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## COVERAGE OF MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS IN NIGERIA: FOCUS ON THE PRINT MEDIA

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### Abstract

*The aim of the study is to evaluate print media coverage of museum exhibitions in Nigeria using two print media firms - The Guardian and Vanguard newspapers - as focal points. The specific objectives are to examine the frequency and prominence of reports on museum exhibitions, assess the story type used, as well as the content of news reports on museum exhibitions. A content analysis research approach was adopted with a major focus on frequency, prominence, story type (genre) and subject/contents. Frequency and simple percentages of data gathered were examined using SPSS version 20.0. The main finding shows that coverage of museum exhibitions was poor, judging from the fact that only 14 reports on museum exhibitions were obtained out of 80 editions of the newspapers studied. Additionally, the majority of the reports failed to make the front page, instead were fixed inside the pages of the newspapers, suggesting low priority topic. The implication of this result is that the newspapers are lacking in performing their agenda-setting role as regards the promotion of museum exhibitions - a key area in heritage preservation. Based on the findings, it was suggested that the print media as a purveyor of information, should recognize the urgency of setting the museum agenda for Nigerian society by increasing their coverage of news stories on museum exhibitions.*

**Keywords:** *Museum Exhibition, Newspapers, Reportage, Nigeria*

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### Introduction

Succinctly described, museum exhibition is a systematic display of material objects aimed at communicating to the museum audience. “While museums have a wide range of potential public programmes, exhibitions tend to be the predominant form of communication between a museum and its public” (Kapukotuwa, 2017, p.167). In line with this, Mclean (1997) affirmed that museums are not museums in the absence of exhibitions. This suggests that exhibition is at the heart of museum activities.

Museum exhibitions arouse and satisfy curiosity, which is why museums are sometimes referred to as ‘cabinets of curiosity’ (Weil, 1995). Museums as the repository of cultural and natural heritage are regarded as settings for conversation, inquiry, debate, education, recreation and tourism, inspiration and contemplation – these are majorly triggered by objects on display.

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However, it is a fact that in Nigeria, museums generally experience poor visitor statistics. For a sizeable percentage of people who do not visit museums, what other ways can they get to know about museum's exhibitions, and possibly get a glimpse of what messages museums communicate through their exhibitions? The media readily comes to mind as one way of creating more awareness for museums and their exhibitions.

As potent tools in mass mobilization, information dissemination, entertainment, socialization, integration, cultural promotion amongst others (Chieme, Nyekwere, Nwaubeta&kiriko, 2017), the media can be a key player in extending the messages of museums to a wider population if there is adequate coverage of museum exhibitions. In corroboration, Nwabueze, Nnaemeka, Umeora and Okika (2015)note that the media have the responsibility of setting agenda. Since attitudes and behaviours are usually affected by cognitions i.e., what a person knows, thinks or believes (McCombs, 2010), the agenda-setting role of the mass media connotes a likely huge influence on how people view issues (see Shaw, 1979). Thus, the reportage of museum exhibitions can determine the extent of value accorded to museums. Besides, adequate coverage of museum exhibitions by the media can positively affect people's attitude towards museums and their exhibitions, resulting in an increased museum audience. Following what has been said, the aim of the study is to investigate how two print media outfits - *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers - report issues on museum exhibitions. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the frequency of reports on museum exhibitions in *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers.
2. Ascertain the prominence given to news stories on museum exhibitions in the newspapers.
3. Access the story type used to report stories on museum exhibitions.
4. Investigate the content of the news reports on museum exhibitions.

### **Literature Review**

As institutions for the collection, preservation, exhibition and explanation of cultural and natural phenomena, museums pay close attention to culturally defined branches of knowledge such as art, history, religion, geography and natural history (Fletcher in Jafari, 2000, p. 400). Much of what museums do are carried out through exhibitions.

Exhibition could be defined as a spatially organized and visualized expression of thoughts, things and systems of knowledge, originating in the time of Enlightenment, and to a great extent, based on the display of material objects (Kerstin, 2012). As construed by Verhaar and Meeter (1989, p.260) in Kapukotuwa, 2017, p.168), "An exhibition is a means of communication aiming at large groups of the public with the purpose of conveying information, ideas and emotions relating to the material evidence of man and his surrounding with the aid of chiefly visual and dimensional methods". In the opinion of Dean (2002), exhibition refers to a comprehensive grouping of all elements (including exhibits and displays) that form a complete public presentation of collections and information for public use. Dean states that it is generally assumed that museum exhibitions incorporate a collection of objects, or their representations, as the primary channels of communication. "As unique three-dimensional compositions, exhibitions show things, whether a work of art or a working machine, a history timeline or a bit of bone; this showing or exhibition

is the one feature common to all museums” (McLean, 1997, p.83). As noted by Dean (2002), museum exhibitions accomplish several goals such as:

- Promoting community interest in the museum by offering alternative leisure activities where individuals or groups may find worthwhile experiences.
- Supporting the institution financially: exhibitions help the museum as a whole to justify its existence and its expectation for continued support. Donors, both public and private, are more likely to give to a museum with an active and popular exhibition schedule.
- Providing proof of responsible handling of collections if a donor wishes to give objects. Properly presented exhibitions confirm public trust in the museum as a place for conservation and careful preservation.

Since the exhibition is at the heart of museum activities, and museums are meant for people, museum authorities must constantly seek avenues of promoting museum exhibitions to reach a wider percentage of the public. To this effect, a handful of writers have identified the media as a promotional tool for museums and their exhibitions.

By studying the cases of important museums in Australia, America and Europe, Panteleimon (2014) found that social media have already formed a basic communication tool for the museum’s exhibitions. The author noted that social media could be used to develop new models of participation and feedback as well as promote the museum’s activities in general. The study concluded that social media, to a high degree, serves as a means to attract more visitors to onsite museums.

Furthermore, Renata (2017) is of the view that to attract visitors, museums need media. The media campaign in museum activities, according to Renata (2017), represents an important step when planning, organizing and coordinating the implementation of promotional activities for museums. The writer notes that the most famous media campaign in Croatian museum activities is related to the museum event called *Museum Night*. Such powerful museum media campaigns are activities organized for the promotion of large and extremely important exhibitions such as the exhibition of Herman Bolle, Renata concluded. Similarly, Luyten (1994) remarks that the museum needs to find or create favourable news coverage about its collections and exhibitions; arguing that the more the press is cultivated, the more likely it is to give better coverage to the museum.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the media has a huge role to play in advertising museum exhibitions for greater patronage. Unfortunately, very little was found on museum exhibitions and the print media in the context of Nigeria within the scope of the literature review for the study. Consequently, this paper was deemed necessary to fill the void.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This study was based on Agenda-Setting Theory and Social Responsibility Theory. Agenda-setting theory was first suggested by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw based on their study of the media’s role in the 1968 American presidential election. This theory states that the media dictate what people think about, not what people think. Nwabueze *et al.* (2015) affirmed that by frequently covering and giving prominence to issues in the media, the audience attaches

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importance to those issues more than others and by so doing, the mass media set agenda for public discussion. They noted that the media, through agenda setting role tell the public which issue is important. This, therefore, means that examination of agenda-setting can present an explanation of why information about certain issues is addressed frequently, while other issues are event-based to the public, as well as how public opinion is shaped (Tesema, 2012). The relevance of this theory to the study is that, through constant media reportage, issues on museum exhibitions become important public discourse, and the degree of prominence assigned to the news stories in Nigeria could be ascertained through media reports. This is more so because the media determine to a certain extent the type, amount and frequency of information that reaches the general public.

Social responsibility theory is an extension of the Libertarian theory of the press, which places emphasis on the moral and social responsibility of persons as well as institutions which operate the mass media (Okoro & Naji, 2012). The theory is based on the principle that the press must be responsible to represent all aspects and interests in society. In other words, the theory suggests that the mass media should permeate and represent all the strata of society (Stephen, 2014). Capturing it succinctly, “it presupposes that newspapers must have social conscience, be devoted to public welfare and public service; they should be responsive to problems in the society” (Johnson, Layefa, Taiwo, 2016, p.7). Linking this theory to this study, the media in executing their social duty is expected to shape opinion and provide the basis for the understanding of different issues of museum exhibitions in society. Thus, it is the responsibility of the Nigerian press to frequently report issues on museum exhibitions by providing several media contents through accurate, objective and balanced reports. The theory is suitable in this study as it enhances understanding of how the print media carry out their social responsibility in reporting news stories on museum exhibitions in Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

Content analysis research approach was used for this study. It is appropriate when one’s aim is to examine the manifest content of communication in the print media. The population of the study consists of the editions of two selected Nigerian national dailies -*Vanguard* and *DailySun* newspapers from 1st January 2021 to May 31st, 2021 (i.e.,  $155 \times 2 = 310$ ) (weekend editions inclusive). The newspapers were purposively selected because of their wide readership and circulation strength.

The sample size was determined, using the composite week procedure. As noted by Wimmer & Dominick (2011, p.163), “a study might use a sample of one Monday (drawn at random from the four or five possible Mondays in the month), one Tuesday (drawn from the available Tuesdays), and so on, until all weekdays have been included”. Deriving from this, the editions of the newspapers for the months under study were selected based on the days of the week. For this study, the newspapers were chosen at random for a month. A sample size of eighty (80) issues was used for the two selected newspapers. To determine this, eight (8) editions of a particular newspaper were examined in a month and 40 editions in five months. In all, sixteen (16) editions of the two (2) selected newspapers were studied in one month and 80 editions in five months. Hence, the sample size for this study was 80.

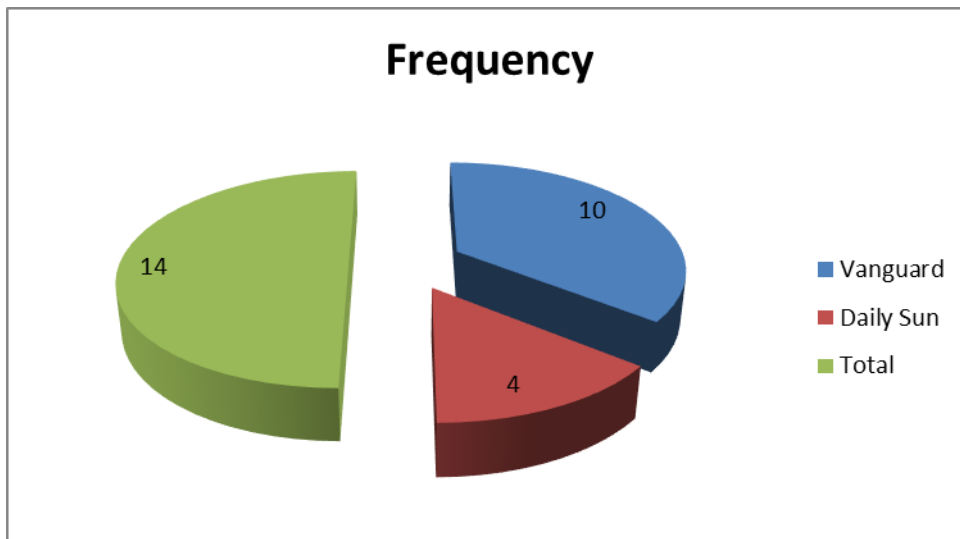
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The units of analysis were the news, features, editorials, opinion articles and pictures, which are the genre of media content that give accurate, objective and in-depth accounts of an occurrence. The following were categorized under each of the units of analysis: Frequency (number of times each unit of analysis appeared), Prominence (using Front Page, Inside Page and Back Page) and Subject/content (using sculptural display, paintings, book and film exhibition and other issues). With the aid of SPSS software version 20.0, frequency and simple percentages were analyzed for the study. Data were presented using tables and charts.

**Results**

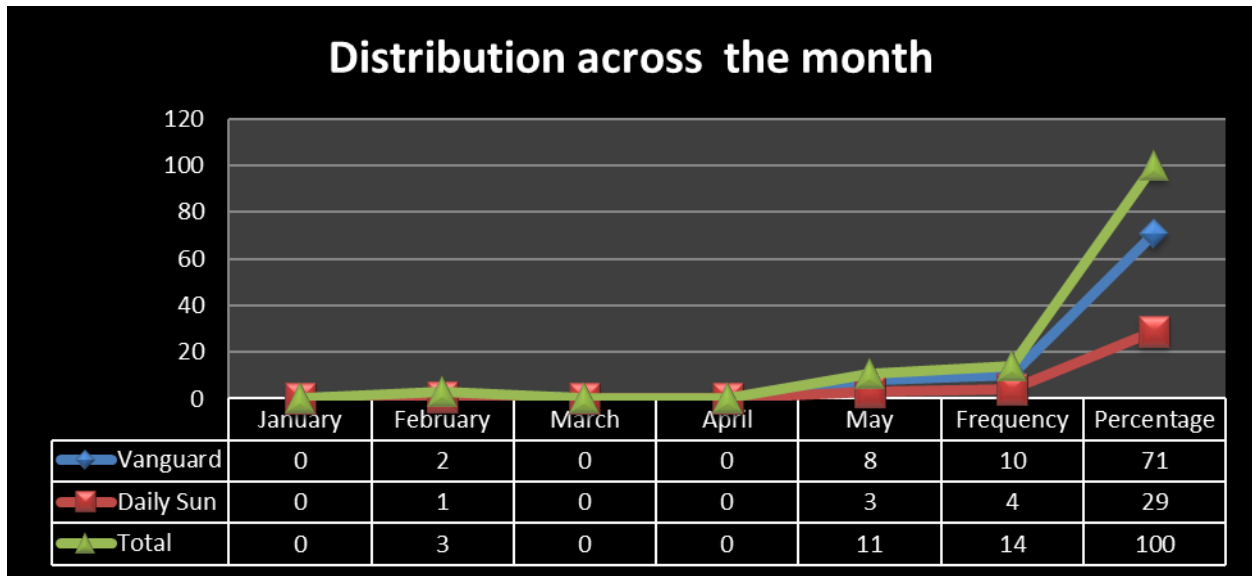
A total of 40 editions of each of the two newspapers studied from the *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers making a grand total of 80 editions formed the sample size of the study. From the data analysis, a total of 14 reports were obtained out of 80 editions of the newspapers studied. The results are shown below.

***Table 1: Pie chart showing the frequency of reports in the Vanguard and Daily Sun newspapers***



From the above figure, *Vanguard* newspaper had 10 (79%) reports on museum exhibitions in Nigeria. On the part of *Daily Sun* newspaper, it had 4 (29 %) newspapers with reports. The implication is that both *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers had news stories on museum exhibitions in Nigeria, though may not have been sufficient.

***Fig.2: Line chart showing data distribution across the five months of study.***



In Fig.2 above, February and May had 3 and 11 reports respectively, while January, March and April recorded 0% news stories. This implies that news stories on museum exhibitions were covered and were published only in the months of February and May.

**Fig. 3: Doughnut chart showing distribution of data based on story type**

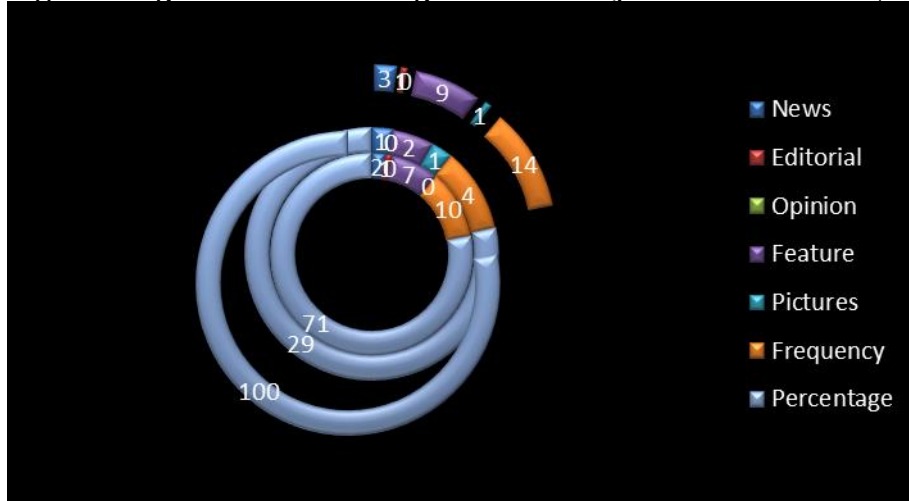


Fig. 3 above indicates that feature articles had the highest frequency with 9 stories. This was followed by news stories with 3 reports. Editorial and picture articles recorded 1 story each. This implies that stories on museum exhibitions were reported mainly via feature articles.

**Fig.4: Bar chart showing the distribution of data based on prominence.**

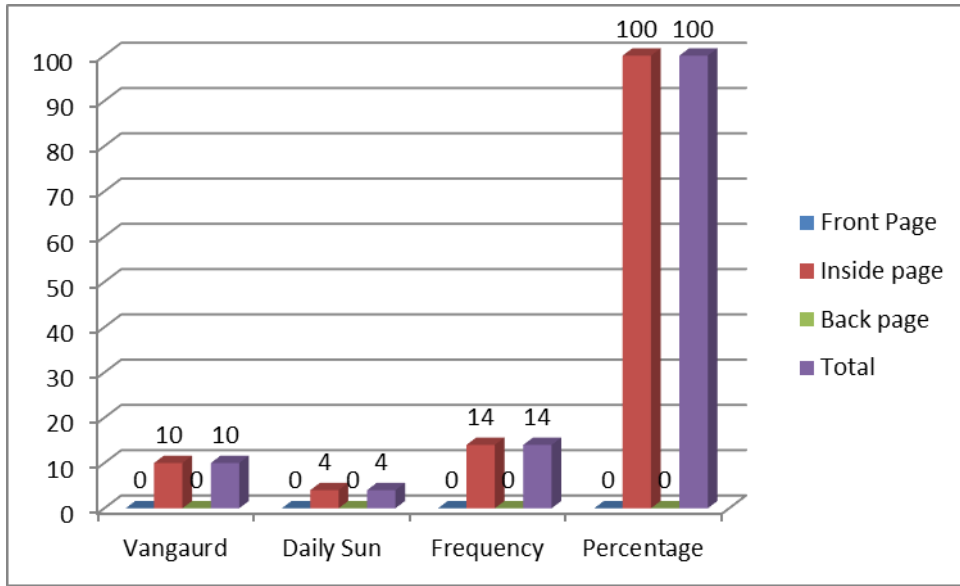
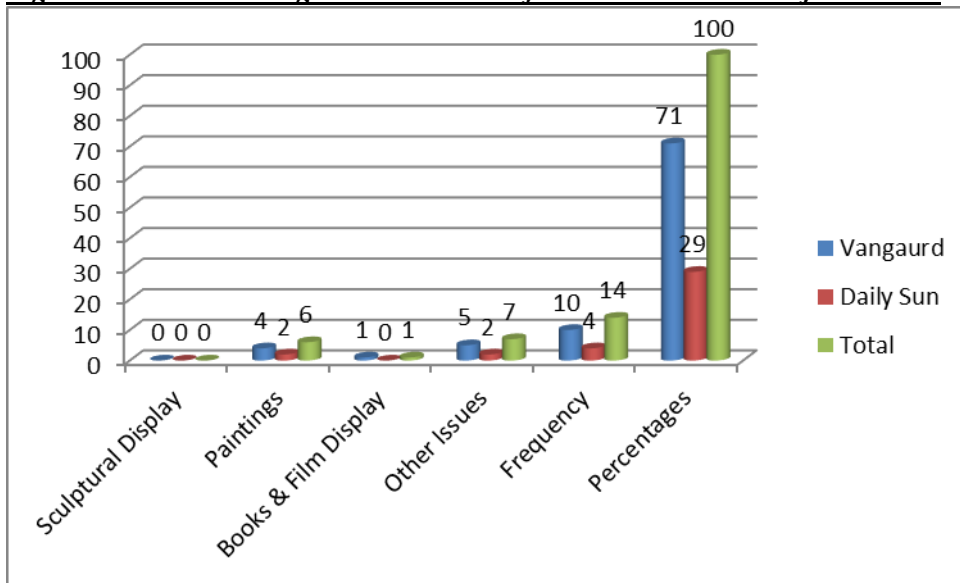


Fig.4 shows that the inside page of *Vanguard* newspaper recorded 10 stories, while *Daily Sun* presented 4 stories within the study period. This indicates that the majority of the reports were captured within or inside the pages of the sampled newspapers.

**Fig.5: Bar chart showing the distribution of data based on the subject matter.**



In Fig 4 above, paintings were featured 6 times (43%), books and film displays recorded 1 story (7 %) . 7 reports (50 %) were devoted to other issues. This implies that the majority of the news stories across the five months focused on other issues apart from sculptural display, paintings, book and film display as captured by *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers.

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## Discussion

Results from data analysis show that the two newspapers – *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun*- had reported stories on museum exhibitions. This is more so because of the outcome of quantitative content analysis, which exposed how the two newspapers managed their reports on museum exhibitions. The analysis of the study revealed that there were 14 reports within the study period. Although this result indicates that the two print media exhibited their social responsibility function in the coverage of museum exhibitions, it is left to wonder if only 14 reports out of 80 editions studied are enough to be regarded as adequate coverage for issues concerning museum exhibitions. As posited by Feezell (2018,p.1) “the conventional models of agenda setting hold that mainstream media influence the public agenda by leading audience attention, and perceived importance, to certain issues”. Since no society can survive without information and since the media are the major purveyor of information, they have the responsibility to set agenda for the Nigerian society by increasing their coverage of news stories on museum exhibitions. As regards the trend in the coverage across the five months, it was observed that news stories on museum exhibitions were reported only in the month of February and May. This is evident in Fig.2 above.

The findings of the study identified that information on the story type used to report museum exhibitions as presented in *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers were reported using mainly feature articles. The import of the above finding is that the two sampled newspapers covered news stories on museum exhibitions with detailed information using feature articles and not just as they cropped up or occurred. Feature articles go beyond the straight news presentation by providing background informative stories on museum exhibitions to the public. On the other hand, in Fig.4 only 1 story was reported through editorial. It is quite appalling that the editorial, being the newspapers’ views on topical issues, did not have much to present to the general public as regards their views on the museum exhibition. By reporting complex issues through features, opinion articles and editorials, in-depth interpretations of the issues are provided for the public understanding.

Looking at the prominence in fig.4, it was observed that the majority of the reports on museum exhibitions were positioned inside the pages of the two newspapers. This indicates that news stories on museum exhibitions were seen as less important to feature on the front page or back page of the sampled newspapers. Placement, as opined by Aniekeme (2016) shows how much importance the editor attaches to a news event and one of the ways to gauge the importance the newspapers attach to news stories is to look at where the stories were placed. Iroko (2016) noted that in making decisions for the placement of stories, editors are inevitably communicating to readers which issues and corresponding stories should receive the most attention.

Linking this finding to the agenda-setting model, which posits that by frequently covering and giving prominence to issues in the media, the audience attaches importance to those issues more than others (Nwabueze, Nnaemeka, Umeora& Okika, 2015); it was observed that the sampled newspapers did not execute their agenda-setting function very well. This then indicates that reports on museum exhibitions were not prominently placed in *Vanguard* and *DailySun* newspapers within the study period. This equally indicates poor coverage of news stories on



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museum exhibitions. This is evident in the report by *Vanguard* newspaper on page 20, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with the heading: *Peep into Fela's Private Part*.

On the aspect of subject matter, as regards news stories on museum exhibitions reported by the selected newspapers, data presented in fig. 5 shows that paintings, books and film displays and other issues were the subject matter. These issues are arts and culture, visual arts for extant society, travel and tourism. These issues focused more on things that have to do with the extant population. The implication of this result is that the selected newspapers paid more attention to stories on other related issues than stories on museum exhibitions. Based on the result obtained in the analysis, it implies that the sampled newspapers did not adequately play out their agenda-setting and social responsibility function in showcasing issues on museum exhibitions in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

Newspaper as a channel of information dissemination is one of the major tools of communicating to the public. Information on museum exhibitions is spread from one region to the other through the media, particularly the newspapers. Going by the results from the analysis, the study shows that news stories on museum exhibitions in Nigeria were reported in *Vanguard* and *Daily Sun* newspapers, though not sufficiently. Stories on museum exhibitions were not prominently reported as all of the stories were tucked inside the pages of the sampled newspapers. Feature article, which is one of the genres in media text classification and which provides detailed analysis of topical issues was used in covering museum exhibition. There were fewer reports using the news format which presents immediate reports on current issues. These suggest that issues on museum exhibitions were not well projected to the public within the period of study. Thus, the study submits that the newspapers examined did not adequately present museum exhibitions to the attention of the public via recurring news coverage, which is one of the tenets of the agenda-setting function of the media.

Conclusively, it is suggested that there should be frequent reports on museum exhibitions by the press. This will go a long way to helping readers know the importance of preserving heritage for posterity, tourism development and research purposes. Again, National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), National Art Gallery and other related bodies should develop a deeper partnership with the print media; this will definitely provide the synergy for more in-depth reportage of issues on museum exhibitions in Nigerian print media.

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