources and values that brought her to that position. Transparency gives the reader information by which she can undo some of the unintended effects of the ever-present biases. Transparency brings us to reliability the way objectivity used to. Objectivity used to be presented as a stopping point for belief: If the source is objective and well-informed, you have sufficient reason to believe. The objectivity of the reporter is a stopping point for reader's inquiry (Weinberger 2009, Transparency is new. para. 4/5).

Ward approach the issue of objectivity from an angle he called 'pragmatic objectivity' which Sambrook (2012) said starts by acknowledging human failings and imperfection and offers the premise that everything we know is an interpretation of some aspect of our world. According to him,

> Pragmatic objectivity' offers a combination of three tests: empirical standards that test a report's accord with facts derived by careful observation, controlled experiments, or statistical measure; standards of coherence that tell us how consistent an interpretation is with what else we believe; and standards of rational debate that include a commitment to rational persuasion and tolerance, and openness to rival views and counter-evidence. Ward believes this redefinition recognises the fallibility inherent in reporters' judgements while holding them to collective standards that support the aim of objective reporting (Sambrook, 2012:28).

Ward argued that uncertainty about objectivity can lead to confusion in newsroom practice and the erosion of standards. This, he said is because reporters and editors need a clear idea of what objectivity is and why it is valuable. He also believe that a new theory of objectivity is needed because journalism is moving away from a rigid, traditional style

of objective reporting that eliminates any judgment or hint of editorializing, while more and more, reporters use a lively, opinionated style, or adopt an interpretive stance toward stories. Sambrook (2012) tried to bring out what he described as an important distinction between objectivity and impartiality, pointing out that the public are concerned with verification, but perhaps less concerned with opinion based upon accurate information as opposed to deliberately misleading. According to him:

> There has been too much debate about impartiality and the attempt to eliminate bias in news reporting while more stress should be on objectivity and the need for factual, evidence-based, journalism as a foundation. If the public are less concerned about impartiality, they may still be keen to preserve objectivity. It is clear that the digital age presents significant challenges to the century-old norms of journalistic objectivity and impartiality. Yet abandoning the standards they were designed to support is also clearly dangerous and may encourage a 'post-truth' environment (Sambrook 2012:12).

Rorty (1991) called for the abolition of the whole concept of objectivity for reasons which Sambrook (op.cit) said vary from epistemological disbelief in the plausibility of its philosophical characterizations to ethical and ideological concerns regarding the potentially authoritarian connotations of the concept. He maintained that objectivity has already been replaced by many journalists and journalistic organizations with the alternative ideals of "fairness", "balance", "neutrality" and "transparency", adding that when journalistic objectivity is reduced to "balanced" or "neutral" reporting, the active quest for truth – or "what really happened" – disappears from the journalistic agenda.

Closely related to the concept of objectivity in the media is the issue of gatekeeping which is equally a very important concept in media practice globally. In the words of

Dunu & Okafor (2016) gatekeeping as an enduring media concept has been traditionally used to regulate news flow and set news agenda for the public. According to them:

> From the gatekeeping concept, we understand that not all stories no matter how important make it as news. We understand that news stories undergo a systematic selection process that is biased and driven by a combination of factors -news norms, societal values/pressures and organizational factors. In fact, the gate keeping concept exposes the often complex hierarchal influence and domination of news media by a select few -the gatekeepers (Dunu & Okafor 2016).

Citing Soroka (2012), they stressed that the basic idea of gatekeeping has been clearly captured in the works of Shoemaker when he said "Simply put, gate keeping is the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day". They maintained that since the success of a story is subjected to the decisions of many gatekeepers who operate at different levels, the concept of gatekeeping exerts enormous influence in the voices heard and the faces seen in the news media. They noted that although earlier studies of gatekeeping presume news selection to be chiefly guided by an expert assessment of what would interest the audiences (McQuails, 2010:311). It has been observed over time, that journalists' personal ethical judgments predominate their selections and decisions of news salience, thereby subjecting receivers to attach relevance to and converse the issues granted access to pass through their gates.

Ekeanyanwu (2005) argued that gatekeeping as a mass media activity and function does not stop at opening and closing the news gate, or rejecting and accepting news/information for publication or broadcast, it also involves the shaping and reshaping, display, timing, repetition etc of the news and information in the various

media establishment. Also, Nnoli, cited in Attah (2006:42), argued that "the media provide a consistent picture of the social world which may lead the audience to adopt the media version of social reality of fact and norm, value and expectations". The journalist is first and foremost a gatekeeper and may have to perform this role at different periods in the news process. Folarin (2002), stressed that the factors influencing gatekeeping decisions include timing, ownership pattern, management policy, perceived needs and preferences of the audience, editor's perception of reality, views held by editor's colleagues, influence of advertisers, appraisal of offering by the competition, availability of photography or film footage, legal consideration, professional ethics and ideological perspectives and political orientation. The media decide what millions will learn of, and indeed how they will interpret the day's events in the nation and in the world. They create national issues and icons overnight, and can make or mar by their coverage and the slant they give to issues.

Over time, some media scholars have come to questioned the viability of the concept of gatekeeping especially in this era of the new media because of the influences of the internet with its vast quantity of information available from several sources, while others insist that journalists' gate keeping role is not dying but evolving. Studies by these scholars suggest that as long as journalists still select media content and reject others, they still retain the gatekeeping role, irrespective of availability of other media choices for the audience, based on their selective exposure. Singer (2005) argued that despite the unlimited news available online, editors shape the print package for online distribution, persisting that online stories were typically identical or had minor changes with the print versions.

Shabir *et al* (2015) argued that inspite of the challenges of the internet, gatekeeping is still a very important function of media because the channels and news papers have their own ethics and policies through which the editor decide the news items to be published or aired. According to them, gatekeeping occurs at all levels of the media structure, from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed or covered, and includes media outlet owners and even advertisers. Individuals can also act as gatekeepers, deciding what information to include in an e-mail or in a blog. They argued that:

> Gatekeeping is the vanilla ice cream of mass communication theories. It may not be Everyone's favourite, but nearly everyone can tolerate it. And while it may have an unremarkable flavor, it serves as a building block for other theory and methodological approaches. Media gate keeping showed that decision making is based on principles of news values, organizational routines, input structure and common sense. Gate keeping is vital in communication planning. It is can also be dangerous, since it can lead to an abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass. Nevertheless, gate keeping is often a routine, guided by some set of standard questions. The gatekeeper's choices are a complex web of influences, preferences, motives and common values. Gate keeping is inevitable and in some circumstances it can be useful. The expansion to the internet has very much expanded the views regarding the gate keeping process, since any person or organization can publish anything in the way they see fit (Shabir, 2015:593).

On her part, Awolowo (2009) maintained that gatekeepers are able to control the public's knowledge of the actual events by letting some stories pass through the system while keeping others out. According to her, in carrying out their functions, the gatekeepers make final decision on what to 'go' and what not to 'go' based on two major factors. These are the media policies governing the operation of the media house which also has to do with ownership and secondly, the kind of media system being operated in that part

of the world. She averred that all over the world, the influence of mass media gatekeeping cannot be over emphasized, believing that the gatekeepers in various mass media influence the public in one way or the other, by following their in-house policies and the professional requirements, concluding that the media will continue to shape and influence the opinion of the public on some social, political and economic issues.

In their study of the media coverage of the Clinton/Lewinsky sex scandal, Williams & Carpini (2000) argued that by providing virtually unlimited sources of political information, the new media environment undermines the idea that there are discrete gates through which political information passes, pointing out that if there are no gates, there can be no gatekeepers. According to them, the mainstream press, in its gatekeeping role operates along a single axis of influence, determined by the interaction between political elites and journalists. This point of interaction, they argued constitutes the gate through which information passes to the public while the new media environment creates a multiplicity of gates through which information passes to the public, both in terms of the sheer number of sources of information, the speed with which information is transmitted, and the types of genres which the public uses for political information. They stressed that at one level, the collapse of gatekeeping represents a direct attack on the elites – journalists, policy experts, public officials, academics, and the likes – who have served as the arbiters of social and political meaning under the social responsibility theory. They maintained that the new media presents a challenge to mainstream journalists in their gatekeeping role as agenda-setter and issue-framer. Drawing from the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal, they argued that the mainstream press frequently paused to reflect on its own role, and to try to clarify what constitutes newsworthiness, adding that the existence of

multiple news outlets, semi-news outlets all kept the issue alive and pressured both the mainstream press and political elites to respond.

Jiang (2014) emphasis that the role of the news gatekeeper in the context of modern media has undergone great changes in that their responsibilities become heavier. He maintained that:

> A qualified gatekeeper must possess five basic skills. They should constantly learn new knowledge, accumulate experience, grasp a variety of skills, and organically integrate the transmission techniques of the traditional media and modern media to create a new news transmission trend in the network environment and transit social culture. In addition, to help recipients to establish cognition about society and world through daily trivial news information to exert the social educational function of mass media and influence people's life pattern, value, and so on (Jiang 2014:852).

In his contribution, Bruns (2003) stressed that for a long time, gatekeeping has provided a dominant paradigm for journalistic news gathering and news publishing in the mass media, both for journalists' own conceptualisation of their work and for academic studies of this mediation process. He said:

> In media such as print, radio, and TV, with their inherent strictures of available column space, air time, or transmission frequencies, it is necessary to have established mechanisms which police these gates and select events to be reported according to specific criteria of newsworthiness, such as Galtung & Ruge's news values (Bruns, 2003:1) .

Indeed, McQuail notes that:

> The gatekeeping concept, despite its usefulness and its potential for dealing with many different situations, has a built-in limitation in its implication that news arrives in ready-made and unproblematic event-story form at the 'gates' of the media, where it is either admitted or

> excluded. The gatekeeping framework is largely based on the assumption ... that there is a given, finite, knowable reality of events in the 'real world', from which it is the task of the media to select according to appropriate criteria of representativeness or relevance (McQuail, 1994: 214).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study relied on the Social Responsibility Theory as developed by Siebert, Peterson & Schramm in 1956 and the theory of media ownership developed by Altschull in 1984. The Social Responsibility Theory arose from the report of the Williams Hutchins Commission of 1946 and was chosen to guide this study in view of the fact that the society is at the receiving end of media products. In other words, whatever information passes through the gates into the media is consumed by the society and the impact of such information is felt by all. The Social Responsibility Theory is of the view that the power and near monopoly position of the media imposes on them an obligation to be socially responsible and to see that all sides are fairly presented while the public has enough information to make their decisions. If the media do not take on such responsibilities, it may be necessary for some other agency of the public to enforce it (Siebert et al. 1956). It must be pointed out that the Hutchins Commission report and the social responsibility theory emphasises the concept of public interest.

According to McQuail (2010:170), the concept of Social Responsibility stipulates that a responsible press should provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning. It should serve as a forum for the exchange of comments and criticism and be a common carrier of the public

expression. He said further that "the theory stipulates that the press should give a representative picture of constituent groups in society and also present and clarify the goals and values of society". The theory holds that the government must not merely allow freedom; it must actively promote it. The theory also involves a view of media ownership as a form of public trust of stewardship, rather than as an unlimited private franchise. In the words of Baran & Davis (2006: 114), the theory emphasises the need for an independent press that scrutinises other social institutions and provide objective, accurate news reports, adding that the most innovative feature of social responsibility theory is its call for the media to be responsible for fostering productivity and creative "great communities". They argue that the media should do this by prioritising cultural pluralism by becoming the voice of all the people, not just the elite groups or groups that had dominated national, regional or local culture in the past. In some respect, social responsibility theory is a radical statement. Instead of demanding that media be free to print or transmit whatever their owners want, the theory imposes a burden on media practitioners (Baran & Davis, 2006). Citing the argument of the Hutchin Commission Report, Baran & Davis said that "the press is not free if those who operate it behave as though their position conferred on them the privilege of being deaf to ideas which the process of free speech has brought to public attention. The theory of social responsibility appeals to the idealism of individual media practitioners and tried to unite them in the service of cultural pluralism even when this might reduce their profits or antagonise existing social elites.

However, the study also relied on the theory of media ownership developed in 1984 by Altschull which states that the content of the press is directly correlated with the interests

of those who finance it. The theory is of the view that the autonomy of media outlets is given within the boundaries of the owners' profit. Where the media outlet is commercially owned, the content will reflect the point of view of the news organization's owners and advertisers. In the same vein, where the media outlet fits into what Altschull calls an "interest pattern," the content mirrors the concerns and objectives of whoever is providing the financing. He believes that it is not just ownership that count, but the question of who actually pay for media products.

Shoemaker and Reese have attempted to refine and extend Altschull's work. In their 1991 study, they argued that the theory of media ownership and news content points out that the owners of media organization have the ultimate power over the news content of the newspapers. They argued that the primary focus of a publicly owned news organization is to make profit, and thus, objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by advertisers. Thus, the content of the news is built into the economic objective of the company and in some rare cases, the owner may choose to make profits secondary to an ideological goal, such as promoting a particular agenda, while the organization can't indefinitely ignore the economic goal. They also argued that when media firms are owned by stockholders, public service is usually sacrificed for the sake of profitability. McQuail (2005) argue that the central issue which arises under the theory of media ownership is the extent to which media organisations can claim to exercise independence in relation to their owners and to other economic agencies in the environment in which they operate, especially those who provide operating funds such as investors, advertisers and other sponsors.

Similarly, Nwammuo, Edegoh & Iwok (2015) believe that in performing the functions of agenda setting as well as other core functions, the press sometimes deviates from the concept of objectivity for which it is known, adding that "in this regard, the common saying that he who pays the piper dictates the tune comes to play". He believes that media ownership is an important factor that determines the contents of the mass media.

Interestingly, news organizations funded primarily by commercial sources are far more likely to use objectivity and newsworthiness as their principal standards in making news judgments. The reason is that a commercial media outlet is more responsive to its audience and advertisers, both of whom desire these qualities (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). They further argued that news organizations that are financed primarily by "interest" are far less likely to place great emphasis on objectivity and newsworthiness. Instead, their content is more likely to reflect the thinking of the special interest group or groups that control them. They argued that the primary focus of a news organisation owned by a publicly held corporation is to make profit and objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by advertisers and so, the content of the news is built into the economic objective of the company. In some rare cases they said, the owner may choose to make profits secondary to an ideological goal, such as promoting a particular agenda, the organisation can't indefinitely ignore the economic goal.

According to them, although the news departments may be organisationally differed from the larger firm, content is still controlled through hiring and promotion practices. For example, newspapers usually endorse political candidates who echo the owners or publishers' political attitude. Infact, ownership has become such a powerful force behind

the media organisation that not only editorials and columns, but also the coverage of news and features reflects the political beliefs and interest of the owners.

However, while the media has a responsibility to society to report events and hold government accountable, they have a responsibility to set agenda for the society to follow. If the media is not objective in their news reportage and fail to perform their gatekeeping functions objectively, it will no doubt affect their agenda setting role because only a socially responsible press can set the right agenda for the society. The question then is, if this function is affected, will the media be socially responsible?

This explains why the Social Responsibility Theory and the Theory of Media Ownership have been chosen to explain this study. It is important to state that the social responsibility theory became an important theory in this study in view of its basic principles which, among other things states that media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society, especially when it comes to setting high and professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance. The principle also include the fact that the media should be pluralist and reflect their diversity, giving access to various points of view and rights of reply and that journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as employers and the market. In the same vein, the society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance, while the media should avoid offensive content which triggers crime, violence or civil disorder or cause harm to minority groups.

For healthy, meaningful, harmless, non-interfering and contributory functioning, every media theory has reiterated that the intricacies of media practice should essentially be

compatible with the social structure. In Nigeria today, the practices adopted in media reporting are more often borrowed. In this regard, the media has constantly been lured into over stepping the fire line of informing, educating and entertaining. The habits and practice of the media have often resulted in sensationalising, misleading, instigating or giving ulterior ideas leading to mistakes, triggering catastrophe or toppling governance established laws. This explains the use of the Social Responsibility theory for this study. The theory of media ownership becomes apt in view of the fact that business and political interest of the owners and other sentiments expressed by them can have direct or indirect influence on the objectivity and gatekeeping functions of the media. This is so in view of the fact that ownership plays a vital role in the day to day performance of the media. In most cases, ownership influence affects daily reporting of news and other events in the media. In most media organisations, most reporters and editors always have the looming image of the owners at the back of their mind while performing their responsibilities. The image of the owners looms so large like a cobweb that never goes away and like a shadow that follows you everywhere you go, thus having some level of effect on the day to day performance of the media.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 **Research Design**

This study is based on a use of the survey method. Nelson & Edwards (1997) sees survey research as a method of collecting information by asking questions. Similarly, Babbie (1999) describe survey research as a frequently used mode of observation in social sciences. He believes that in a typical survey, the researcher selects a sample of respondent and administers a standardised questionnaire to each person in the sample. In other words, survey research involves the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions and can be an efficient method for systematically collecting data from a broad spectrum of individuals. Survey research owes its continuing popularity to its versatility, efficiency, and generalizability. Surveys are efficient in that many variables can be measured without substantially increasing the time or cost. Sometimes interviews are done face-to-face with people at home, in school, or at work. Other times questions are sent in the mail for people to answer and mail back. Increasingly, surveys are being conducted by telephone (Nelson & Edwards, 1997).

3.2 Population of the Study

This study was carried out using reporters and correspondents working in the two media houses. For easy administration of the instrument for the study, editorial staffs of Media Trust, publishers of Daily Trust titles and Vintage Press, publishers of The Nation newspapers were sampled. In all, the total population for the study is 459 editorial staff of the two newspapers made up of 255 editorial staff from Daily Trust and 204 editorial staff of The Nation.

3.3 Sample Size

This research covered essentially editorial staff of Daily Trust and The Nation. The researcher obtained the list of the editorial staff of the two organisations from where a sample of 153 was drawn for the study using the systematic sampling method. In all, with editorial staff strength of 255, the researcher decided to take one third of editorial staff Media Trust, publishers of Daily Trust newspapers amounting to 85, while 68 staff were drawn from Vintage Press with an editorial staff strength of 204, also representing one third of the editorial staff to constitute the sample size for the study. The choice of using one third of the editorial staff of the two media houses is due to the belief that it will give a good representation of the views of the staff of the two organisations on the research topic. This agrees with the position of Ary, Jacobs & Sorenson (2010), who argued that while a larger sample is more likely to be a good representation of the population than a small sample, the most important characteristics of a sample is its representativeness and not the size. They argued that "size alone will not guarantee accuracy because a sample may be large and yet contains some elements of bias. The researcher must recognize that sample size will not compensate for any bias that faulty sampling technique may introduce. Representativeness must remain the prime goal in sample selection". Wimmer & Dominick (2011) agree with this position when they argued that sample quality is always more important in sampling than the size.

3.4 Sample Technique

This research is based on the probability sampling method. Specifically, the systematic random sampling method was used in selecting the samples for this study. In systematic sampling, the researcher first randomly picks the first item from the population, then

select each n-th subject from the list. Using the nth number of 3, the researcher selected 85 editorial staff of Media Trust and 68 editorial staff of Vintage Press. This represent one third of the total number of editorial staff of each of the companies. The selected staffs were administered questionnaire. In addition, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview with senior editorial staff such as the Editors-in-Chief and Editors of the three titles (Daily, Saturday and Sunday editions), and a few line editors.

3.5 Methods of Data Collection

The researcher used the survey methods of data collection to generate data for the study. This was in view of the assumption that it provided answers to objectivity of the media as well as determines the gatekeeping function of the media. In other words, in carrying out this research, well designed questionnaire was used to generate the required data. The questionnaire was administered on reporters and correspondents who form the first set of gatekeepers in the media as well as the engine room of any media organisation. It was administered on the staff in the headquarters of the two media houses using the face-to-face method. Those selected, but are outside the headquarters were reached though the email. In addition, in-depth interview was conducted among senior editorial staff of the two newspapers under study. Those interviewed include the editors of both the daily and weekly newspapers on both stable as well as their editors in chief.

3.6 Instrument for Data Collection

A closed and open ended questionnaire was used for collecting the required data for this study. The questionnaire containing 25 questions was divided into two sections, with section A containing personal information, while section B contained questions aimed at

obtaining the required information. In addition, In-depth interview was conducted on selected senior editors from the two newspapers being studied.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

In conducting this study, a pilot study was carried out to test how valid and reliable the instrument used in the study will be. Twenty questionnaires were distributed to a select group of journalists in Kaduna. The result of the pilot study which was meant to test the instrument revealed that the questions contained in it were valid questions and could be relied upon to provide answers to the research questions. Since the study focused on two of the existing national newspapers in Nigeria, the response could also be generalised as the same issues addressed in the study are applicable to many of the newspaper houses in the country. The instrument used for this study was therefore found to be valid. In other words, it comprehensively collected all the information needed to address the purpose and goals of the study. Also, it consistently measured what it intends to measure.

3.8 Methods of Data Presentation and Analysis

The research adopted the use of simple frequency distribution tables in presenting the data and findings of this research. The table brought out the statistical findings of the research, especially as it deals with the objective nature of the media, with the two newspapers as case study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of this research. The systematic sampling method was used for the distribution of questionnaires for this research and applying an nth number of three, 153 questionnaires were distributed across the two media organisations. Interviews were also conducted with selected senior editorial staff of the two organisations in order to explain issues not covered by the questionnaires such as editorial policy issues of the two organisations. The results of the data collated are interpreted in this chapter.

4.2. Data Presentation and Interpretation

Table 4.1: Distribution of respondents by sex

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Male	70	53	123	80.4
Female	15	15	30	19.9
Total	85	68	153	100

In conducting this research, 153 respondents were drawn from the two media houses covered by the study were served with the questionnaires. Out of the number, 80.4% of the respondents were male while 19.9% were female. This is made up of 70 and 53 male respondents working in Media Trust and Vintage Press respectively, while 15 female respondents were served each in the two media organisations. In other words, there are more male respondents in both media organisations than female respondents.

Table 4.2 Qualification of respondents

Qualification	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
OND	15	12	27	17.6
HND	38	25	63	41.2
BSc	8	16	24	15.6
PGDMC	12	9	21	13.7
MSc	4	2	6	3.9

Others	8	4	12	7.8

From table 4.2, one can deduce that many of the respondents had training in mass communication or journalism and therefore are in a better position to understand the issues being discussed. It also showed that there is a progressive rise in the employment of media workers with higher qualifications with those trained in the Polytechnic having the upper hand. This brings to mind the controversy surrounding the BSc/HND dichotomy. The introduction of the International Institute of Journalism by the Nigeria Union of Journalists has given opportunity to many journalists to obtain the OND, HND and the post graduate diploma certificate which enable them to meet up the requirement for being registered as journalists as stipulated in the media council decree. Be that as it may, from the above table, it could be said that majority of the respondents are in a proper position to understand the subject of the research and respond appropriately.

Table 4.3 Editorial position of respondents

Option	Trust	Nation	Total	Percentages
Reporters	20	16	36	23.5
Correspondents	42	32	74	48.3
Sub-Editors	5	5	10	06.5
Bureau Chief	2	4	6	03.9
Line Editor	8	7	15	09.8
Photo Journalists	8	4	12	7.8
Total	85	68	153	99.8

Table 4.3 reveals that 23.5% of the respondents are reporters by designation, 48.3%of the respondent are correspondents while 03.9% are bureau chiefs. Apart from carrying out administrative functions, the bureau chiefs assign beats to the reportorial staff outside the head offices and are also involved in reportorial duties themselves. In other words, 71.8% of respondents are field workers in the two organisations and are in a position to understand the issues in the research as they are involved in the day-to- day reporting of

events for their organisations. Similarly, 06.5 percent of the respondents are sub editors and 9.8% line editors controlling certain pages allocated to them such as politics, business, sport, etc. They are also in the right frame of mind to participate in the process of the research in view of the fact that they understand the issues especially when discussing objectivity and gatekeeping. Apart from the Editors, these two sets of Editorial staff form part of the last gatekeepers of the media organisation.7.8%of respondents were Photo Journalists who also form part of the research. As field workers of the media organisations, they are also in the right frame of mind to understand the issues. This is a clear indication that the respondents were in a proper position to determine what to do with a news story in view of the fact that they are mostly engaged in reporting and collation of information which are processed and published.

Table 4.4 Years of Experience of the Respondents

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
01-10	47	31	78	50.9
11-20	22	26	48	31.3
21-30	12	6	18	11.7
31-40	04	05	09	5.5
Total	85	68	153	99.8

Table 4.4 shows the years of experience of the respondents. The result showed that 50.9% of respondents have spent between one and ten years in Journalism while 31% others have spent between eleven and twenty years working as journalists. This is an indication that there appears to be a smooth succession pattern on the job. Eighteen (18) respondents have spent between twenty one and thirty years on the job, while 9 have spent between thirty one and forty years. Majority of respondents are in the prime of their career as Journalists while a few others have been in the profession for 20 years and above.

Table 4.5 Media organisation of respondents

Media	Number	Percentage
The Nation	68	44.4
Daily Trust	85	55.5
	153	99.9

The table 4.5 shows that 44.4% of respondents were drawn from The Nation newspaper, while 55.5% of respondents were drawn from Daily Trust representing 30% sample drawn from the total population of each of the two media organisations which constitute the case study. The figures above also show that there were more respondents from Daily Trust than from The Nation newspaper, an indication that Daily Trust has a higher number of editorial staff than The Nation.

Table 4.6 Objectivity is a major concept in the media

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	65	46	111	72.5
Agree	14	16	30	19.6
Neutral	5	4	09	5.9
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Strongly disagree	1	2	3	1.9
Total	85	68	153	99.9

In table 4.6, 72.5% of respondents strongly agree that objectivity is a major concept in the media; 19.6% agree to the assertion, 5.9% respondents prefer to remain neutral, while 1.9% others strongly disagree that objectivity is a major concept in the media. It has been argued by some media scholars that that there is nothing like objectivity in the media. Those who hold this view have always argued that fairness is different from objectivity and that being fair does not amount to objectivity. But another school of thought argued that objectivity is a must in the media. This explains why it became important to find out the views of the respondents. It is evident that majority of respondents believe that objectivity is a major concept in the media which cannot be wished away. This is in line

with the tenets of the profession which require media practitioners to be objective in their reportage.

Table 4.7 The decision of what to publish or not to publish affects objective reporting of events by the media.

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	49	41	90	58.8
Agree	29	22	51	33.3
Neutral	4	2	06	3.9
Disagree	3	3	06	3.9
Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-
Total	85	68	153	99.9

In Table 4.7, respondents were asked whether or not they believe that the decision of what to publish or not to publish affects objective reporting of events by the media. From the responses, it was evident that majority of them believe that the decision of what to publish or leave out has a great impact on objectivity. In all, 92.1% of respondents either strongly hold the view or simply agree to the fact that such a decision affects objective reporting of events by the media. Several factors come to play in deciding whether to publish a report or not and in taking the decision, reporters and news managers are bound to compromise on objectivity, one of which is the interest of the owners of such media houses and their business and political associates.

Table 4.8 There is absolute objectivity in news reporting in the media

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	8	7	15	9.8
Agree	11	13	24	15.6
Neutral	18	6	24	15.6
Disagree	18	30	48	31.3
Strongly disagree	30	12	42	27.5
Total	85	68	153	99.9

The Table 4.8 indicates that 9.8% respondents strongly agree that there is absolute objectivity in news reporting in the media, 15.6% of respondents agree, while another 15.6% to remain neutral. Also, 31.3% of respondents disagree that there is absolute objectivity in the media while 27.5% strongly disagree. By implication, the responses contained in the above table is an indication that even though the respondents believe that objectivity is a major concept in the media, there is nothing absolute about it. In other words, the aggregate submission here is that there is nothing like absolute objectivity anywhere in the media. Similarly, majority of the respondents agreed to this fact there was nothing absolute about objectivity in news reporting. In other words, majority of respondents are of the opinion that there is nothing like absolute objectivity in the media.

Also, respondents were asked if they think that ownership affects news reporting in the media. The result shows that 96% of respondents think that ownership affects news reporting, while 3.9% others think otherwise. Most of the respondents believe that there is the need for objectivity in the media, even when they believe in the saying that 'He who pays the piper dictates the tune'. They also believe that most media owners in Nigeria are business men who always want to decide the content of their newspapers to protect their personal interest as well as the need to favour their business partners, friends and associates among others. The mission and vision of the paper, some believe sometimes influences their decision to interfere in the news content of the media thereby affecting objectivity and gatekeeping either positively or negatively, depending on the interest the report tries to portray. Some respondents are of the view that media organisations tend to protect the interest of their owners even if it clashes with the public interest. In this regard, they argued that there is always an unwritten template of what to

publish or not to publish especially as it relates to their business interests, religion, ethnicity or politics. In actualising this, the owners may not come out directly to influence reporting, but the employees most times engage in self-censorship.

Table 4.9 Advertisers' influence affects objective news reporting in the media

Options	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	24	15	39	25.4
Agree	39	30	69	45.1
Neutral	04	05	09	5.9
Disagree	11	13	24	15.6
Strongly disagree	7	5	12	7.8
Total	85	68	153	99.9

Advert plays a major role in the survival of media, especially the newspapers. It has often been said that no newspaper can survive on the sale of the newspapers alone which may not be enough to offset the running cost of the media outfit. This explains why it become important to find out if the respondents believe that advertisers have any influence on the ability of newspapers to report objectively. The responses represented in table 4.2.9 indicates that majority of the respondents agrees that advertisers have influence on the ability of newspaper houses to report objectively. The conclusion however, is that, majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the influence of advertisers have a great impact on objectivity in news reporting. This is in view of the belief that no media house can stand on its own without adverts. In other words, the fear of lack of patronage from advertisers has the potentials to affect objective news reporting.

Most respondents said that major advertisers can exert pressure on the media house, arguing that if a particular company patronises a media organisation with advert, such a

company is likely to get favours in times of crisis especially when it has to do with its image. Some respondents argued that revenue from advert can influence objectivity depending on the amount involved considering the fact that advertisement is the live wire of any media outfit because media organisations are first and foremost business outfits. In this regard, advertisers influence affects objectivity. Any media organisation that decides to ignore its major advertisers will lose huge revenue source that is needed to sustain the publication. So, since most media houses depend on adverts from advertisers, any breach of trust will also mean outright withdrawal of their adverts and no publisher can afford to ignore the interest of their advertisers as doing so may adversely affect their revenue base. Those who believe that advertisers have no influence on objectivity and gatekeeping argue that news is quite different from adverts. They also maintained that the influence of advertisers on news objectivity is minimal even though they provide the needed income for the running of the organisation. However, it was the submission of the senior editorial staff of the two organisations under study that advertiser's influence is common all over the globe. They submitted that "It happens all the time. It does not just happen here, but all over the world. That is why you can say that business Journalism is usually the most gentle of all form of Journalism because there is strong advertisers' influence. Even when they are not advertising, you are thinking about them".

Table 4.10 Government patronage is likely to affect objective news reporting

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	56	22	78	50.9
Agree	18	45	63	41.1
Neutral	9	-	09	5.9
Disagree	02	01	03	1.9

Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-
Total	85	68	153	99.9

Respondents were also asked whether they think that perceived government patronage is likely to have any effect on objective news reporting in the media. The responses presented in table 4.2.10 shows that 50.9% of respondents strongly agree with the assertion while 41.1% said they agree that government patronage is likely to affect objective news reporting. 9 respondents remained neutral while 3 said they did not agree with the assertion. Majority of the respondents are in agreement with the fact that government patronage affects objective news reporting. This comes mainly in form of advert from government Ministries, Departments and Agencies. Interestingly, government departments and agencies constitute part of the largest advertisers in Nigeria. The implication of this is that singlehandedly; the government can make or mar a media organisation by refusing them adverts. They can also influence other advertisers who mainly do business with them to withdraw their adverts from any media house they consider unfriendly. The case of Concord Press and the Nigerian government during the Abacha regime readily comes to mind here.

Table 4.11 Religious as a factor that affects objective news reporting in the media.

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	32	25	57	37.3
Agree	32	40	72	47.0
Neutral	09	-	09	5.9
Disagree	9	3	12	7.8
Strongly disagree	03	-	03	1.9
Total	85	68	153	99.9

In Table 4.11, 37.3% of respondents admitted strongly that religious consideration is one of the factors outside the media that affect objective news reporting, while 47.0% merely agree to the claim. Also, 5.9% others have no opinion on the issue and therefore remained neutral, 7.8% say they don't agree to the claim while 1.9% strongly disagreed. The sum total of this is that majority of the respondents agreed that religious consideration plays a major role in objective news reporting in the media. For example, late Chief MKO Abiola reportedly told the management of the defunct Concord Newspapers that he will not accept any publication in the Concord group that will tend to cast aspersion on the religion of Islam which he professes. Respondents believe that the media take certain actions because it has religious backing even if seen as bad to the society. The study reveals that some journalists often display their religious bias in their day to day reporting, while some religious organisations greatly influence media industry in their objective setting. By so doing, the media report events to suit their religious belief especially when reporting issues of religious conflict. The Daily Trust for example has often been accused of being biased in favour of the Islamic faith in their reporting. But there are those who believe that religion has little or no influence on news objectivity. But some have argued that the media report or take certain editorial positions based on religious considerations. They however, argue that even though religion is a serious issue that affects all aspects of the human life, it has nothing to do with objective news reporting. Some respondents believe that since Nigeria is religiously inclined, any report on religious issue can provoke crisis, stressing that untrained Journalists tint their news reports with religious sentiments thus affecting objectivity.

Table 4.12 The decision on what to publish or not to publish has negative influence on objective news reporting

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	32	25	57	37.3
Agree	38	28	66	43.1
Neutral	6	3	09	5.9
Disagree	6	9	15	9.8
Strongly disagree	03	03	06	3.9
Total	85	68	153	99.9

Respondents were also asked whether they subscribe to the view that the decision on what to publish or not to publish has negative influence on objective news reporting. The result indicates that 37.3% respondents said they strongly agreed that the decision on what to publish or not to publish has negative influence on objective news reporting. 43.1% others agreed to the claim, while 5.7% remained neutral. 9.8% disagree with the assertion whole 3.9% others strongly disagree. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that majority of the respondents believe the decision on what to publish have negative influence on objectivity. In doing so, the Journalist may be forced to tilt the report to favour certain individuals and groups, thereby jeopardising objectivity.

Similarly, respondents were asked if they believe that the decision of what to publish or not to publish has positive influence on objective reporting. In their response, 9.8% of respondents strongly believe that the decision on what to publish has positive influence on objective news reporting; 21.7% others merely agree to the assertion, while 7.8% respondents were neutral. On the other hand, 31.4% respondents disagree that the decision on what to publish has positive influence on objective news reporting with 29.4% others strongly disagreeing with the assertion. This invariably means that majority are of the opinion that the decision on what to publish does not have positive impact on objective news reporting.

Editors of the two media houses under study were of the view that such decisions are made as part of the gatekeeping functions of the media which in itself is a major function in news reporting. Some of the respondents, especially in the interview argued that the latitude to exercise individual judgements based on available information has helped in deciding what is good for publication. There are no stated "no go areas". Sometimes the personal interests of reporters or some good advertisers have affected being objective on some issues. Bye and large there is enough freedom to exercise my right as an editor.

Table 4.13 Reporters practice self-censorship in their day-to-day reporting of events

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	28	26	54	32.2
Agree	40	26	66	43.1
Neutral	9	6	15	9.8
Disagree	5	10	15	9.8
Strongly disagree	03	-	03	1.9
Total	85	68	153	99.9

In Table 4.13, respondents were asked whether they believe that reporters practice self-censorship in their day to day reporting of events. 32.2% of respondents strongly agreed that Reporters practice self-censorship; 43.1% of respondents agree while 9.8% of respondents are neutral. Another 9.8% disagreed with the assertion while 1.9% strongly disagreed. In other words, there is almost a consensus that reporters censor themselves in their daily reporting of news events. Some refuse to write certain stories based on some unwritten company policies not to write such stories especially when such stories has to do with certain individuals or organisations that have one form of relationship or the other with the organisation and its owners. Some of the respondents also believe that

reporters often refuse to write certain reports based on the assumption that the editor will not allow it to be published.

Similarly, 31.4% of respondents strongly agreed that reporters only operate strictly by the editorial policy of their organisation and so, cannot be said to practice self-censorship. But 13.7% of respondents agreed that what the reporters do is strictly to operate within the editorial policy, while 11.7 percent of respondents remained neutral. Similarly, 27.5% of the respondents disagree with the statement, while 15.6% strongly disagree. From the responses, it is difficult to say that Reporters actually operate within the editorial policy of their media houses considering the marginal differences in the responses. Respondents during the interview argued that some Reporters are guilty of self-censorship. One of them said "some staff are guilty of self-censorship. We have instances when reporters imagine editors will not publish a story because of perceived interest of the owners of the paper. In such instances, the reporters don't even write the story and leave the decision to the editors". They also believe that some people shy away from certain stories for fear of offending the owners of the paper. The general submission is that this has happened on several occasions. However, one of the Editors argued that "I don't think it really reflects on one's judgment as a professional. What is actually at work here is proprietor's interest. This is a reality even in the western world. The proprietor's interest definitely affects how stories are approached. It could also mean certain stories being dropped especially, if they would hurt the interest of the person who pays your salary".

Table 4.14 Lack of professionalism on the part of Journalists affects gatekeeping and objective news reporting

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage

Strongly agree	65	46	111	72.5
Agree	14	16	30	19.6
Neutral	5	4	09	5.9
Disagree	-	-	-	-
Strongly disagree	1	2	3	1.9
Total	85	68	153	99.9

In Table 4.14, respondents were asked whether or not they agreed that lack of professionalism by Journalists affects gatekeeping and objective news reporting in the media. Majority of the respondent believed that lack of professional training for media workers affects objectivity and gatekeeping. In other words, professional training in media studies, Journalism and Mass Communication as well as training courses for media workers will put them in a proper position to understand objectivity and gatekeeping roles of the media. Moreover, the vast majority of the respondents agreed that professionalism has a role to play in objective news reporting and upholding the gatekeeping function of the media.

Table 4.15 Personal safety of the Reporters and Journalists affect the choice of what to publish or not to publish

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	59	40	99	64.7
Agree	14	16	30	19.6
Neutral	04	02	06	3.9
Disagree	05	07	12	7.8
Strongly disagree	03	03	06	3.9
Total	85	68	153	99.9

Respondents were asked whether the personal safety of reporters and journalists affects the choice of what to publish or not to publish by the media. In all, 64.7% of the respondents strongly agreed to the assertion; 19.6% of them said they agreed, 3.9% of

respondents were neutral while 7.8% others disagreed. In other words, majority of the respondents agreed that the personal safety of the Journalist affects the choice of what to publish or not publish. They argued that while their counterparts in the advanced world have insurance cover, the same cannot be said about the media in Nigeria. They believe that the only effort at providing insurance cover for Journalists in the country is the one initiated by the Nigeria Union of Journalists which employers of Journalists are yet to buy into. They believe that objectivity will be enhanced more if the reporters have some forms of insurance cover.

Table 4.16 Legal restraints affect gatekeeping and objectivity in the media

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	37	23	60	39.2
Agree	41	37	78	50.9
Neutral	01	02	03	1.9
Disagree	06	06	12	7.8
Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-
Total	85	68	153	99.9

In Table 4.16, 39.2% of respondents strongly agreed that legal restraints affects gatekeeping and objectivity in the media; 50.9% respondent agree to the assertion, 1.9% remained neutral while 7.8% disagreed. In other words, it can be concluded that legal restraints, such as the law of sedition, libel, Official Secret Act among others affects objective news reporting in the media. Here, the respondents were quick to refer to such laws as the Official Secret Act which is still part of the nation's legal system and several others.

Table 4.17 Brown envelope syndrome affects the choice of what to publish or not to publish as well as objective news reporting in the media

Option	Media Trust	Vintage Press	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	27	21	48	31.4
Agree	33	24	57	37.3
Neutral	8	10	18	11.7
Disagree	17	13	30	19.6
Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-
Total	85	68	153	99.9

Brown envelope is a form of financial inducement for journalists. In table 4.2.17, respondents were asked whether they believe that brown envelope syndrome affects the choice of what to publish as well as objective news reporting in the media. 31.4 percent of respondents strongly agreed to the assertion, 37.3% respondents agreed, 11.7% preferred to remain neutral, while 19.6% said they don't believe brown envelope syndrome affects the choice of what to publish. This means that majority of the respondents believed that brown envelope syndrome play an important role in objective news reporting in the Nigerian media.

Interestingly, the Daily Trust has what they call a "policy of refusal" which forbids their staff from demanding or collecting any form of gratification from anybody in order to do their job. This policy has been published several times by the newspaper and is boldly displayed in the organisation. However, it could not be ascertained if the staff abide by this written code or not. Even though the same cannot be said of The Nation, reporters are often warned against collecting money from newsmakers with a promise that his story will be published. However, respondents agreed that one of the major factors that affect objectivity in news reporting is the growing influence of money. With a lot of media people, especially reporters either poorly paid or not paid al all, they are often vulnerable when people with hidden agenda try to get them to do things for a price.

Also, respondents were asked if field trips sponsored by government and organisations have the potentials to affect gatekeeping and objective news reporting in the Nigerian media. 45.1% of respondents strongly believe that such trips have the potentials of affecting objective news reporting; 37.3% respondents agree to it, 7.8% of respondents prefer to be neutral while 9.8% others disagreed. In other words, majority of the respondents believe that participating in field trips organised for Journalists by government, companies and other agencies have the capacity to affect objective news reporting as reports from such trips are often written to favour the sponsors.

4.3 Discussion of Major Findings

After careful study, the results of the response from respondents is analysed below so as to make proper recommendations.

4.3.1 Research question one: How do objectivity and gatekeeping influence news reporting by Daily Trust and The Nation newspapers?

Research question one set out to determine whether objectivity and gatekeeping, being the responsibility expected of journalists as the fourth estate of the realm influences news reporting in both Daily Trust and The Nation newspapers. From the responses of the various respondents, it is evident that they believe that objectivity is desirable in the media, but its attainment is hampered by several factors. Some believe that there is nothing like absolute objectivity in the media even though it is a major requirement of journalistic practice. The saying that “he who pays the piper dictates the tune” comes to play in this regard. Many respondents said that media owners in Nigeria are either politicians or business men who would not want the content of their newspapers to affect their business interest. While this could be true of The Nation whose publisher is a well-known politician, the same thing cannot be said of Daily Trust whose owner is a

journalist. This agrees with Ayodele (1988) assertion that the Nigerian journalist is objective in his presentation of news only to the context to which he is or has been free of censorship, free from media owner's control and free from personal biases. The finding concurs with the tenets of the media ownership theory that the autonomy of the media is given within the context of the owner's profit.

While objectivity has become a professional norm in the media over the last century, findings of this study revealed that not all newspapers are achieving the degree of objectivity that the goals and values of good journalism requires. It revealed that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in achieving balance and fairness in news reporting by the media. However, this study shows that even though there is ownership influence on the content of the media, operators of the media themselves often decide to write stories in favour of the owners and their friends. In other words, Editors and Reporters themselves engage in censoring themselves believing that a particular report may not go down well with the owners of the paper. This tends to agree with the argument by McGill (2004) who argued that objectivity has at its heart the noble aim of presenting indisputable facts upon which everyone in society can agree, and build upon towards the goal of a better society. Unfortunately, the ideal of "objectivity as is practiced in today's newsrooms has become a subtle but powerful means of self-censorship. It's a conglomeration of contradictory practices that serve the purpose of rationalization as often as investigation. It has become a crutch for journalistic practices that work against civic aims".

Some respondents argued that there is nothing like objectivity. "I don't believe there is any such thing as objectivity. There is pursuit of fairness and there is a difference. Pursuit

of fairness means that everybody has to do the right thing especially for the society because society is more important than anybody or group". According to them, objectivity presupposes that you can always have a harbinger between two or more forces and you have achieved fairness because you have given everybody equal attention in space or time. So, when a man rapes a woman, you give the rapist as much attention as you give the rape victim. That is supposed to be objectivity, but that is not fairness. When a government is involved in policies that everybody knows is detrimental to all, you want to, in the name of fairness pursue equal attention. They believe that you need equal attention in analysing the matter, but if you want to be fair to society, you have to put them in a position to be able to make a judgement based on the balance of information you have rather than the so called balance or space. That is the problem of journalism here and anywhere in the world when they want to pretend that what they are doing is so. When the Americans report the war, they don't report it from the point of view of being fair to the Iraqis, but from the point of view of the Americans. So, whatever information you get from the other side is used to reinforce their value because you report based on your values, you write a newspaper based on your values. You cannot run away from who you are. During the first Gulf war, anytime the Iraqis unleash the missile, they call it scud missile and when the Americans use their own, they call it patriot missile, but both of them killed".

According to the findings, objective news-reporting is that which is devoid of inferences, judgment and slanting. Yet modern journalism is not altogether a professional practice in which the operators become autonomous. It is not an alternative to the ability of the journalist to think, feel or have emotions. Journalists' objectivity is therefore a relative

term, relative to the system under which they operate. Therefore, objectivity in news presentation is not a myth, nor a mere philosophical abstraction, but an attainable media goal which the journalist must strive to attain, even in the face of opposing realities across the globe. The findings also revealed that there are so many complexities which the journalist has to contend with. These include ethnic and religious interest, ownership and control, advertisers' interest, government interest as well as dealing with personal biases among others. The Nigerian journalist is a part of all these complexities. Whether or not he works in a 'private' or 'public' media, whether or not the private media-owner has political or religious leanings, and other biases, the journalist cannot isolate himself from society nor operate in a vacuum. This is in line with the argument of Reavy (2013) who noted that there was the need to re-evaluate objectivity as ethical values in journalism. He stressed that perceived objectivity has a demonstrable impact on journalism, adding that some have asserted that a lack of objectivity has been responsible, at least in part, for journalism's reputational decline. Others, he said argues that objective journalism has grown stale, while advocacy journalism offers an opportunity to make it fresh and relevant in a society overloaded with information.

The findings also revealed that in attaining objectivity in the media, the reporter need not shy away from his prejudices, pre-conceptions, feelings and ambitions. He need not pretend, but rather, he must struggle to control his biases. This tends to agree with the argument of Mutter (2010) who argued that it is time to retire what he called the difficult-to-achieve and impossible-to-defend conceit that journalists are now, or ever were, objective, saying "let's replace this thread bare notion with a realistic and credible standard of transparency that requires journalists to forthrightly declare their personal

predilections, financial entanglements and political allegiances so the public can evaluate the quality of the information it is getting". This is also backed by the social responsibility theory which places a responsibility on the media to provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's event in a context which gives them meaning, while giving a representative picture of constituent groups in society and present and clarify the goals and values of society.

From this stand-point come the arguments that since subjectivity is to be avoided, and since absolute objectivity might not be possible except as a target, the media professional can go a long way to being objective by sticking, as much as possible, to what Severin & Tankard (1979:63) regard as "verifiable statements" which involves the excluding of inferences, judgement and slanty reporting. But Shoemaker & Mayfield (1987) believe that the news content is under the control of those who fund the media. This finding is supported by the Social Responsibility theory

4.3.2 Research question two: What are the factors responsible for the performance of Daily Trust and The Nation in relation to objectivity and gatekeeping?

Research question two sought to find out the factors that are likely to affect the media in relation to objectivity and gatekeeping. The findings revealed that objectivity is obviously a concept that is hard to achieve in an environment where the reporter is weighed down by several forces such as poor remuneration or the complete lack of it, lack of job security and personal security for practitioners, advertisers' influence, ownership influence among others. This agrees with Ayodele (1988) assertion that since the journalist is a product of the society with its various facets, he must be inevitably influence and be influenced by society. Many reporters in the Nigerian media are

employed and asked to fend for themselves and this has made them vulnerable. Even though this was not the case with the two newspapers under study, it is generally a problem in the media and this was discovered to have, to some extent affected objective reporting. The finding also revealed that to a large extent, the experience of media practitioners in Nigeria does not give room for absolute objectivity. For example, many of the media houses in the country hardly pay regular salaries. Even though this is not the same with the two papers under study, it was discovered that Reporters and Editorial staff in The Nation newspapers are among the least paid in the industry. On the other hand, editorial staffs of Daily Trust have a better pay package than their colleagues in The Nation. Although Daily Trust has a policy that forbids their staff from accepting any form of gratification, the same cannot be said of The Nation. The research also discovered that the brown envelope syndrome plays a very prominent role in news reporting as many reporters sometimes decide what prominence to give to a particular report considering the financial implications involved. In this regard, the principle of objectivity is sometimes sacrificed on the altar of financial gains. This usually leave the people handicapped as the news often comes out tainted with falsehood and views that are contrary to the belief of the Nigerian public. In some cases, the news is carried from the view point of the government.

4.3.3 Research question three: How do self censorship, ownership and control affect objectivity in news reporting in the Daily Trust and The Nation newspapers?

Research question three sought to find out if self-censorship as well as ownership and control affect objectivity in the media, especially The Nation and Daily Trust. The findings revealed that while no media house will agree to censor the reports of their

reporters, the issue of self-censorship is a daily practice by reporters who are always afraid of offending the owners of the organisation. In The Nation newspapers for example, there is an unwritten code for Reporters not to write any report that will offend the sensibility of the owner as well as his political party and political associates. They also cannot accept advertisement considered to be against the interest of the owner of the paper and his political party and his political associates, no matter the amount of money involved. For example, in the course of this research, the organisation rejected a wraparound advertorial that could have fetched the company about N40 million over two edition considered to be against the interest of the All Progressives Congress, after the Editor and Managing Director almost lost their job for accepting a front page advert worth N4 million during the inauguration of Ayodele Fayose as Ekiti state governor. Even though both Daily Trust and The Nation almost share the same political ideologies, Daily Trust accepted the wrap around advertorial that was rejected by The Nation.

From the findings, it is clear that the two media organisations try as much as possible to be guided by the social responsibility theory of the media which states that the media owe the society an obligation to report events in such a way as not compromise national safety or throw the nation into crisis, while sticking to the principles objective reporting. It is evident from the outcome of the study that the two media organisation under study has succeeded to a large extent in helping to set agenda for the society in accordance with the agenda setting role of the media. For the example, both newspapers have become a must read for policy makers for look up to them for direction on a number of issues because of their high level of professionalism and indebt reporting of events.

However, one thing that stands out is the fact that ownership plays a vital role in media practice in Nigeria. This agrees with the argument by Olusola (2010) that "the interest of the media owner is a factor that is always taken into consideration in the presentation of any media content". It is often said that "Who pays the piper dictates the tune" because media ownership is an important that determines the content of the mass media. It was evident that directly or indirectly, there is a great influence of ownership in the management of newspaper houses in the country. This is reflective of the content of the papers and their style of reporting. In The Nation newspaper for example, great care is give to the treatment of stories affecting the All Progressives Congress (APC) which is the party of the owner of the paper. Until the perceived friction between the owner and the leadership of the party, stories critical of the paper were not given due prominence. However, the paper celebrated the letter from Aswaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu accusing the party National Chairman, Chief John Odigie Oyegun of betrayal. Also, the finding agree with the Media Ownership Theory of the media which states that the content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance it and that the autonomy of media outlets is given within the boundaries of the owners' profit. It also agree with the words of Shoemaker and Reese that the owners of media organization have the ultimate power over the news content of the newspapers, adding that the primary focus of a publicly owned news organization is to make profit, and thus, objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by advertisers.

Also, this finding can be explained within the context of Shoemaker and Reese's explanation the theory of media ownership. They argued that the theory of media ownership and news content points to the fact that owners of media organizations have

the ultimate power over the news content of the newspapers. They argued that the primary focus of a publicly owned news organization is to make profit, and thus, objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by advertisers. The content of the news is built into the economic objective of the company and in some rare cases, the owner may choose to make profits secondary to an ideological goal, such as promoting a particular agenda, while the organization can't indefinitely ignore the economic goal. They also argued that when media firms are owned by stockholders, public service is usually sacrificed for the sake of profitability.

As part of its efforts at ensuring proper gatekeeping and objectivity in news reporting, the researcher was informed that a reporter with the Daily Trust was once fired for sending in reports which the organisation later found out to be false especially as the reporter was not present when the event supposedly took place. According to findings, the reporter who was covering Kaduna state for the paper was in far away Saudi Arabia when he reported an issue which turned out to be false. He was reportedly fired for not verifying the report before sending it for publication, thus causing the paper some embarrassment. In The Nation, Editors are reportedly surcharged for publishing reports from their reporters that are not properly verified as part of the gatekeeping functions. Also, a reporter in the Abuja office of The Nation was reportedly queried for assuming that a particular report will not be published because of the political interest of the owner of the paper and therefore failed to file such report which was later celebrated by other media houses. Also, the Editor of the Saturday title of the paper was said to have been surcharged at the weekly editorial meeting for not publishing a particular story which was widely used by other papers apparently because of the feeling that it might offend

the political interest of some political heavy weights and members of the publisher's party. The Managing Editors, Northern Operation of The Nation told this researcher that the responsibility of every reporter is to write his report to the best of his ability while leaving it to the discretion of the editors on whether to publish the story or not. He also argued that sometimes, late adverts are responsible for certain stories not being used and this makes the reporters to assume that it was not used because of the perceived interest, pointing out that some reporters have capitalised on that to resort to self censorship. However, while The Nation newspaper has given so much prominence to the crisis in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), it pays less attention to the crisis threatening the All Progressives Congress, sometimes, refusing to publish stories on the crisis. The impact of ownership on Daily Trust is more in the area of protecting the interest of the north and Islam. The paper is less critical of north and its leaders, but has been able to cut a niche for itself as a paper of first choice across the north.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the summary of the entire research work, conclusion and recommendation. It also made recommendation for further study by researchers who might be interested in carrying out similar research in future.

5.2 Summary

There are divergent, but controversial opinions on the issue of objectivity. While some people are of the view that reporters should be completely neutral, others believe that reporters should suppress personal opinions in their news report given the fact that it is to the benefit of the masses. There are yet others who believe that there can never be news objectivity because of the prejudices that every reporter, editor and even the news readers come up with daily. This school of thought believe that subjectivity rather than objectivity thrive in the media. But media scholars are of the consensus that the news reader has a right to fair, unbaise and accurate account of events. They are also of the consensus that the interest of the masses should be paramount in the mind of the news reporter. The question however is, who or what determines the interest of the masses in a news report? Is it the function of the news event itself or that of the journalist whose duty it is to report the event? Either way, the basic issue is that news objectivity is a case of great concern and with the Internet in view, it becomes a more complex issue due to its vulnerable nature of accessibility (Akpan & Onyebuchi, 2012).

Similarly, the practice of gatekeeping is central to daily news reporting as it has the potential of affecting news objectivity. The study traces the relationship between the two concepts and their importance to news reporting and journalism practice. Gatekeeping, like objectivity is one area that has been well studied in media circle. It is common knowledge that reporters and editors have to select from a wide range of stories what

should be written and published. This selection is systematically biased, driven by a combination of organizational factors, news norms, values and audience interests. The resulting news from such decision is skewed towards stories that are, for instance more sensational than normal.

This explains why this study primarily centred around finding out the perception of Journalists themselves as it relates to two of the major issues that tend to shape their day to day function in reporting events. Gatekeeping and objectivity forms a major component of any media organisation and how they report events around them. In doing this, a comprehensive review of relevant literature was undertaken. These are works of scholars of the objectivity and gatekeeping in particular and mass communication in general. The choice of two theories to explain the research was also explained in the second chapter, while the third and fourth chapters explained the methodology adopted in carrying out the research and an analysis and interpretation of the collated data.

5.3 Conclusion

Interestingly, the basic idea of gatekeeping has been cogently stated in Shoemaker's analysis which state that "simply put, gatekeeping is the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day". However, studies revealed that different biases in news selection are portrayed as a function of a variety of factors, including organization-level factors such as administrative characteristics, working procedures, and cost and time constraints; story-level factors such as the geographic

proximity of the story; extra-organizational, or professional factors such as journalistic values and norms, and views of newsworthiness.

On the other hand, the impossibility of complete objectivity has been argued on several grounds. One is that the unavoidable process of news selection must also entail subjective judgement of which journalists themselves maybe unaware. Another is that all events and report of events which are candidates for treatment as news have to be placed in a wider frame of reference which gives them evaluative meaning. However, the irony of trying to be balanced or objective is that in practice, news organizations default to authorities and officials as surrogates for objectivity and this has greatly affected investigative reporting as reporters now rely on handouts from government officials for their reports in the name of trying to be objective. Journalists sometimes substitute terms such as accuracy, fairness, balance or truth in place of objectivity to describe the prime goal that guides their reporting. Objectivity is a tough standard to achieve, particularly with so many critics and citizens believe that journalists today do not even come close to achieving it.

Objectivity is a comprehensive ideal that can justify the more specific values of fairness, accuracy and accountability to the public. Therefore, a new theory of objectivity is needed because journalism is moving away from a rigid, traditional style of objective reporting that eliminates any judgment or hint of editorializing. More and more, reporters use a lively, opinionated style, or adopt an interpretive stance toward stories. Uncertainties about objectivity often lead to confusion in the newsroom, resulting sometimes in the erosion of standards. Reporters and editors need a clear idea of what objectivity is and why it is valuable. In most cases, many reporters avoid the use of the word “objectivity” and prefer to talk about some of its components, such as fairness and

balance which are just as controversial as objectivity. However, objectivity restrains journalists who would sacrifice accuracy and fairness to advocate causes. It restrains those who would use journalism to injure enemies and to pursue their own ends. To devalue objectivity is to leave the public more vulnerable to manipulation than it is today. In a culture that lacks confidence in objectivity, demagogues prosper and the quality of public debate suffers.

Journalists increasingly see themselves as providing meaning to the daily barrage of fragmented news items. But giving meaning to an event is not a simple uncontroversial procedure. The meaning may be biased or ideological, but journalists need a theory of objective interpretation to guide their forays into interpretive journalism. Democracy continues to need objective reporters who care about responsible communication.

It is pertinent to say that today's journalist tends to be at a cross road in view of the seeming contradictory goals he has to serve in the name of objectivity. He is expected to be neutral, but still has to draw attention in a crowded media marketplace. He is expected to be impartial, but yet be a crusader for justice and development among others. The society he lives in wants him to be clear and an unbiased conduit for facts, and yet to "follow their nose" which is a clear call to the use of individual moral conscience to get the facts. Experience as a reporter has shown that in most cases, it is rather difficult to reconcile these contradictions. The uncorrupted ideal of objectivity, in the sense of reporters striving to dig out verified facts and present them fully and fairly, is indispensable in journalism. But how objective will the media be in the face of current challenges, especially in the third world? This is one question that will continue to agitate the minds of media workers and media commentators.

Like Merril (1984) argues, since objective reporting is reporting that is detached, unprejudiced, not opinionated and unbiased aimed at matching reality or the whole truth, no reporter can write a story to match reality or tell the whole truth in his reports. A story therefore is never what it purports to be but always much bigger than its verbal image. The renowned American professor of mass communication further argued that all reporters, apart from being limited from their objectivity by weakness of language, are conditioned by experience, cultural background, selectivity and inability to mirror the real event and verbal picture of the event and submitted that the word "fairness" should be preferred to objectivity.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made to enhance the course of journalism practice in Nigeria.

a. In line with the Social Responsibility Theory, it is recommended that the media must recognize their limitations on account of the realities and constraints they have to grapple with and keep striving towards objectivity because it is attainable. In doing so, they must ensure that only experienced and highly competent media professionals are employed and assigned sensitive media responsibilities, especially those that which have to do with the gatekeeping functions, while Training and retraining must be treated with utmost importance to bring reporters up to date with modern trends in reporting. This will ensure that news content and reporting style is refined and emphasis placed on thorough investigation by journalist when gathering news because it is by so doing that news sources can be verified before it is disseminated to the public.

This will enhance objective reporting and make gatekeeping less problematic as sources of news and the quality of such news can easily be verified and authenticated.

b. In view of the finding that the influence of ownership may be difficult to eliminate, media organizations must guard their reputation and credibility through fairness, truthfulness, accuracy and objectivity in disseminating information to the public while media owners must strive to eliminated undue interference in the editorial work of the journalist, while efforts should made to uphold the integrity of the media organisation.

c. Also, the study also revealed that society expects so much from the journalist and to attain this, objective reporting becomes very essential because it is central to the sustenance of democracy and democratic practices, there is the need for the media to engage in objective journalism, because it is through objective journalism that sound investigative journalism can be practised, while existing legislations which tends to stand as obstacles to objective practice of Journalism in the country should be abrogated while the Freedom of Information Act should be implemented to the fullest so that access to information can be less cumbersome.

d. One of the findings of this study draws attention to the non payment of salaries by some media organisations as one factor capable of affecting objective reporting by the media. It is therefore recommended that media houses should be well funded and employees should be sufficiently remunerated in order to curb the temptation of indulging in unethical practices such accepting brown envelopes, bribes, free bees etc to suppress news stories, while journalists should be well paid and a special welfare package put in place for them as a way of discouraging the brown evelope syndrome which tends to sometimes influence news reporting.

e. One of the major threats to objective reporting according to the findings is the fear of either loss of job or life in the course of practive. Therefore, it is recommended that there should

be adequate security and insurance cover for Journalists practicing in the country in line with international best practices. This will encourage them to be more courageous and objective in their reporting, while existing legislations and obsolete laws which tends to obstruct objective practice of journalism should be reviewed or repealed.

But how objective will the media be in the face of current challenges, especially in the third world? This is one question that will continue to agitate the minds of media workers and media commentators.

5.4 Suggestion for further Study

Research is a continuous exercise as it enriches the body of knowledge. However, in the course of this study, it was discovered that while there are so many literature on objectivity and gatekeeping, there were limited literature combining the two concepts which are very important in the day to day practice of Journalism. Thus, it is recommended that further researches should be carried out on this area to complement the existing literatures. Researchers could also carry out further studies on this area of study comparing more newspaper and possibly comparing the print and broadcast media.

5.5 Contribution of Study to Knowledge

This research made the following contributions to knowledge:

i. It helped to assess the level of objectivity and gatekeeping being carried out by media practitioners in the Nigerian media. In other words, the study put to test the objective nature of journalists working in the Nigerian media and how they are able to carry out their gatekeeping functions as well as those influences that affect their daily practice. From the study, it is obvious

that gatekeeping and objectivity is practiced in line with the saying that he who pays the piper dictates the tune. This collaborates the popular saying that freedom of the press belongs to the man who owns one.

ii. The findings of this study can be used by Media scholars and practitioners in shaping media practice. The finding points to the fact that just like the gateman that keeps watch in our homes have certain persons that sometimes influences their decisions, the gatekeeper in the media have persons that influences their decision as to what is published or not published. These persons includes, but not limited to owners and advertisers.

iii. The study established fact that in performing gatekeeping role, the journalist is central to the flow of information and remains viable, while the traditional interpretation of the gatekeeping role of the media in Nigeria deserves additional attention.

iv. The study reveals that the practice of gatekeeping and objectivity in the Nigeria media does not in any way differs from its practice in advanced democracies as the same sets of influences affects the practice both in Nigeria and other newsroom across the world.

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APPENDIX 1

Department of Mass Communication,

Ahmadu Bello University,

Zaria.

May 14, 2014

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am a Post graduate student of the above named department. I am carrying out a research entitled "Gatekeeping and Objective News Reporting in the Nigeria Newspapers: A study of The Nation and Daily Trust Newspapers in Nigeria" as part of the requirement for the award of a Master of Science degree in Mass Communication. I will be most grateful if you can assist in answering the research questions provided below. Any information obtained as part of the research will be treated in confidence and names of respondents where provided will not be mentioned.

Anticipating your kind assistance.

Yours faithfully,

Anthony Akowe Osigbeme

RESESARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHY

1. Sex: A. Male B. Female
2. Highest qualification: A. OND (mass Com.) B. HND (Mass Com.) C. Bsc (Mass Com.) D. PGD (Mass Com.) E. Msc (Mass Com.) F. Others ……
3. Editorial position: A. Reporters. B. Correspondents. C. Sub-Editors. D. Line Editors. E. Bureau Chief. F. Photo Journalists
4. Years of experience: A. 1-10. B. 11-20. C. 21-30. D. 31-40. E. 40 and above
5. Media organization: A. Media Trust (Daily Trust). B. Vintage Press (The Nation)

SECTION B

How objectivity and gatekeeping affect news reporting

6. Objectivity is a major concept in the media: A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

7. The decision of what to publish or not to publish affects objective reporting of events by the media. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

8. There is absolute objectivity in news reporting in the media? A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

9. There is nothing absolute about objectivity in news reporting in the media? A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

10. Ownership affects objective news reporting in the Nigerian media? A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

11. Explain your choice of answer in question 9 above……

Factors that can affect objectivity and gatekeeping

12. Advertisers' influence affects objective news reporting in the media. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

13. Explain your choice of answer in question 12 above……

14. Government patronage is likely to affect objective news reporting. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

15. Religious consideration is one of the factors outside the media affecting objective news reporting in the media. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

16. Explain your choice of answer in question 15 above……

17. The decision on what to publish or not to publish has negative influence on objective news reporting. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

18. The decision on what to publish or not to publish has positive influence on objective news reporting. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

How Self censorship, ownership and control affect objectivity in news reporting

19. Reporters practice self-censorship in their day to day reporting of events. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

20. Reporters do not carry out self-censorship in their reporting, but operate strictly by the editorial policy of their media houses. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

21. Lack of professionalism on the part of Journalists affects gatekeeping and objective news reporting. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

22. Personal safety of the Reporters and Journalists affect the choice of what to publish or not to publish. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

23. Legal restraints affect gatekeeping and objectivity in the media. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

24. Brown envelope syndrome affects the choice of what to publish or not to publish as well as objective news reporting in the media. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree

25. Sponsored field trips for Journalists have the potentials of affecting gatekeeping and objective news reporting. A. strongly agree. B. Agree. C. Neutral. D. Disagree. E. Strongly disagree