Sports Editorial Writers and Challenges of Reporting in Nigeria

كتاب المقالات الرياضية وتحديات التغطية الصحفية في نيجيريا

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Abstract:

This study aimed at examining the challenges faced by sports editorial writers in Nigeria. As sports reporting evolves into a distinct and influential branch of journalism globally, including Nigeria, the editorial segment within sports reporting addresses critical issues that are often overlooked in standard sports sections. Despite its growing significance, sports journalism in Nigeria, like other forms of reporting, is fraught with challenges that impede professional practice. Thus, this research seeks to explore specific hurdles confronting sports editorial writers and provide insights into the coverage patterns of sports editorials. Empirical materials for the study were drawn from qualitative data obtained through interviews with 12 experienced sports writers from Nigerian print and broadcast media. The findings revealed that sports editorial writers face a range of challenges, including ownership interference, which affects editorial independence; conflicting editorial philosophies; pressures from stakeholders with vested interests; and demands from advertisers that conflict with journalistic integrity. The study concludes with recommendations to address these issues.

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It emphasizes the need for newspaper publishers and media management to allocate more space and resources to sports reporting, thereby enabling a broader and more in-depth coverage of sporting activities.
Key words: *Sports, Reporting, Editorials, Profession, Journalists*

1. Introduction and the Statement of the Problem

Editorial writing is the opinion moulding function of the print media (newspapers and magazines), and it constitutes one of the most vital assignments these print media are meant to perform. Editorial writing which encompasses all spheres of human endeavour (politics, sports, economy, law, science and so on) is ideologically oriented towards public service. According to Aina (2014, p. 17) "the history of consistent commitment gives the editorial a distinct and unique personality". Similarly, Ekeanyawu (2015) emphasized that the editorial has been found to be an indispensable compass in the navigation of the murky waters of issues and development in the society.

However, one major aspect of journalism which has for long been referred to as a "fun" is sports reporting/journalism. This is due to the fact that this aspect of journalism right from time immemorial; has always been allotted little space on either the print media or broadcast media (Owoicho, Salau & Jimoh, 2018). Although, with the current spate of development and attention to sports across the globe, sports reporting (editorial, features, news, analysis e.t.c) is now receiving attention ever than what it used to be before. In Nigeria today, media outfits (print, broadcast and online) are now springing up, especially radio and print, and some of them are now giving attention to aspects of reporting that can generate revenue and as well brings audience; of course sports is one of such. In the same vein, the advent of modern day technology has further aided journalism practice, and sports journalism cannot but exploit this form of modern technology, as reporters and writers now have

various tools to work with and make their job easy (Mohammed, 2014; Talabi, 2011).

Therefore, sports reporting is now an important aspect of journalism in the 21st century, and its influence on audience loyalty to a media outfit cannot be undermined. The concept of sports journalism itself reflects that it is the most trivial aspect of journalism (Boyle, 2006). According to Museum of Broadcast Communication, cited in Owoicho *et al*. (2018), sports journalism entails reporting and giving coverage to sporting events and activities on the mass media. It is usually laced with spices and some form of comics by describing the real-life situation of such sporting events been reported. This led to the credence that sports editorial writing is now frequently seen on the pages of Nigerian national dailies. It is more common whenever there is a breaking events or happenings in the world of sports, which writers cannot but make their opinion on such events known to the teeming populace (Ekenayawu, 2015).

There is no doubt that editorials generally are judgemental in nature (although fairness must be ensured) and it is majorly written by veterans in the field for elites and enthusiasts. This is also obtainable in the world of sports writing, as only the veterans and experienced sports journalists delved into the aspect of sports editorial writing. However, every job, profession or task has its own challenges and opportunities, as journalism profession itself is full of challenges and impediments which may affect the practitioners to perform at their best. Thus, sports editorial writing as an aspect of journalism has its own chunk of challenges which include; ownership interest/disposition, advertisers' control, poor remuneration, low readership culture, audience dependence/overreliance on foreign contents, among others. Against the aforementioned, this study examines the challenges of sports editorial writing in notable national dailies in Nigeria, with a view to identify the various problems confronting sports editorial writers in the cause of writing sports editorials.

2. Procedures of the Field Study

2.1 - Approach of the Study:

To achieve its set objectives, this study employs a qualitative research through the use of in-depth interview. As averred by Lisa (2008), in-depth interviews are interviews in which participants are encouraged and prompted to talk in depth about the topic under investigation without the researcher's use of predetermined, focused, short-answer questions.

2.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study entails selected sports editorial writers in notable Nigerian dailies. These writers were selected based on their relevant experience in covering the sports industry in the country, as their invaluable experience will provide valuable insights on the challenges confronting sports writing. Accordingly, based on the register obtained from *SportsPro*; an internationally published sports journal, there are more than 200 notable sports journalists in Nigeria.

2.3 Sample of the study:

A purposive sampling method is adopted to select the participants from the study population. Thus, 12 sports journalists who are further called “informants” in this study were purposively selected among veteran sports writers in notable Nigerian dailies for the interview. The justification for selecting 12 informants was further validated by Muellman, et al. (2021) which emphasized that between 6 and 10 key informants appears to be sufficient in a qualitative study of small population, in order to get rich and useful data. Similarly, Hennink, et al. (2017) opined that about 8 to 12 interviews are enough to reach data saturation in in-depth interview.

2.4 Study Variables

-The Independent Variable: Sports editorial writing in Nigeria and activities involved.

-The dependent Variable: Challenges involved in sports editorial writing amidst technological advancements.

2.5 Fields of the study

- Time Domain: Data collection and analysis occur over a three-month period, allowing enough time to gather comprehensive data and conduct a thorough analysis.

- Spatial Domain: The study is conducted within sports organizations and facilities where sports reporters are domiciled and can be accessed.

- Human Domain: The human aspects includes sports writers, sports reporters and stakeholders who are directly involved in sports editorial writing in Nigeria

2.6 Study Instruments:

The primary tool that was used in collecting data for this study is the interview guide. The interview guide is designed to allow for deeper discussions on sensitive issues pertaining to sports editorials and how they are structured.

2.7 The Scientific Bases of the Scientific Instruments:

To ensure reliability and validity of the study instruments, experts in sports writing and reporting review and refine the instrument. Moreover, consistency checks were ensured to confirm that the interview guide reliably measure ethical constructs related to sports editorial writing.

3. Results of the Study:

3.1 Overview of Findings:

The profile of informants that were interviewed is presented in a table below:

S/N	Name	Medium/Organization	Years of Experience
1	KI	Punch Newspaper	35 years
2	KII	SoccerPro Magazine	17 years
3	KIII	Nigerian Tribune Newspaper	21 years
4	KIV	Independent Sports Agency	10 years
5	KV	Vanguard Newspaper	25 years
6	KVI	Sports Reel Magazine	15 years
7	KVII	This Day Sports	25 years
8	KVIII	The Nation Newspaper	26 years
9	KIX	News Agency of Nigeria	12 years
10	KX	MTN Football	11 years
11	KXI	Complete Sports	16 years
12	KXII	Sporting Life	10 years

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025

3.2 Summary of Findings:

Theme	Sub-theme	Key Viewpoints
Theme 1: Challenges Confronting Sports Editorial Writers	**Editorial Policies & Internal Problems**	Limited sports prioritization due to political/economic focus, management's lack of support, publisher control.
	External Problems	Decline in sports audience due to foreign content, internet's appeal, and cost-effective alternatives.
Theme 2: Aspect of Sports Writing Frequently Reported	**Frequent Sports Covered**	Primarily football, with other sports covered if major developments occur.
	Prospects of Frequent Reportage	Sports editorials attract more readers, provide deeper insights, and engage sports enthusiasts.
Theme 3: Sports Reporting and Growth of Journalism	**Motivation for Reporting Sports**	Passion for sports, long-term experience, and the growth of sports journalism motivate reporting.

The table highlights key challenges and motivations faced by sports editorial writers. Internal challenges include editorial policies that prioritize political and economic content over sports, and external problems related to the growing dominance of internet and foreign

sports content, which has reduced local readership. In terms of coverage, football is the most frequently reported sport, with other sports covered less frequently. Sports editorial is seen as valuable because it attracts a larger audience and allows for deeper analysis, which boosts readership. Motivational factors for reporting include a passion for sports and the widespread interest it garners.

4. Discussion

However, analysis of the interview data from the in-depth interviews generated three (3) themes and five (5) sub-themes which are thematically analysed below:

Theme 1: *Challenges confronting sports editorial writers*

Sub-theme I: Editorial Policies and Internal problems

The interview informants who are eight (8) in numbers were of different views as regards the various challenges confronting them in the cause of discharging their duties as sports editorial writers. While the views of majority of them tallies, others have various views and experiences as regards these challenges. For instance, IP3 maintained that the editorial policies of his outfit is tailored towards political and economic activities, hence, sports is not priortised. Similarly, IP1 opined that his outfit does not give sports information a level playing ground compared with other activities, hence his work as a sports writer is sometimes jeopardized by other activities that are of interest to the management. However, other informants expressed their concerns as regards the challenges confronting them which include management's unfavourable disposition to sports, publisher's control of editorial activities among others.

Sub-theme II: External problem

The informants have both divergent and convergent opinions and perspectives as regards the external problems confronting them. IP2 stressed that sports audience are no longer available to read information on sports, as a result of influx of foreign contents. Similarly, IP7 emphasized that sports audience exposure to abundant sports information on the internet has drastically reduced the number of those that read sports information, which has forced newspaper

outfits to look at other sectors that can command large readership. Also, IP8 stressed that sports audience are now much comfortable getting information from the internet and other foreign sports outfits, at the expense of the local newspapers. Also, IP5 maintained that cost effectiveness, means of socialization, fun among others are the reasons why newspaper sports writers are losing sports audience to the internet and foreign news sites.

Theme 2: ***Aspect of sports writing that is frequently reported***

Sub-theme I: Frequent sports covered

The informants in their views have similar submissions as regards the aspect of sports that they frequently writes on, IP3 maintained that most of his sports editorial contents are on football; except if there are major breakthroughs or lessons in other sporting activities. Similarly, IP1 said he majorly writes on football, and it is the reason why he tagged his sports column on Punch newspaper "Grandmaster of Soccer". Other informants also corroborated this assertion that football is the most reported aspect of sports.

Sub-theme II: Prospects of frequent reportage

On the prospects of frequent reportage, the informants in their views opined that, sports editorials is one of the very few writing form that required timely report or account of whatever views. The informants have different views as regards prospects of reporting sports editorial, IP2 opined that sports editorial and other forms of sports reporting attracts more audience to newspaper outfit and carve a niche for such newspaper among other newspapers. In his views, IP8 stressed that sports editorial is another avenue for sports lovers to get detailed and comprehensive reports as regards issues and happenings in the world of sports, just as IP5 corroborated it that "you have people around for different analysis at the newspaper stands". IP4 emphasized that sports editorial is an advanced version of whatever issues in sports that has been reported earlier, and it gives sports enthusiasts avenue to have understanding and full knowledge of such issue which might be impossible if it is a mere watching or reading of sports stories. In his submission, IP6 opined that sports editorial is better than other forms of sports reporting, because the readers have

advantage of gaining insight from the writings of sports enthusiasts, analysts and commentators; who are more gifted when it comes to the world of sports.

Theme 3: ***Sports reporting and growth of journalism profession***

Sub-theme I: Motivation for reporting sports

The motivation to report sports among other genres of journalism, according to the informants is as a result of various factors. IP7 stressed that he is motivated to write on sports because he has been on the job for over 25 years, and he cut his journalism teeth through sports reporting. Also, he emphasized that sports reporting has contributed to the overall growth of journalism in that there is barely any media outfits today that does not give sports certain part of their space. Similarly, IP1 said he is motivated to write on sports because of his love for it, and the fact that it has become part and parcel of him in the last 35 years of sports journalism. He stressed that sports journalism is one aspect of journalism that has promoted the pen profession, in that, more sports media outfits (print or broadcast) have sprung up in the last 15 years. However, other motives according to IP2, IP4, IP5 andIP8 include; passion for it, mandate given to them, large number of audience among others; are the factors that motivate them to write on sports.

5. Conclusion

There is no gainsaying in the fact that sports reporting is a popular genre of journalism in the present-day Nigeria and other part of the globe. It is mostly common seeing people across age grades reading, listening and watching sports news from the media.

As a result of this, more sports-based media outfits are springing up in the last two decades in order to satisfy sports enthusiasts and lovers through bringing sports news and activities to their doorstep. Also, sports editorial which is an aspect of sports reporting is now emerging on various media outfits (print or

broadcast). Sports editorial is an advanced version of sports reporting where various issues in the world of sports which might have been earlier reported as straight news; are now given detailed and thorough analysis for the full understanding of the audience.

However, from the analysis deduced from the interview above, it can be concluded that sports editorials are forms of writing sports news in an advanced version, with the aim of giving sports audience detailed and thorough information that will update their existing knowledge as regards the sports news reported. Although, sports editorial writers are inundated with various external and internal challenges, but this advanced version of writing is a better way of expanding the frontiers of knowledge in the world of sports, as well as a platform to advance the journalism profession as a whole.

6. Suggestions and Future Recommendations:

However, based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

- Newspaper publishers and management board should give sports reporting more space in order to have more sporting activities reported.
- Newspaper outfits should endeavour to tailor their policies (editorial and administrative) towards giving sports journalism an avenue to thrive.
- Sports editorial writers should ensure that whatever sporting events they are writing on should be what interests the readers.
- Other forms of sports should be priortised, not necessarily football alone.
- Sports editorials should be given more space in the pages allotted for sports news on newspapers, while informed commentary and analysis on sports should be frequently aired on radio and television.

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