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**INFLUENCE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE ON THE COMPOSITION OF  
NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL BOARDS IN NIGERIA**

**ONIFADE, OLUWAFEMI SUNDAY; JONAH, MARY HARUNA; AND SULE, GODWIN  
MATTHEW**

*Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, Nigeria*

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***Abstract***

*This study examines the roles of religion, region/ethnicity and gender in the composition of editorial boards of selected Nigerian newspapers with “national” spread. Using the theoretical foundations of the Gatekeeping theory, it deconstructs the classification of some newspapers as national newspapers through the instrumentality of the qualitative approach to the Content Analysis method. It asserts that ethnic, regional and religious motives take primacy over national interest in the establishment and operation of newspaper organizations in Nigeria. The findings of the research shows that women are seriously underrepresented on the editorial boards of the newspapers under consideration for this study. The study calls for the multiplicity of gender, ethnicity, and ideological/political orientation on the editorial boards of Nigerian newspapers.*

***Keywords:*** *Influence, Religion, Culture, Composition, Newspaper .*

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**Introduction**

Newspapers are arguably the oldest form of modern mass communication. Despite the revolutionary technological advancements in the field of communication, newspapers have held their own in the unending struggle for the attention of the mass audience among the mass media. The place of newspapers in the human development and nation building cannot be ignored across the world. The importance of and power wielded by newspapers are evident in the development of the Authoritarian Press. The realization of the opinion-shaping power of newspapers led to their incorporation in the nationalist struggle for independence across the colonial world.

Every newspaper has a target audience and scope of operations. While some are local/ community newspapers, others are regional. While some are national in

scope and reach, others are international in scope, penetration, reach, and operation. Irrespective of the scope of a newspaper, there is an inherent desire to expand the area of influence by exporting the values and practices of the newspaper to the regional, national and global audiences. The wider the reach and penetration of a publication, the greater its potential to influence public opinion. Ethnic, religious and regional sentiments are impediments to integration and development in Nigeria, therefore, most Nigerian newspapers would take pride in being called a “national newspaper”. This sobriquet connotes that the newspaper accommodates all major social, ethnic, religious and regional interests in its operations, composition and readership.

Newspapers and allied operatives are products of culture. The publishers, editors, proof-readers, reporters, sub-editors etc. are products of the cultural environments in which they are born, raised, trained and/or practice. Culture is a summative way of life. Religion is also an aspect of culture. Therefore, religion, culture, and ethnicity are bound to influence the operations of newspapers one way or the other.

### **Statement of problem**

There is a worry that many Nigerian newspapers are “national” in name alone. They are regional in their reach, acceptance, and editorial board compositions. Readers also tend to read publications that resonate with their ethnic, religious, and cultural values. It is observed that Nigerian newspapers operate from the region of origin of their founders. A random survey of corporate offices across the nation shows that newspapers like *Nigerian Tribune* and *Guardian* are hard to come by in the average home and office in the core north of the country while *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* are not easily found in homes and offices in the southern parts of the country. The average Hausa/Fulani Muslim believes that *Daily Trust* newspaper protects the interest of the “North” and preserves the cultural and religious values of the people. This narrative may not be acceptable to the Christian northerner from Plateau, Nasarrawa, or Niger. To this category of reader, *Daily Trust* serves the interest of the Hausa/Fulani Muslim oligarchy. To them, *Leadership* newspaper is more representative of northern Nigeria than any other so called northern paper.

How many southerner Nigerians hold editorial positions on the board of *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* newspapers? How many northern Nigerians hold editorial board positions in *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Thisday* and *The Sun* Newspapers? How many editors share different faith from their publishers?

### **Objectives of the study**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the regional composition of the editorial boards of the selected newspapers.
2. To assess the religious composition of the editorial boards of the selected newspapers.
3. To examine the gender composition of the editorial boards of the selected newspapers.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the regional or ethnic compositions of the editorial boards of the selected newspapers?
2. What are the religious compositions of the editorial boards of the selected newspapers?
3. What are the gender compositions of the editorial boards of the selected newspapers?

### **Literature Review**

The place establishment and operation of the mass media in Nigeria is deeply rooted in politics. It is impossible to separate journalism from politics because they shape each other. It is arguable that every serious politician attempts to influence the editorial output of the media in his/her constituency in a way that would confer advantage on him/her or the party which he/she represents. If this argument is true, then we can conclude that “political interference in editorial policies is part of the hallmark of journalism practice in Nigeria” (Udoakah & Ani, 2017, p. 448).

While the founding fathers of independent Nigeria used newspapers to fight the colonial government and obtain political freedom, the media in recent times has “emerged in Nigeria as an instrument for fund raising, propagation of ideology and safeguarding of the status quo” (Ezeah, 2005, p. 138). For this reason, media owners carefully select members of their management team. These members are called editorial board members in print journalism. The editors help in the formulation and implementation of editorial policies for the newspaper.

As noted by Udoakah (2001), editorial policies take “into consideration the objectives of the newspaper or magazine, the readership and, of course the paper's source of funds, the prevailing policies, values and laws of the environment within which the newspaper or magazine operates. It thus shapes

the character of the publication, influences its content and dictates its frequencies and format” (Udoakah, *Issues in Media Practices*, 2001, p. 40). This explains the regional, gender and religious sentiments perceivable in the editorial composition of most Nigerian newspapers as well as their stories and readership/circulation.

Readership has an influence on the editorial policies of a newspaper. When the management of a publication has adequate knowledge of the target audience, then the determination of the means and approaches to the reconciliation of the interests of the audience with the objectives of the publication becomes easier. Variables such as “the economic status, cultural background, education, interest and values of the groups targeted must be known” (Udoakah, *Issues in Media Practices*, 2001).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation upon which this study is based is the Gatekeeping Theory.

The theory explains that there are gates through which information must pass before they get to the general public. At these gates are individuals who are purveyors or transmitters of “truth”. These purveyors are people who possess the knowledge of good and evil and they will open the gates to allow “good” information pass through and shut the gates against “bad” information. The theory was propounded by Kurt Lewin in the year 1947. Gatekeepers in this context are the editors and editorial board members of newspapers. They are members of the society for which they write. Therefore, they know the values, desires, aspirations, customs, and traditions of their societies. Consequently, they would engineer their editorial contents to meet the needs and aspirations of their people while also preserving their customs, values and traditions. The gatekeeper “decides which of a certain commodity – materials, goods, and information – may enter the system. Important to realize is that gatekeepers are able to control the public’s knowledge of the actual events by letting some stories pass through the system but keeping others out” (utwente.nl, 2017).

By opening and shutting the gates to information based on the broad perception of the values and needs of the audience, the gatekeeper is ultimately setting the agenda for the public. By regulating the flow of information to the public, members of editorial boards of newspapers, as gatekeepers, wield enormous political influence on their readers. This is because readers’ political decisions are often made on available information which are provided in public domain. In other words, the choices made by gatekeepers “hold the potential to color mental

pictures that are subsequently created in people's understanding of what is happening in the world around them" (utwente.nl, 2017). Gatekeeping has potentially dangerous tendencies because "it can lead to an abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass" (utwente.nl, 2017). This is why excessive homogeneity in the composition of editorial boards of newspapers should be avoided. When there are combinations of ethnic, gender, religious and ideological groups on the board, the risk of wielding undue power on the readers would be minimized because each member would protect the interest of his/her religious, ideological, regional or gender constituency in the process of setting or reviewing editorial policies and ultimately editorial contents.

### **Method of Study**

The method used in this study is qualitative content analysis. The unit of analysis in the masthead of the newspapers and the content categories examined are gender, regional and religious representation on the boards of the three newspapers. The composition of the boards are critically analysed because it (Critical Analysis) primarily deals with power relations and social inequality. Religion, culture, ethnicity and gender are some of the recurrent domains of social inequality and power tussle. Therefore it is better to look beyond the superstructure of the composition of the editorial boards and examine the base with a view to provide an understandable explanation regarding the state of affairs in the selected newspapers. The composition of the editorial boards of the selected newspapers as provided in their mastheads would be qualitatively analysed and inferences would be drawn from it.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of this study is all Nigerian newspapers. The operationalization of newspaper here is the print editions, therefore online newspapers are not taken into cognisance here. There is no accurate data on the number of newspapers in Nigeria, however there are over 100 independent newspapers in the country (Reporterswithoutborders, 2016). Many of these newspapers are unknown even in the geographical environment where they are published. Consequently, there is a need to focus our attention on newspapers with national spread and circulation. Although many Nigerian newspapers claim to be national newspapers, only few of them can boast of relative national reach. These few include; *Daily Trust*, *Leadership*, *People's Daily*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Thisday*, and

*The Guardian*. Others are, *The Punch*, *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard*, *National Mirror*, *The Nation*, *Daily Independent*, *Daily Champion*,

### Sample of the Study

For this study, the following newspapers were selected: *Daily Trust*, *Daily Sun* and *The Nation* newspapers. The rationale for the selection of these newspapers for the sample is the geographical origin of the publishers. *Daily Trust* is owned by a northern Nigerian Muslim, *Daily Sun* is owned by south-eastern Christian (Igbo) and *The Nation* is owned by a south-western liberal Muslim who is married to a Christian woman. The two main religions in the country are catered for in the sample and the three largest ethnic groups are also taken care of in the sample. However, it is important to note that both *Daily Sun* and *The Nation* are published in the south-west geo-political zone. This zone is historically the headquarters of newspapers in Nigeria.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The data for this study was generated from the masthead of the three newspapers under review. The data is the details of the Editorial Board members of *Daily Trust*, *Daily Sun* and *The Nation* newspapers.

#### Editorial Board of Daily Trust Newspaper

| <i>S/N</i> | <i>Name</i>         | <i>Editorial Position</i>   | <i>Sex</i> | <i>Region</i> | <i>Religion</i> |
|------------|---------------------|---|------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1          | Kabiru Yusuf        | Chairman,<br>Editorial Board  | Male       | North         | Islam           |
| 2          | Abhay Desai         | Chief Operating<br>Officer  | Male       | Foreigner     |                 |
| 3          | Mannir Dan<br>Ali   | Chief Executive<br>Officer/<br>Editor-<br>in-Chief                  | Male       | North         | Islam           |
| 4          | Mahmud<br>Jega      | Associate<br>Director,<br>Editorial /<br>Deputy Editor-<br>in-Chief | Male       | North         | Islam           |
| 5          | Aliu M.<br>Akoshile | Associate<br>Director,<br>Business                                  | Male       | North         | Islam           |

|    |                 |       |                                      |      |       |              |
|----|-----------------|-------|--------------------------------------|------|-------|--------------|
| 6  | Shehu Mohammed  | O.    | General Manager, Management Services | Male | North | Islam        |
| 7  | Garba Abubakar  | Aliyu | DGM (IT)                             | Male | North | Islam        |
| 8  | Peter Omananyi  | O.    | Asst. General Manager, Production    | Male | North | Christianity |
| 9  | Nasiru Abubakar | I.    | Editor, Daily Trust                  | Male | North | Islam        |
| 10 | Theophilus Abah |       | Managing Editor                      | Male | North | Christianity |
| 11 | Akeem Mustapha  |       | Advert Manager                       | Male | North | Islam        |

(admin@dailytrust.com, 2016).

The data displayed on the table above shows that there are severe gender, regional and religious differences in the composition of the Editorial Board of Daily Trust newspaper. None of the eleven members of the Editorial Board of Daily Trust newspaper is from the southern part of the country. This gives credence to the perception of the newspaper as a newspaper for northerners. It also suggests that the publication is a northern response to the alleged dominance of the Lagos/Ibadan press in the Nigerian journalism industry. Similarly, none of them is a female. The board comprises only men. This is also an indication of the place of women in Nigerian society in general and northern Nigerian society in particular. In a region where Islam is the predominant religion, it is unsurprising that there is no woman on the editorial board of the newspaper. The gender imbalance is better appreciated when we take into cognisance that the branch of Islam practice in northern Nigeria is conservative Islam.

On the religious aspect, only two members of the board are Christians. This suggests that Christianity is a minority religion in the north even though the numerical disparity between Islam and Christianity may not be as great as the composition of the Editorial Board suggests.

**Editorial Board of The Sun Publishing Limited**

| <i>S/N</i> | <i>Name</i>           | <i>Editorial Position</i>                | <i>Sex</i> | <i>Region</i>   | <i>Religion</i> |
|------------|-----------------------|--|------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1          | Robert Obioha         | Chairman,<br>Editorial Board             | Male       | South-East      | Christianity    |
| 2          | Eric Osagie           | Managing<br>Director/Editor-<br>in-Chief | Male       | South-<br>South | Christianity    |
| 3          | Femi Babafemi         | Editor, Saturday                         | Male       | South-West      | Christianity    |
| 4          | Chidi Nnadi           | Editor, Sunday                           | Male       | South-East      | Christianity    |
| 5          | Chidi Obineche        | Editor, Special<br>Investigations        | Male       | South-East      | Christianity    |
| 6          | Femi Adeoti           | Deputy Editor,<br>Daily                  | Male       | South-West      | Christianity    |
| 7          | Beifoh Osewele        | Deputy Editor,<br>Daily (2)              | Male       | South-<br>South | Christianity    |
| 8          | Adetutu Folasade-Koyi | News Editor                              | Female     | South-West      | Christianity    |
| 9          | Tope Adeboboye        | Assistant Editor,<br>Features            | Male       | South-West      | Christianity    |
| 10         | Iheanacho Nwosu       | Bureau Chief,<br>Nation's Capital        | Male       | South-East      | Christianity    |
| 11         | Ismail Omipidan       | Assistant Editor,<br>Politics            | Male       | South-West      | Islam           |
| 12         | Desmond Mgboh         | Bureau Chief,<br>North-West              | Male       | Southeast       | Christianity    |
| 13         | Murphy Ganagana       | Bureau Chief,<br>North-Central           | Male       | South-<br>south | Christianity    |
| 14         | Amaechi Ogbonna       | Business Editor                          | Male       | South-East      | Christianity    |
| 15         | Emma Jemegah          | Group Editor<br>Sports                   | Male       | South-<br>South | Christianity    |
| 16         | Aderonke Bello        | Editor, Online                           | Female     | South-West      |                 |

(Daily Sun, 2018)



The table above shows the list of editorial board members at The Sun Publishing Limited. Only two (12.5%) out of sixteen members are female. This again shows a great gender imbalance on the board. Although it is an improvement on the gender composition of Daily Trust newspaper, it is a gross underrepresentation of women who make up a huge chunk of the population. Similarly it contradicts the widespread notion that women in the southern part of Nigeria are greatly represented in the workforce. It is arguable that the low representation of women on the board is a reflection of the underrepresentation of women in journalism in general. Perhaps the demands of senior editorial positions are not compatible with domestic responsibilities of the “African wife”.

It is noteworthy that none of the sixteen members of the Editorial Board of *The Sun* newspaper is from the northern part of the country. Six of them (37.5%) are from the Southeast geo-political zone which is the zone of the publisher. Six members of the board are also from the South-West geo-political zone which is the zone where the newspaper is based. This is another 37.5%. Four of them (25%) are from the South-south geo-political zone. The regional composition of the members of this board suggests that the editorial output would lack a national outlook as members are drawn from three geo-political zones to the exclusion of three others. We can also say that the members are all drawn from the southern region to the exclusion of the northern region if we want to look at it from the North versus South narrative. Thus we can classify the newspaper as a southern newspaper and not a national newspaper.

An analysis of the religious composition of the newspaper’s editorial board shows that fourteen (87.5%) members of the board members are Christians. Only one of them (6.25%) is a Muslim while the religion of one member (6.25%) is unknown. This insinuates that the owner prefers to work with people that share his religious beliefs. Consequently, the editorial content of the newspaper are likely to be predominantly pro-Christianity.

**Editorial Board of *The Nation* Newspaper**

| <i>S/N</i> | <i>Name</i>    | <i>Editorial Position</i>          | <i>Sex</i> | <i>Region</i> | <i>Religion</i> |
|------------|----------------|------------------------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1          | Sam Omatseye   | Chairman, Editorial Board          | Male       | South         | Christianity    |
| 2          | Victor Ifijeh  | Managing Director/ Editor-in-Chief | Male       | South         | Christianity    |
| 3          | Gbenga Omotoso | Editor                             | Male       | South         | Christianity    |

|    |                      |  |      |       |              |
|----|----------------------|--|------|-------|--------------|
| 4  | Adekunle Ade-Adeleye | General Editor                                 | Male | South |              |
| 5  | Lekan Otufodunrin    | Editor, Online                                 | Male | South | Christianity |
| 6  | Yusuf Alli           | Managing Editor, Northern Operations           | Male | North | Islam        |
| 7  | Waheed Odusile       | Managing Editor                                | Male | South | Islam        |
| 8  | Lawal Ogienagbon     | Deputy Editor                                  | Male | South |              |
| 9  | Adeniyi Adesina      | Deputy editor, News                            | Male | South |              |
| 10 | Yomi Odunuga         | Deputy Editor, Nation's Capital                | Male | South | Christianity |
| 11 | Emmanuel Oladesu     | Group Political Editor                         | Male | South | Christianity |
| 12 | Simeon Ebulu         | Group Business Editor                          | Male | South | Christianity |
| 13 | Ade Ojeikere         | Group Sports Editor                            | Male | South | Christianity |
| 14 | Sanya Oni            | Editorial Page Editor                          | Male | South | Christianity |
| 15 | Ade Odunewu          | Executive Director, Finance and Administration | Male | South |              |
| 16 | Soji Omotunde        | General Manager, Training and Development      | Male | South | Christianity |
| 17 | Kehinde Olowu        | General Manager, Abuja Press                   | Male | South |              |
| 18 | Shola O'Neil         | Regional Manager, South-South                  | Male | South | Christianity |
| 19 | Tunde Olasogba       | Assistant General Manager, Southwest           | Male | South |              |

|    |                     |                |        |       |              |
|----|---------------------|----------------|--------|-------|--------------|
| 20 | Robinson<br>Osirike | Advert Manager | Male   | South | Christianity |
| 21 | Folake<br>Adeoye    | Manager, Admin | Female | South |              |
| 22 | Udensi<br>Chikaodi  | Press Manager  | Female | South | Christianity |

(The Nation, 2018)

The table above gives a representation of the Editorial Board of *The Nation* newspaper. Only one of the twenty-two members of the Editorial Board is from the northern region. This gives a meagre 4.5% to the whole of the northern region. In contrast, the south has twenty-two members (95.5%) on the board. Like the previous two newspapers, The Nation newspaper is also heavily skewed in favour of the region of the publisher. With such a gulf in representation between the northern and southern sections of the country on the editorial board of the newspaper, the “national” credentials and claims of the newspaper are called to question. Consequently, the quantity, quality, and framing of stories in the newspaper is likely to be more favourable to the south than the north. It is however important to note that neither the Managing Director/ Editor-in-Chief nor the Chairman of the editorial board is from the same ethnic group as the publisher. This is unlike the first two newspapers analysed.

An examination of the gender composition also shows that only two members (9%) of the board are female while twenty members (91%) are male. Interestingly, none of the two female members hold crucial editorial positions. One of them is an Administrative Manager and the other is a Press Manager. With such a huge gender imbalance, there is a likelihood of greater coverage and favourable framing for men and lesser coverage and unfavourable framing of women in the reports and analysis carried by the newspaper. This is likely to occur because we live in a patriarchal society (like most African societies). The gender representation on the editorial board of this newspaper bears semblance to those of the two newspapers earlier analysed.

The attempt by this paper to investigate the religious composition of the editorial board of The Nation newspaper has not been very successful as the religious affiliation of seven (32%) members of the board could not be verified by this researcher. However, two members (9%) of the board is a Muslim while thirteen (59%) of them are Christians. This is significant because the publisher of the newspaper is a Muslim. In a country that is rife with religious division, intolerance and deep-seethed suspicion, it is interesting that none of the

Chairman, Editorial Board, Managing Director/ Editor-in-Chief and the Editor share the same faith with the publisher. Consequently, we can say that the newspaper is a religiously liberal newspaper. It is a reflection of the personality of the publisher who a Muslim but married to a Christian woman.

### **Conclusion**

The editorial board plays a vital role in the operations of every newspaper. The contents are shaped by the editorial board and the composition of the editorial is determined by the ethnic, gender and religious views of the owner.

Women are grossly underrepresented on the editorial boards of the three newspapers. Cumulatively there are only four women out of forty-nine members on the editorial board of the three newspapers. This gives us a paltry 8% representation. This is worrisome because a cursory look at enrolment figures at mass communication and journalism training institutions would reveal greater female enrolment. Although there is inadequate gender representation on the boards of Daily Sun and The Nation, it is worrisome that there is no woman on the editorial board of Daily Trust newspapers. It suggests that there is a cultural or religious norm which is more essential and cherished than professional or ideological norm of gender equality.

The three newspapers operate from the biggest cities in the region of origin of their publishers. Daily Trust operates from Kaduna (the capital of the defunct northern region) in the north while Daily Sun and The Nation operate from Lagos which is the old capital of the country.

The members of the editorial boards of the three newspapers are largely drawn from their geographical operational bases. This creates a north/south dichotomy. There is no southern representation on the board of Daily Trust newspaper just as there is no northern representation on the board of Daily Sun newspaper. The Nation has only one board member from the north. This situation buttresses readers' perception of the newspapers as regional.

There is also a religious dichotomy in the compositions of the boards. This means that the newspapers could be used to promote religious causes using the appropriate frames.

The prevailing paradigm in editorial board membership of Nigerian newspapers is a critical challenge to the development aspirations of Nigeria. A society that seeks positive transformation and developmental evolution would allow for internal cross-fertilization of ideas among the constituent groups.

### Recommendations

Nigerian traditional newspapers need to develop broader outlooks in their objectives and philosophies. A broader outlook entails recruiting the best writers from different ethnic, gender and religious backgrounds to serve as reporters, columnists and editors. This would give the newsrooms and the boardrooms truly national outlooks and it would reflect on the editorial content of the newspapers. A broader representation of all regions, gender, and religions on the board would also increase the acceptability and readership of the newspapers across the country. This would ultimately increase the circulation figures as well as the revenue which they would generate from advertisements.

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