

# Evaluation of Grassroots Newspapers' Mission Statements in South-West Nigeria

## Güneybatı Nijerya'daki Kitle Gazetelerinin Misyon Açıklamalarının Değerlendirilmesi

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### Abstract

**Aim:** Mission or vision statement is expected to reflect an organization's ideology and operational philosophy. It provides an organization's sense of direction, focus, and distinguishing features among its peers. Grassroots newspapers are often less institutionalized due to their low capital base. This study explores the extent of conceptualization of mission statements to guide the operational philosophy of grassroots newspapers in South-West Nigeria.

**Method:** It adopts the content analysis research method to extract quantitative and qualitative data on key messages conveyed in the mission statements of 27 grassroots newspapers identified as operating within South-West, Nigeria.

**Results:** The study finds that half of the identified grassroots newspapers have clearly expressed mission statements; mostly focused on creating a voice for community members, projecting their image and activities to the outside world, while reviewing national issues related to their communities; fostering development, and upholding journalism ethical standards.

**Conclusion:** The findings thus suggest a high level of professionalism among grassroots newspapers operating in Nigeria's South-Western region because they appear to understand their societal expectations. However, it is unclear if they indeed live up to the expressed mandates in their everyday operations as this was beyond the scope of this study. Further studies are therefore suggested to explore the extent to which grassroots newspapers in the region, and beyond, live up to their expressed mission statements.

**Originality:** Research studies on print media in Nigeria often focus on national or regional newspapers with minimal attention accorded grassroots media. This study is original in its quest to understand the operational philosophy of grassroots print media in the country. The study thus contributes to public understanding of the operations and guiding principles of grassroots media often considered as alternative media capable of enhancing media access to local communities and enhancing their participation in political and developmental processes.

**Key Words:** Grassroots newspaper, mission statements, media management, content analysis, Nigeria.

## Öz

**Amaç:** Misyon veya vizyon ifadesinden bir kuruluşun ideolojisini ve operasyonel felsefesini yansıtmayı beklenir. Misyon; bir kuruluşun yön duygusunu, odak noktasını ve benzerleri arasında ayırt edici özellikleri sağlar. Kitlelere ait gazeteler düşük sermayeleri nedeniyle genellikle daha az kurumsallaşmıştır. Bu çalışma, Güney Batı Nijerya'daki kitle gazetelerinin operasyonel felsefesine rehberlik edecek misyon beyanlarının kavramsallaştırılmasının kapsamını araştırmaktadır.

**Yöntem:** Nijerya'nın Güney Batı bölgesinde faaliyet gösterdiği belirlenen 27 kitle gazetesinin misyon beyanlarında aktarılan temel mesajlara ilişkin niceliksel ve niteliksel verileri çıkarmak için içerik analizi araştırma yöntemini benimser.

**Bulgular:** Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular sonucu, kitle gazetelerinin yarısının misyon beyanlarını açıkça ifade ettiğini; çoğunlukla topluluk üyeleri için bir ses yaratmaya, imajlarını ve faaliyetlerini dış dünyaya yansıtmaya ve aynı zamanda topluluklarıyla ilgili ulusal sorunları gözden geçirmeye odaklanmış olduğunu, kitle gazeteciliğinin gelişimini teşvik ettiğini ve gazetecilik etik standartlarını desteklediği bulgulanmıştır.

**Sonuç:** Dolayısıyla bulgular, Nijerya'nın Güney-Batı bölgesinde faaliyet gösteren kitle gazeteleri arasında yüksek düzeyde bir profesyonellik olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Çünkü toplumsal beklentileri anlıyor gibi görünmektedirler. Ancak bu çalışmanın kapsamı dışında olduğundan, günlük operasyonlarında ifade edilen talimatları gerçekten yerine getirip getirmediikleri belirsizlik taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle, bölgedeki ve ötesindeki kitle gazetelerinin ifade ettikleri misyon beyanlarını ne ölçüde karşıladığını araştırmak için daha kapsamlı çalışmalar yapılması önerilmektedir.

**Özgünlük:** Nijerya'da yazılı medya üzerine yapılan araştırma çalışmaları genellikle ulusal veya bölgesel gazetelere odaklanmakta ve kitle medyasına çok az ilgi gösterilmektedir. Bu çalışma, ülkedeki kitlelerden gelen yazılı basın işleyiş felsefesini anlama arayışı açısından orijinallik taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle çalışma, genellikle yerel topluluklara medya erişimini artırma ve onların siyasi ve kalkınma süreçlerine katılımlarını artırma kapasitesine sahip alternatif medya olarak kabul edilen kitle medyasının operasyonları ve yol gösterici ilkeleri hakkında kamuoyunun anlayışına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kitle gazetesi, misyon beyanları, medya yönetimi, içerik analizi, Nijerya.

## Introduction

Grassroots newspapers are expected to differ significantly from large national or regional commercial newspapers. They tend to encourage patronage and support from the government, community leaders and associations, and other key stakeholders in the communities. Unfortunately, their roles within the society have not been fully explored by researchers in Nigeria. Erstwhile studies on the contribution of the media to Nigeria's political and socio-economic development often draw data from national media organizations to the exclusion of community or grassroots media. As alternative media, they have been neglected by researchers (Fuchs, 2010). Studies such as Coker (1968), Omu (1978), Agbaje (1992), among other landmark studies on Nigeria's media history, drew conclusions on the basis of data obtained from the national newspapers with minimal reference to grassroots newspapers. Grassroots newspapers are closer to the people and can (if well managed) relate to the needs and yearnings of their communities, mirror their needs to government, and also bring government's programs to the attention of the community where they are based (Oso, 2003). Grassroots newspapers tend to project the needs of local community members to the government and sensitize the people on government programs. They tend to focus on people-centered issues such as, environment and waste disposal, nutrition, youth empowerment, primary healthcare, adult literacy, yearly traditional festivals, roads construction, drainage system, provision of fertilizers to peasant farmers and modern mechanized farming techniques.

The political-economy of the local communities in Nigeria is usually backward owing to perennial neglect by national and state governments who site industries and other investments of the economy in the cities and big towns that host the seats of governance. The media are mostly urban based and urban focused to the detriment of the rural communities and their inhabitants. This study sought to address this gap by examining grassroots media, an area largely neglected in previous studies. Our focus here is on their mission statements and their potentials to contribute to national goals and objectives.

The study presupposes that the proximity of local newspapers to their resident audiences positions them strategically to better influence and reflect the activities, interests, and concerns of their readers compared to the more celebrated national newspapers. Therefore, local newspapers must be included in societal development efforts. Grassroots newspapers can also be viewed as alternative media, capable of giving voice to grassroots communities as alternative social actors. This, in turn, can enhance their participation in political and developmental processes. This study thus explored the operational philosophies of grassroots newspapers in South-West, Nigeria to examine the extent to which operators perceive and understand their role as critical actors within the society.

### Nigeria's news media landscape and the South-West region

The Nigerian media have been noted as one of the most vibrant, advanced and diverse systems in Africa, whose roles continue to be of great significance in the country's development processes (Akinfeleye, 2003; IWMF, 2011). The Nigerian media system has long been dominated by print and broadcast media. The proliferation and increasing affordability of internet access has also enhanced the development of the online media over the past decade with more

media start-ups being established as online news media platforms (Adepetun, 2017). The print media started as a private enterprise and remain dominated by private ownership (Omu, 1978), while the electronic media (both radio and television) are dominated by government ownership (Oso, 2012). The broadcast sector is still largely regulated through the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) which oversees the licensing, operations, and conduct of broadcast media in the country, imposing fines and sanctions when deemed necessary.

Historically, the South-West region has dominated the news media industry. The region comprises six states namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti. Lagos remains strategic as “the media centre of Nigeria” (Anyanwu, 2001) being a former capital, in addition to maintaining its status over the years as the nation’s commercial nerve centre. Ibadan, located in Oyo state still within the South-West region, was the birth place of the first television station in Nigeria. Egband, located in today’s Abeokuta in Ogun State hosted the first newspaper in the country, *Iwe Iroyin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba*, (translated “A newspaper for the Egbas and Yorubas”), a bilingual newspaper established in 1859 by an Anglican missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend (Omu, 1978). The newspaper, though promoted as a grassroots newspaper to drive literacy within its host community, was notably political with reports suggesting the proprietor used it as a propaganda tool to drive his political agenda (Oso, 2012). Its involvement in local politics eventually contributed to its demise in 1867 (Coker, 1968). Over the years, the South-West region has remained the preferred location for media establishments, hosting the majority of news outlets from the early years (Omu, 1978) to contemporary times (Olukotun, 2017).

Despite the long history of the press in the region (Omu, 1978), many of the publications were in English Language even at a time when literacy level was low, prompting analyst to suggest elitist inclinations of the early press (Oso, 2012). The dominance of the English language in Nigerian print media industry remains till date, especially with more Nigerians reportedly being literate in the English Language than the local languages (Lagos Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

The Nigerian press has taken different colorations depending on prevailing circumstances in the country, and “has developed within the dynamics of the country's political economy” (Oso, 2012, p. 10). Oso argued that the political orientation of the press remains largely motivated by the economic and political interests of media owners and the market imperative for survival. The quest for survival remains a major issue in the print media industry. It is difficult to give the exact circulation figures of all newspapers published in the country largely due to poor attrition rate of newspapers in the country (Olukotun, 2017). However, some general interest newspapers with national outlook (e.g. The Nation, The Punch, The Sun Vanguard, Daily Trust, The Guardian, Thisday) have remained dominant and consistent over the years (MediaReach OMD, 2017).

The magazine sub-genre of print media is the most affected by the challenges facing the sector. Most notable news magazines, like Tell and The News, have been largely overwhelmed and have ceased regular publishing. The magazines that still survive can be described as photo albums, primarily showcasing fashionable styles of celebrities. These magazines are mostly printed in vibrant colours but have very little online presence (MediaReach OMD, 2017).

The print media sector remains vibrant and a major driver of public discourse despite the challenges and stiff competition from online and social media platforms which have generally reduced the influence of the hitherto influential legacy media. However, this vibrancy cannot be said to apply to the grassroots sector owing mainly to the poor economy of the rural sector in Nigeria. Government neglect over the years has ensured that rural areas remain poor and lack the infrastructure to support a vibrant media sector. Nevertheless, some publications have weathered the storm, with the oldest being *Oriwu Sun*, a community newspaper in the Ikorodu area of Lagos State, which has survived for 40 years (Oso, Jimoh, Akanni, & Tijani-Adenle, 2021). Our focus on the South-West region is thus supported by the region’s acclaimed dominance of the Nigerian media landscape, as well as the continuing existence of *Oriwu Sun*, a key reference point for community newspaper practice in Nigeria.

### Conceptualizing grassroots / community newspapers

In today’s mediatized and promotional society, the media and other tools of communication have become highly important and central to the processes of political cum social development, and the process of democratic consolidation. To be able to adequately capture, reflect and project these processes, ideas and perspectives that underline them, the society needs a multi-sector media system with different units or components serving the different social groups and interests within the society. There is no doubt that the society is becoming highly segmented with identity politics on the upward spring.

Media, by virtue of the nature and relevance of their content, have a high potential for setting the agenda in local environments. Cook et al. (1983) examined how the media influence the general public, policymakers, interest group leaders, and public policy. Their findings revealed a significant link between audience exposure to a specific television program and public perceptions of issue importance, reinforcing the idea that the media play a role in agenda-setting. Hence, a well-run grassroots publication could effectively influence the local agenda with the right content.

Until recently, few studies had focused on community media practice in Nigeria. Such studies have mostly explored their role in driving grassroots development and sustaining democracy (e.g. Abiola, Rauf, & Ekeh, 2023; Ibagere & Anyanwu, 2012). These roles have sometimes evaluated stakeholders' perspectives (Abiola, Rauf, & Ekeh, 2023), or audience's perspectives (Animashaun, 2023; Asekun-Olarimoye, Ekeh, & Abiola, 2022). They tend to justify public need for community media by establishing their role in mobilising grassroots participation in the political system, empowering local communities by integrating them into governance, enlightening them, and projecting their interests in media coverage. These is despite the noted absence of ordinary community members in the operations and ownership of most community media, with ownership and operations often vested in the hands of select elites members of the community (Asekun-Olarimoye, Ekeh, & Abiola, 2022; Oso, et al., 2021).

The need for grassroots community based media in Nigeria is thus justified in the sense that the national commercial media hardly feature or reflect the activities and concerns of peasants, and those living in urban slums. These set of Nigerians are politically, socially, economically, and symbolically marginalized. The late Nigerian political scientist, Claude Ake, has noted this crucial point when he observed that "nowhere in the state apparatus do peasants find institutional expression as a social force; nowhere do they have even a physical presence in the state..." (Ake, 1985, p. 25). It is therefore important for this social segment of the citizenry to have their own mechanism of expression and representation which grassroots based newspapers tend to represent. This type of newspapers could be close to an alternative public sphere described by Nancy Fraser as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser, 1992, p. 123).

Nigeria is well served by many so called national newspapers and broadcasting stations. Scholars, particular those interested in the areas of media and politics have paid due attention to the dominant commercial mainstream media. Though not given much attention and recognition, there are local community-based newspapers serving different functions for their audiences as (Animashaun, 2023; Asekun-Olarimoye, Ekeh, & Abiola, 2022). Privatization and deregulation have changed the ecology of broadcasting in Nigeria, formalizing the establishment of community broadcast stations. The Nigerian Government through its broadcast regulatory agency, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) began licensing community radio stations in 2015, licensing 17 community radio stations spread across the country (Garba, 2015), with more additions over the years (Adegboyega, 2021; Ajimotokan, 2023).

While all these varied media forms (at least in terms of ownership) are united in performing basic media functions (information, education, entertainment, mobilization), they do not necessarily operate from the same philosophical or normative premise. There is the tension between public service and commercial interests, elite ownership and control and community ownership and control. Community media are conceptualized as alternatives to the commercial oriented and elite owned mainstream media. The journal, Media Development (2002, p. 1) outlines the key characteristics and purpose of community media. These outlets prioritize social objectives over profit-making, focusing on empowering individuals rather than viewing them as passive consumers. Instead of imposing standardized solutions, they preserve and promote local knowledge. Community media are owned and governed by the communities they serve, ensuring accountability. Additionally, they are dedicated to human rights, social justice, environmental sustainability, and inclusive development.

According to Thomas (2001), the foundation of community media is rooted in the principle of participatory communication. This perspective emphasizes that individuals and communities have the right to express themselves, define their reality, and take action accordingly. It also serves as a tool for understanding and challenging dominant power structures and the inequalities they create.

As Oso has pointed out, the key concept guiding the formation and operation of community media are *access*, *popular participation* and *self-management*, with its key objective entrenched in the Freirean concept of *conscientization*, which focuses on raising critical awareness and empowering communities (Oso, 2003, p. 2). Access is more than being able to read or listen or view other people's view or images but also important is the opportunity to be able to put across one's views, perspectives to others through the media space. McQuail (2010) explains that in a communication system, access can refer to both the ability of a sender to reach a specific audience and the capacity of an audience to receive particular messages or channels. In practice, it primarily concerns how open media channels are to diverse voices, particularly those with limited power or resources. More broadly, access is closely linked to the principle of media diversity.

In terms of popular participation, the audience of community media is not treated as mere consumers. It "implies the involvement of the public in production and in the management of communication systems" (Berrigan, 1979, p. 19). The third key concept, self-management connotes the opportunity for the public to exercise power of decision-making within communication enterprises and being fully involved in the formulation of communication policies and plans (Berrigan, 1979). Self-management relates to the process of empowerment. Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization means that "adults could learn to recognize social, political and economic contradictions and would be able to take action against oppressive elements in life" (Richards, 2001, p. 4). Berrigan (1979) noted self-management as the activation of the individual and group to articulate their needs and/or problems, and provide solutions.



Oso (2003) argued that the objectives of community media extend beyond influencing attitudes and behavioral change in areas such as health, agriculture and literacy campaigns. He emphasized that their objectives must include socio-political and cultural concerns. According to him, community media serve four key purposes. First, they amplify the voices of marginalized and powerless social groups while fostering dialogue through horizontal communication. Second, they assist these groups in identifying their actual challenges, facilitating discussions, exchanging information and ideas, and collaboratively finding solutions. Third, they encourage popular participation and self-management, enabling communities to take charge of decision-making and the execution of local projects. Finally, community media play a crucial role in raising awareness, equipping communities with the knowledge needed to challenge political and economic marginalization, oppression, and exploitation, ultimately contributing to their empowerment and liberation.

The late Zambian scholar, Francis Kasoma, in his definition of community newspaper assert that grassroots/community media must not only be people-centered in terms of its content and philosophical orientation, it must also be owned, operated and managed by the community it serves (Kasoma, 1987, in Karikari, 2000). Outside assistance is however not ruled out in its operation and finance as such task may be carried out by assigned experts outside the communities as deemed necessary. Kasoma (1997) also emphasized that a community newspaper should be published in the predominant language spoken by the majority of its target audience to ensure accessibility and effective communication. Oso (2003) thus considered the community newspaper a part of everyday life, aspirations and interests of the community, with its “name, definition, orientation, content and philosophy grassroots-based” (p. 159).

The grassroots/community newspaper is not just an inward looking instrument. It is an instrument of dialogue; the community speaking to itself and the outside world about issues of concern affecting it and seeking solutions. As a two-way communication channel it is “a mirror (reflecting the community back to itself) and that of a window allowing the outside world to look in at its experience” (Wanyeki, 2000, p. 30). In fulfilling its mission as a people-centered public communication channel, the community newspaper is not apolitical, though it is expected to be non-sectarian, non-partisan, inclusive and open to all members of the community i.e. it must provide access as the voice of the community (Oso, 2003). As an instrument of counter-hegemony, it must strive to be independent of political actors and other established interests in order to maintain its autonomy and affiliation to its community. It is of, and for its community.

The fundamental operating philosophy of this type of newspaper is public service and communitarianism and not commercialism and/or self-interest. The interest of the community is paramount. McQuail (2010) explains that the communitarian model highlights the importance of social connections among individuals, countering the emphasis on individualism found in modern libertarian thought. In the context of media, this model suggests that the relationship between media and audiences becomes more interactive, particularly when they share a common social identity or belong to the same physical community.

The above discussion raises some issues. First is the issue of ownership and control. In a largely illiterate and predominantly oral society, community or collective ownership and control of modern mass media organizations, particularly newspapers, could be problematic. Though ownership could be through grassroots based organizations (e.g. cooperative societies, market men and women association, age-grades etc.) control could actually be monopolized by the literate and/or politically active members who often dominate these associations. In this sense, participation could either be deceptive and/or manipulative (See Sparks, 2007, for a general discussion of different forms of participation). Oftentimes, community/grassroots newspapers are established by privileged individuals, politicians, and former editorial staff of well-established commercial newspapers (Oso, Jimoh, Akanni, & Tijani-Adenle, 2021). We must therefore be concerned with the issues of production and management skills required for the operation of grassroots media outfits.

The other issue is related to their non-commercial orientation. Grassroots/community newspapers are expected to operate on the basis of what Roncagliolo (1997) calls the logic of socio-cultural profitability. This perspective focuses on enhancing community capital, which cannot simply be acquired through financial means. According to Brunetti (2000, as cited in Oso, 2003), this involves acting as facilitators of social engagement and encouraging both material and symbolic production that better aligns with the specific needs of the community. The fundamental issue connected to this is the viability and sustainability of such newspapers. They are not expected to be commercial and profit orientated. Quite often, they record low circulation figures and their readership are usually not the affluent members of the society. This makes them less likely to attract or appeal to advertisers. The peculiarities of grassroots newspapers thus make it imperative for practitioners to have explicitly specified operational philosophy to guide the publication as often contained in mission statements of organizations. This should also be of interest to researchers to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of grassroots newspaper management and operations.

### **Mission statements as operational philosophy of organizations**

Mission statements are expected to reflect the ideology and operational philosophy of an organization. A mission statement acts like a rudder to any business enterprise giving direction and vision to the organization and it distinguishes

one organization from others, even within the same industry. Braun, Wesche, Frey, Weisweiler, and Peus (2012) highlight that mission statements became widely adopted in both for-profit and non-profit organizations following the publication of Drucker's Handbook of Management in 1974. The articulation of mission statements by corporate organizations gained prominence in the 1980's (Alegre, Berbegal-Mirabent, Guerrero, & Mas-Machuca, 2018) and has continued to rise over the following years (Bart & Baetz 1995; Cady, Wheeler, DeWolf, & Brodke, 2011).

Mission statements typically encompass several key components. According to Braun et al. (2012, p. 431), these include:

- i. A vision and set of goals that outline a long-term, future-focused perspective on the organization's development.
- ii. A mission statement that defines the organization's core responsibilities and purpose.
- iii. A philosophy and set of values intended to shape attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making within the organization, sometimes expressed as a motto.

They added that, the varied components are usually are not always distinctly separated but are instead integrated into an organization's overall practice to ensure their effective application. Hence, these statements are expected to articulate the organization's purpose, its goals, core values, and the strategies it employs to achieve its objectives (Cady et al., 2011).

Without a mission and a vision, an organization may flounder, wither and die. Where entrenched, a sharp mission and vision may lead to a robust and sustainable business template, enabling the organization to flourish and endure the vicissitudes of the business environment. As noted by a professor of strategy and governance, a "mission statement consists of three components: key market, contribution and distinction" (Bart, 1997). An organization's ability to succinctly envision these three components may define its success or otherwise as "mission statements are usually considered the cornerstone of every company's strategy formulation exercise" (Bart & Baetz, 1995, p. 9). Organizations thus tend to articulate their mission statements for varied reasons which can be for financial benefits, attitudinal or behavioral, depending on their respective peculiarities (Braun, et al., 2012).

For grassroots newspapers, mission statements remain relevant in providing a needed direction for effective operations. Citing Bartkus, Glassman, and McAfee (2000), Braun et al. (2012, p. 430) observe that, regardless of whether an organization operates for profit or not, mission statements serve several key functions. They help establish coherence within the organization by providing clear direction and purpose. Additionally, they act as a control mechanism and serve as a reference point for decision-making. Furthermore, mission statements contribute to a sense of meaning in work, which can inspire and motivate members of the organization.

Studies are however sketchy on the effectiveness of mission statements in achieving organizations' goals. Findings by Braun, et al., (2012) identified content and form of mission statements among key factors influencing mission statements' effectiveness to an organization's overall aim. How then have grassroots publications in South-West Nigeria fared in this regard? Are they accustomed to conceptualizing mission and vision statements to guide their operations? This study sought to examine the degree to which mission statements are institutionalized in the conceptualization and operation of grassroots newspapers in South-West, Nigeria. The study thus examined:

- (1) The extent to which community newspapers in South-West Nigeria have expressed mission statements to guide their operations; and
- (2) The themes of mission statements of grassroots newspapers in South-West Nigeria.

## Method

The study is a qualitative study evaluating the mission statements of grassroots newspapers in South-West, Nigeria. It is also an *exploratory research* seeking to understand a phenomenon of which little is previously known. Exploratory research often addresses the "what" question; intended to develop preliminary ideas about a phenomenon, thus providing necessary framework for further studies (Neuman, 2014). It adopted the content analysis method, using thematic analysis of mission statements of the grassroots newspapers in South-West, Nigeria. Content analysis is used to "describe communication content" (Wimmer & Dominic, 2006, p. 150) and "enumerate the details of communication – their content, their function, their form or structure" (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 238).

The population of study spanned grassroots news publications in the South-Western region of the country with non-national outlook. Its focus was on mission statements of grassroots newspapers published across Nigeria's South-West region. The study sampled all accessible community newspapers in the six states in the region comprising Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo. Since there was no official record or listing of these publications, the researchers relied on the snowball approach where residents and media practitioners in the field gave information on the grassroots newspapers they were aware of. A total of 27 publications were eventually identified across the six states the region, and sampled for this study.

Each identified publication formed the units of analysis. A simple coding sheet was designed to extract the required data from the identified publications. The content categories extracted included publication name, publisher, state of publication, and location within state, year of establishment, mission and vision. We conducted online search of

names of individuals listed as publishers of the publications to gather background information on those behind the grassroots newspapers. This included checking available social media profiles and news mentions identifying an individual with any of the sampled publications. We were unable to get concrete information on named individuals or corporate entities identified as publishers for eight of the publications.

The mission statements of each of the identified publications were extracted for the study. The extracted mission statements were thereafter qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis approach. Details of the grassroots newspapers examined in the study are presented in the appendix section at the end of this article.

## Findings

This study examined the mission statements and other key variables of the identified twenty-seven (27) grassroots newspapers published in South-West Nigeria. Majority of the newspapers (89%; n=24) are published in English despite Yoruba being the dominant indigenous language in the region. One of the publications is bilingual (publishing in both English and Yoruba languages) and two were solely published in Yoruba language. More than half of the publications (52%, n=14) either have their mission statements separated from their vision statements or both integrated. Ten (37%) limited themselves to “Motto” wherein they expressed their operational philosophy and values. Three others (11%) have no mission statement whatsoever. Our findings indicate that majority of the grassroots newspapers are published by journalists who had honed their skills in major national newspapers before going to their local communities to practice. We also found them having strong connection with the political class either by appointment into political positions, or their desire to contest for political office or both. Table 1 gives a general overview of these observations.

**Table 1:** Descriptive data on grassroots newspapers examined in the study

Variable	Options	Frequency	Percent
<b>State</b>	Lagos State	10	37.0
	Oyo State	7	25.9
	Ekiti State	4	14.8
	Osun State	3	11.1
	Ondo State	2	7.4
	Ogun State	1	3.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Location within State</b>	Others	14	51.9
	Capital	13	48.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Language</b>	English only	24	88.9
	Yoruba only	2	7.4
	Yoruba/English	1	3.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Mission Statements</b>	Mission/Vision	14	51.9
	MOTTO only	10	37.0
	None	3	11.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mission Statements themes inclusion</b>	Community centeredness	17	71%
	Fulfilling basic media role	11	46%
	Politically oriented	5	21%
	Journalism ethics	4	17%
	Cultural orientation	2	8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	
<b>Publisher's background</b>	Journalist	9	29.6
	Journalist & Politician	5	18.5
	Government institution	2	7.4
	Journalist group	1	3.7
	Politician	1	3.7
	Lawyer	1	3.7
	NGO	1	3.7
	Unknown	8	29.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0</b>



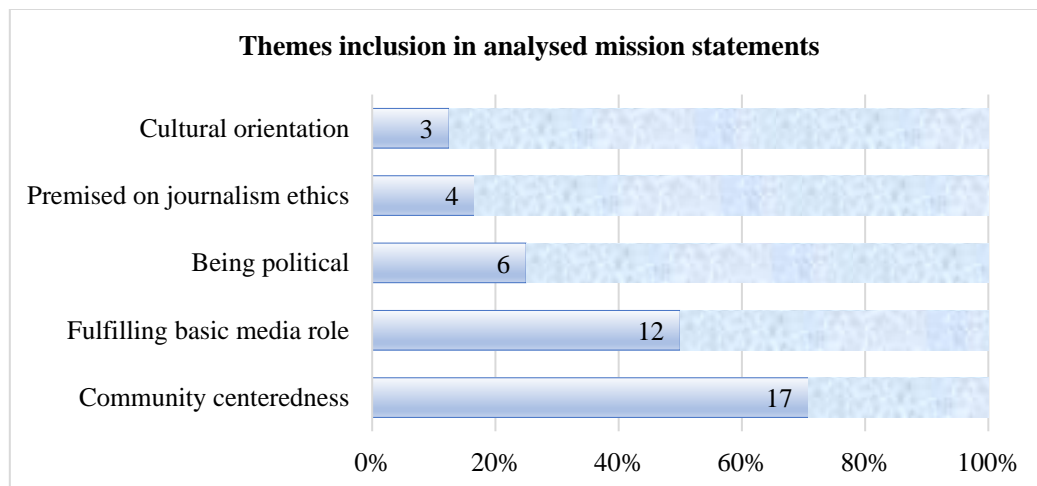
## Extent of Use of Mission Statements

On the extent to which grassroots newspapers in South-West Nigeria have expressed mission statements to guide their operations, our findings show that majority of the grassroots newspapers (90%) have some form of mission statements expressed even though their level of articulation varies. The high preponderance of publications with mission statements suggests that the publications realize the need for mission statements to guide their operations. However, it might just be a way of following typical news media templates as entrenched in national newspapers organizational models where most of the publishers had worked before venturing into grassroots journalism. It is therefore unclear if they were simply coined to maintain international standards like conventional mainstream newspapers (Ayedun-Aluma & Tijani-Adenle, 2014).

Nevertheless, the fact that mission statements are featured by majority of the publications examined in this study portends well-guided operational ideologies for these newspapers. It could serve as a guarantee by these publications to reassure the populace of their desire to remain focused irrespective of economic pressures and varied ownership structures - mostly privately owned with ties to political parties or administrations in power.

## Themes of Mission Statements of Selected Grassroots Newspapers

In this section, we present our findings on the varied mission statements of the identified newspapers where expressly stated. As there was no distinction on vision and mission statements for over half of the publications, the contents are examined together with those expressing only their Motto. The analyzed mission, vision, and motto statements were categorized into five themes: community centeredness, fulfilling basic media role, being politically oriented, premised on journalism ethics and cultural orientation. The inclusion rate of each identified theme is graphically presented below and discussed thereafter.



**Figure 1:** Themes inclusion in analyzed mission statements

### Community Centeredness

Majority of the mission statements examined (71%) expressly confirmed their bias towards promoting the interest of the community they serve. The statements variedly avowed the commitment of the publications in promoting the interest and development of the community through fostering social interactions and impacting lives of community members. They often seek to sustain peace and harmony within their communities.

*Oriwu Sun*, the longest surviving community newspaper in the region based in Ikorodu, Lagos, seeks to,

*advocate nothing opposed to the welfare of Ikorodu division and the best interest of our neighborhood; we shall strive to do our best for the physical, intellectual, the moral and above all, the spiritual welfare of all classes in this great town, Ikorodu, without distinction of rank, politics or sects.*

*The Voice*, in Saki area of Oyo State desires to

*reawaken the consciousness of all our people on the need to develop ourselves through self-help, exposition of ills in society and promotion of our natural endowment that will bring in the much-desired development to our people and make our state a model for others.*

*The Pen*, established by Ekiti State Chapter of Nigerian Union of Journalists, aimed to bring,

*objective reporting to the door-steps of Ekiti people at home and in diaspora... (not denying) the fact that this publication shall be an official mouthpiece of NUJ Ekiti Council in all its programs and activities both in the state and from the national secretariat.*

Another Ekiti-based newspaper, *Fountain News Breaker*, clearly expressed its focus nothing that, "We have never pretended to be a national newspaper. It's our clear mission to promote grassroots news from our community in Ekiti".

Some of the expressed mission statements also suggest a desire to grant media access to members of the community, giving members of the community a voice; promoting the exchange of ideas among the people, government, corporate organizations and civil societies; with over-arching interest towards fostering overall community development.

*The Impact*, another community newspaper in Ikorodu, affirmed its commitment "to galvanizing public opinions towards bringing development, first, to our immediate environment, Ikorodu, as well as Lagos State, and humanity in general". *Townwatch*, also in Ikorodu, expresses its community journalism drive as aiming "Towards grassroots enlightenment and development". *The Village Network*, published by a non-governmental organization in Abeokuta, Ogun State, presents itself as "a vehicle through which people within and without would understand their predicament and firmly commit themselves to solving the problem with the assistance of other stakeholders".

Some other community newspapers seek to project the image and activities of their communities to the outside world. For instance, Ondo based *Southern Echo* seeks to be "The Voice of Ondo People", while Oyo State based *Ibadan News*, sees itself as "Championing the course of Ibadan land".

### **Fulfilling Basic Media Role within the Community**

Half of the studied newspapers with mission statements (50%, n=12) expressed their desire to promote basic media roles of informing, educating, entertaining, creating a voice for members of their respective communities; reawakening societal consciousness and public participation in the development and governance of their respective communities.

Ekiti-based *Fountain News Breaker* notes a "clear mission to promote grassroots news... to inform, educate, and entertain the world at large about happenings in Ekiti, as well as bring the happenings from the world to Ekiti people". *New Democrat*, also based in Ekiti, hopes to "remain the voice for the voiceless, and hope for the down-trodden masses of our society".

Lagos-based *Echo News* also seeks "to inform, educate and entertain, (but) in positive, liberal and critical manner and in a language that is simple, polite and precise...to have a well-informed citizenry passionate about the development of the community". Ondo-based *Ikale News*, seeks to "promote community development through journalism". Lagos-based *Badagry Prime*, considers itself as,

*"the flagship of community journalism in Badagry Division area of Lagos State, ... (while ensuring) that its audience are well informed, irrespective of, and not minding the challenges and the cost of achieving this task in every edition of our publication, as we are poised to reporting our conscience without fear or favor"*.

Another Badagry publication, *The Reality*, considers itself the "mouth-piece of the people. For Ibadan's *Parrotxttra*, it simply desires to promote "edutainment at its best".

These highlighted mandates are entrenched media roles which may not ordinarily be available to grassroots communities in the absence of the established grassroots publications. Often times, the community newspapers focused their coverage of issues on reviewing national issues as they relate to their respective communities, thus creating a better understanding of how national issues, policies, actions and inactions, impact on members of their respective grassroots audience.

### **Sometimes Political**

Six of the mission statements (25%) clearly expressed their political inclination in their mission statements. For instance, one of the newspapers sampled in the study, *Osun Defender*, was birthed out of the desire of its owner to challenge the political administration in the state. The proprietor might have successfully used the paper to actualize that dream, with his later emergence as governor of the state. Few others were created by serving governments at the state or local governments' level with expressed mission statements to promote inclusive governance and collective responsibility.

One of such is Lagos-based *Ikoyi-Obalende Times* founded during the administration of then Chairman of Ikoyi/Obalende Local Council Development Agency (LCDA), Folarin Gbadebo-Smith. The *newspaper* expressed its mission as “to highlight the activities of the local government... (and) make the paper a reference point among other community newspapers”. *Alore Ipinle Oyo/Oyo Megaphone*’s adoption of Oyo State government’s maxim as its motto is also suggestive of its political inclination. The newspaper is a publication of the state’s Ministry of Information and Culture.

Lagos-based *Echo News*, owned by a politician and former journalist, Hon. Kehinde Bamigbetan, wants members of its host community “participating actively in governance to overcome collective challenges”. Ikorodu, Lagos-based *The Impact* wants “to bridge the gap between the government and the governed, particularly at the grassroots”. *The Voice*, based in Saki, Oyo state, desires “to be the driver for good governance through accurate and unbiased reportage of events that would change the political and economic landscape of our state”.

### Premised on Journalism Ethics

Four of the mission statements (17%) analyzed profess support for the sanctity of upholding basic journalism ethics of balance and fair reportage of issues; premised on truth. The fact that many of the publishers of these grassroots newspapers were trained journalists, and/or had practiced journalism in large and mainstream media organizations might have informed the rampant inclusion of uploading these journalistic ethics in their mission statements.

Ekiti based *New Democrat*, expresses its commitment “to impact positively on the society by disseminating news without bias, and practice journalism in the most civilized manner”. Ikorodu-based *Townwatch*, says it is,

*guided by the principles of factual, balanced and fair reporting and commentaries ... (believing) that these principles and ethical conduct are the basis of public trust and confidence... (and) that a system of self-regulation through a professional code of ethics under an independent body would serve the interest of the profession and that of the public.*

As could be expected, *The Pen*, operated by members of the Ekiti State chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), expresses its commitment to upholding “the ethics and code of conduct of our profession by publishing nothing but the truth, and show to the world a practical example of what NUJ preaches about professionalism”. For Oyo-based *Oyo Herald*, it is “in pursuit of truth and fairness”. Lagos-based *Badagry Prime* desires to “be the dependable and accurate source of reference for balanced, objective, informative and well researched news stories, news analysis, informed feature articles, events and spotlight reports as they break in the state and Badagry in particular as its constituency”.

### Cultural Orientation

Few of the mission statements (13%, n=3) suggest the desire of the operators to use their respective publications to promote the culture and cultural values of their respective communities. These included promoting the language of the people; socio-cultural activities of the community, and revitalizing the declining cultural values encouraging communalism, hard work, humility, integrity, etc.

Lagos-based *Alariya Oodua* professes its mandate as “*Ewa ati igbelaruge asa Yoruba Ni ti wa*” (We desire to promote Yoruba beauty and culture). *Ekiti standard* desires to fill identified gap in “appropriate communication tools that will enhance the general wellbeing and promote the socio-cultural and political needs of our people”. Oyo-based bilingual newspaper, *Alore Ipinle Oyo / Oyo Megaphone*, adopts the state government maxim “*K’Oyo le daa...Ajumose gbogbo wa ni o*” (Oyo’s development is our collective responsibility) as its motto.

### Discussion of Findings

Our analysis of grassroots newspapers in South-West Nigeria thus presents them as poised for balance in their coverage of issues, often claiming to be guided by the ethics of the journalism profession. Despite the myriad of challenges confronting grassroots newspapers in South-West Nigeria (Sobowale, Sowunmi & Emmanuel, 2014), these newspapers nonetheless appear committed to giving their publics a voice, positively projecting their local cultures and traditions; fostering social, infrastructural and political development in their communities, and reviewing national issues as they relate to their communities. Contrary to projected impressions however, our exploration of these publications suggests a dominant focus on the local elites. News mentions are dominated by known political and social actors in the communities with scant focus on artisans and other unknown actors. Thus, a replication of urban-based media whose front pages and major stories are elite dominated. This finding validates Aborisade’s (1977) study on news mentions between known and unknown persons in the urban media.

The commitment to focusing on local issues are however noted and affirmed by the sampled publications. These expressed commitments are commendable as it is only localized goals such as these that separate community newspapers from national-oriented newspapers and these are what can encourage patronage and support from the government,

community groups, and other key stakeholders in the community. Grassroots publications in Nigeria thus need to back up their commitments to community development goals with actions by shedding their seeming elitist toga and focus more on issues and interests of ordinary members of the community. Further studies are however required on core contents of community newspapers in the country to truly substantiate their observed elitist tendency, or otherwise.

Equally important is the desire of most grassroots newspapers in the region to achieve their aims in line with the laws and ethics guiding journalism practice. This might not be unconnected to the fact that most of the publishers of these grassroots newspapers had journalism education and/or had practiced as journalists in mainstream or national newspapers before setting up community newspapers in their respective localities. One must however add that grassroots newspapers have the right to be biased in their outlook and subjective in their coverage. They are unlikely to be able to project their local culture and resources; or review national, regional or state issues as it affects their communities if they are not focused primarily on the growth and development of their constituencies. This is the strength of grassroots/community newspapers and it is a quality that serves as an advantage rather than a deficiency. As noted by Oso, et al. (2021), most of the community newspapers which have survived over a decade in Nigeria have been those which had focused on their communities rather than those built around political office holders or individual interests. Hence, we hold that a well-run grassroots publication will be in a good position to influence the local agenda as envisioned by Cook, et al. (1983).

Though it is clear that the grassroots newspapers whose mission statement were analyzed in the study fall short of the theoretical ideal in terms of ownership and control, their operational principles and world views are guided by communitarian principles and democratic participant media theory as theorized by Dennis McQuail (McQuail, 2010). The overall analysis presented above confirmed that these grassroots newspapers are mostly driven by social objectives and are not-for-profit oriented (Media Development, 2002). The findings suggest that the expressed mission statements of the sampled newspapers largely conform to the communitarian ideology promoted by McQuail (2010). Their orientations, contents and philosophies as articulated in the mission statements are also grassroots-based as stressed by Oso (2003). Their expressed desire to promote communication channel for projecting the activities of the communities thus aligns with Wanyeki's (2000) expectations of grassroots media roles within the society.

The seeming exclusion of the local community members in the control and ownership of these newspapers should however be a cause for concern. It runs contrary to Kasoma's (1987, cited in Karikari, 2000) explanation of what a community or grassroots newspaper should be. The establishment of grassroots newspapers in the region might have been hijacked by political elites and media professionals within the communities. This has not been without some repercussions. Contents production are largely monopolized and influenced by elite members of the society who tend to have the requisite knowledge to effectively run a newspaper, or the requisites capitals to own and/or serve as sources.

This could have contributed to the predominance of English as the primary language used in the sampled newspapers despite Kasoma's (1997) emphasis on the necessity of community newspapers publishing in local languages of the people they serve. No doubt, this prevailing practice could further alienate the less-privileged and less educated members of their respective communities.

There is also the tendency for these publications to compromise on their independence, since the elites who run and establish these newspapers are often those with political clout and specific interests within the society. It is a sort of irony that these publications whose avowed missions are to promote the culture of their localities are unable to do so in their local languages and dialects. As established in our findings, only two of the publications are published in the local Yoruba language dominant in the South-West Nigeria and only one is bilingual (Yoruba/English). The major reason for this is the decline of local languages in relation to the English language as Nigeria's *lingua franca*. English language gets promoted in educational institutions and public service to the detriment of the indigenous language derisively labelled 'vernaculars' by the British colonial authorities and parroted by their local successors. This might have contributed to the low literacy level in indigenous languages with fewer people able to read or write in indigenous languages compared to the English language (Lagos Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Thus, even if written in the local language, only few will be able to read the grassroots newspapers. There is however an observed difference in audience reception of broadcast or spoken online media content presented in indigenous languages which are increasingly popular among audiences. This has propelled online influencers, local and international media organizations like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to delve into production of local content in the popular indigenous languages commonly spoken by Nigerians. Undoubtedly, Nigerian communities remain largely oral with indigenous languages still largely spoken among the populace in urban and rural areas despite the dwindling literacy in such languages (Lagos Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

## Conclusion

This study of mission statements of grassroots newspapers in South-West Nigeria is an original study that fills a significant gap about the operations, and especially the normative beliefs underlying community newspapers in Nigeria. It chronicles the reflection of mission statements of the grassroots newspapers and their expected roles within their



respective communities. It theorized the significance of having channels with which alternative voices can be projected, and promote counter-hegemony ideas. It also found that even though the publications are locally based, the English language is the overwhelming medium of expression to the detriment of the local language.

It is worth noting that this study, though significant, did not explore all there is to know about community newspapers in Nigeria. First, it is restricted to the South-West region of the country. While the South-West can be safely said to be the headquarters of the media operations in Nigeria (Oso, 2012), it still portends a limitation for the generalizations of our findings to the entire country due the diversity of Nigeria's peoples and cultures across regions (Jonathan, 2020). The study also did not examine the extent to which the newspapers live up to their philosophical orientations and beliefs, through critical examination of their contents. Such inquiry can thus be explored in future studies.

## Recommendation

With the internet and other innovations in technology, grassroots newspapers in Nigeria may need to begin to redirect/re-focus their channels from print to online in order to save cost and reduce financial challenges. The ever increasing internet penetration rate in the country (Sasu, 2024) may be an added advantage in this regard. With the information overload resulting from a globalized world order, grassroots/community media have an opportunity now, more than ever before to secure and capture their constituencies creating peculiar media content and harnessing local opportunities that may not be explored by mainstream or international media platforms. Development organizations and their communication experts should focus more on reach rather than coverage. They should explore how grassroots and community media can help achieve societal development goals.

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## Appendix

Details of identified grassroots newspapers examined in the study

S/N	NAME	STATE	Location	Establishment Date	Mission Statement
1	Oriwu Sun	Lagos	Others	1985	Yes
2	Echo News	Lagos	Others	Established 2007; Suspended.2009; Revived 2015	Yes
3	The Impact	Lagos	Others	2014	Yes
4	The Osun Defender	Osun	Capital	2006	Yes
5	New Democrat	Ekiti	Capital	1998	Yes
6	Parrot Xtra	Oyo	Capital	2004	MOTTO only
7	Badagry Prime	Lagos	Others	2006	Yes
8	Town Watch	Lagos	Others	Unknown	Yes
9	Alore Ipinle Oyo (Oyo Megaphone)	Oyo	Capital	Unknown	MOTTO only
10	The Reality Newspaper	Lagos	Others	Unknown	MOTTO only
11	Fountain News breaker	Ekiti	Capital	2011	Yes
12	Okeho News	Oyo	Others	Unknown	None
13	Prime Afrique	Lagos	Others	Unknown	None
14	Osun Mail	Osun	Capital	Unknown	Yes
15	Oyo Herald	Oyo	Capital	Unknown	MOTTO only
16	Alariya Oodua	Lagos	Others	Unknown	MOTTO only
17	The Voice	Oyo	Others	Unknown	Yes
18	The Pen	Ekiti	Capital	2009	Yes
19	The Village Network	Ogun	Capital	2013	MOTTO only
20	Lekki Express	Lagos	Others	Unknown	MOTTO only
21	Ikoyi Obalende Times	Lagos	Others	Unknown	Yes
22	Ekiti Standard	Ekiti	Capital	Unknown	Yes

23	<i>Ikale News</i>	Ondo	Others	1992	Yes
24	<i>Southern Echo</i>	Ondo	Others	Unknown	MOTTO only
25	<i>Ibadan News</i>	Oyo	Capital	2005	MOTTO only
26	<i>Nigerian Platform</i>	Osun	Capital	Unknown	MOTTO only
27	<i>Iroyin Agbaye</i>	Lagos	Others	Unknown	None

**\*Location Key:** “Capital” indicates state capital; while “Others” refers to any other part of the state aside the capital

#### **Ethical Statement:**

The authors undertake that the submitted article is the original work of the author(s) and that ethical rules were followed in all preparation processes of this study. In case of detection of a contrary situation, Çankırı Karatekin University Journal of Social Sciences Institute has no responsibility, all responsibility belongs to the authors of the study. The authors also undertake that there is no criminal or illegal expression in the article, that we did not use any illegal materials or methods during the research, and that we acted in accordance with ethical rules.

#### **Author Contributions:**

In the study titled “Evaluation of Grassroots Newspapers’ Mission Statements in South-West, Nigeria”, all listed authors contributed significantly. Jide Jimoh and Lai Oso contributed 25% each, Raheemat Adeniran contributed 20%; Tunde Akanni and Hassan Suleiman each contributed 15%.

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