

## **Conceptualising the Mass Media as 'The Social Scientific Oracle'**

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This study is a qualitative content analysis of three Nigerian news magazines, examined using the library (desk) research method, to ascertain the mass media's penchant for predictions. The study analysed the selected contents of *Tell*, *TheNews*, and *Newswatch* magazines that reveal some salient categories of predictions in the Nigerian media. Through the data analysis that supports some reviewed literature, the researcher observed that journalists have repositioned the media institution as an authority that makes forecasts for the audience. This prompted the researcher's conceptualisation of the media as 'the Social Scientific Oracle,' as the finding aligns with the putative conventional norm of conferring a nomenclatural status to the media due to what they do in their society of operation. The researcher dissected the oracle in the Greek cosmology and the term in the African worldview and recommended that the media be conceived as the 'Oracle' in the Africans' conception of it.

*Keywords:* journalism, journalists, mass media, oracle, prediction, reportage

### **Introduction**

Mass media scholars often study the media as a social institution in human society and brand the institution based on media systems' offerings to the people. Similarly, members of the public in some societies brand the media based on the quality of the cumulative services they render to society where they operate. This indicates the audience's strength as a group that influences the media as an institution that renders indispensable services to them. The media confer status to individuals (Okunna and Omenugha, 2013), in a similar vein, they have gotten different nomenclatures depending on the services they offer to their audience. Among all social institutions, the media have the most overarching reach on the public regardless of their classes or socio-economic status; and they could reach and be reached virtually anywhere and anytime for the services they offer to humanity and posterity.

Arguably, no other institution under human operation can compete with the media in terms of affordability, availability, responsiveness, and reachability. Other institutions need the people and the people could need them only when certain unavoidable issues arise. So, some institutions have 'selective importance' or services limited to a certain class or number of people. This distinguishes the media from schools, law courts, families, and religious entities as social institutions. Thus, the services of the media have made them indispensable to human beings and other social institutions. The helpfulness of the press to every human being or institution is not concealed as the submission below provides:

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It is impossible for most people today to imagine a morning without the radio or television news or newspapers. The day begins for most of the people with the news. The reporter's voice is the first voice we hear every day and possibly the last one we hear before retiring to bed at night. The reporter has become part of our daily public and private lives. His power lies in the public's dependence on him (Agbese, 2008, p. 15).

Therefore, the media are the closest institution to people especially nowadays the digital media have empowered more people to engage in media content production and consumption. A former President of the United States of America (USA), Thomas Jefferson, better accentuated the relevance of the media, when he preferred the press without the government, to the government without the press. Jefferson's view underscores the sublime importance of the media to people who rely on them for educational and informational functions (Okunna and Omenugha, 2013).

Meanwhile, the media have possibly expanded the scope of their importance to the people with their claim of predictive roles as seen in the submission of Olaosebikan (2006, p. 24), referenced in Edogor et al. (2023a, p. 179) who observes that "the media apart from their duty of educating, informing and entertaining the public, is (sic) capable of making accurate predictions." Also, Onanuga (2006, p. 19) referenced in Edogor et al. (2023a) argues that "apart from what is referred to as reporting history in a hurry...the media...accurately predict events." The above notion which some media scholars (Huxford, 2003; Loo, 2013; Neiger, 2007; Edogor, 2018) have critically studied, prompted this current researcher to conceptualise the mass media as the 'Social Scientific Oracle.'

### **Statement of the Problem**

The mass media systems as social institutions in societies have been variously nomenclated based on the functions they perform for their audience. For instance, the institution is christened the 'watchdog' because they watch over the activities of the ruling class. "If the press sets itself up against political (and economic) leadership, it is being adversarial. If as part of its adversarial behaviour, it maintains a steady watch on the leadership, it is being a watchdog," (Ndolo, 2011, p. 11). Similarly, in Nigeria, when the media fail to discharge their social responsibilities, they are called the lame dog, while they are referred to as the mad dog when they display rascality in reportage.

Similarly, in the USA, when the media fail to act as a watchdog but report as a stooge to the government, they are called lapdogs, (Benjamin, 2014). Also, due to the media's complimentary roles to the three arms of the government and their ability to galvanise and mould public opinion in a democracy, they are "sometimes referred to as the fourth branch of government, complementing the executive, judicial and legislative branches" (Baran, 2010, p. 29). Through this placement of the media among the governmental hierarchy, they are sometimes called 'the Fourth Estate of the Realm.'

Similarly, social media have given the media audience who have the new media savvy the unreserved powers to participate in some roles that were hitherto reserved for journalists. Owing to that, social media and their users are branded 'the Fifth

Estate of the Realm,' because they now form another societal force that influences governments, non-governmental bodies, groups, and powerful individuals to yield to the yearning(s) of the people (Edogor, 2024). When it was hypothesised that the media had an overwhelming influence on people, Baran (2010, p. 363) refers to the institution as “an efficacious drug or a killing force.” The underlying idea of that view later mutated into one of the defunct popular mass media theories – the hypodermic needle theory.

About the above view, Baran (2010, pp. 362–363) observes that “the fundamental assumption of this thinking (that the media are inescapably influential) is sometimes expressed in the hypodermic needle theory or the magic bullet theory.” Also, the media have been credited with the ability to programme matters of public interest. Sequel to that, public analysts and scholars branded the institution as agenda-setters, this idea transformed into the agenda-setting theory. According to Loo (2013) “to a limited extent, journalists were the traditional sources that readers consult for an explanation... and guidance on what will or can happen given the current checks on reality. Essentially, they were the source of ‘wise,’ authoritative accounts of the interplay between shifting social, economic, and political forces.”

Also, Loo (2013) explains that mass media’s playing as the oracle has to do with the “calling of journalists to be their readers’ eyes and ears, to be ‘out there’ to Observe, Reflect and Report, Analyse, Contextualise, Learn, and ultimately, Enlighten their readers.” Those submissions captured the various nomenclatures of the mass media based on their offerings as social institutions. However, no study has nomenclated the mass media specifically on their ability to survey, dissect, and predict what would happen. This is the gap in journalism and media studies literature that, this study will fill. The target to fill up the observed vacuum was the objective that prompted this study.

### **Why the Concept of the Media as ‘The Social Scientific Oracle?’**

The media have been involved in journalistic reporting that predicts future events, unlike their traditional roles of reporting past issues. Contemporary journalism provides the audience the confidence to get useful information about what may happen in the future, like some other social science disciplines that predict some phenomena. Some media scholars (Huxford, 2003; Neiger, 2007; Edogor, 2018; Diakopoulos, 2022) have given attention to this development – media prediction of future events. Though such a trend, was not hitherto among the pronounced traditional functions of the mass media; it is steadily becoming a norm for journalists now. Such posture in reportage could be why some scholars opine that “the media are not mere chroniclers of only what has taken place, but active providers of information to guide the audiences on impending matters,” (Edogor et al., 2023b).

As providers of information that guide the audience on impending issues, the media could help people to project, and navigate into the future for useful personal and group decisions. The foregoing is fathomable in the work of a Senior Editor of *The Economist magazine*, Frances Cairncross, who authored a book on prediction. Through the book entitled, *The Death of Distance*, Cairncross made predictions

about how electronic communication gadgets would change the direction of economic activities in some parts of the world. Leonard (1997) cited in *Amazon.com Review* (2001) revealed that Cairncross predicted the speed of communication as the most important economic force that would shape the upcoming century and address the transmutations sweeping across the communications process. The source also notes that:

Cairncross predicts that it won't be long before people organize globally based on language and three basic time shifts – one for the Americas, one for Europe, and one for East Asia and Australia. Much work that can be done on a computer can be done from anywhere. Workers can code software in one part of the world and pass it to a company hundreds of miles away that will assemble the code for marketing. And with workers able to earn a living from anywhere, countries may find themselves competing for citizens as people relocate for reasons ranging from lower taxes to nicer weather. Cairncross discusses about 30 major changes likely to result from these trends, including greater self-policing of businesses, an unavoidable loss of personal privacy, and a diminishing need for countries to want emigration.

The cited journalist's effort revealed the ability of mass media practitioners to predict some future technological developments. The author's effort gives a clue to the possibility of using journalism to make reports that would capture future matters, unlike historians who largely dwell on past events fully. In addition, George Elliot Morris, an American journalist is also reputed for his predictive media reportage. He was the author of the popular book, *Strength in Numbers: How Polls Work and Why We Need Them*. In Nigeria, some media practitioners like Simon Kolawole, Dele Momodu, Nduka Uzuakpundu, and Azubuike Ishiekwene, among others, have variously authored predictive media reportage (oracular reporting).

The journalistic works of the afore-mentioned Nigerian journalists and others epitomize oracular reporting in political and socio-economic matters. Predicting social phenomena is a common trend in the realm of social sciences. A political scientist, Friedman has written books premised on predicting critical political matters. In one of his books, *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*, he predicted the political, technological, and socio-economic phenomena that would shape the globe in a century. Also, he chronicled the major countries whose policies would significantly alter various developments of the world and the factors that would affect some extant strong nations. Friedman (2009, p. 10) applied 'geopolitics,' and according to him, 'geopolitics is not simply a pretentious way of saying 'international relations.' It is a method for thinking about the world and forecasting what will happen down the road.'

Similarly, David Orrell is another scholar whose interest focuses on prediction. This is evident in his book, *The Future of Everything*, which presented predictions on different aspects of intertwined human endeavours. Orrell gives a picture of how the book captures prediction as follows:

*The Future of Everything* is about scientific prediction in the areas of weather, health, and wealth—how we foresee storms or fair weather, sickness or health, booms or crashes. It might seem that forecasts of the atmosphere have little to do with the

prediction of diseases or the economy, but in fact, these three areas are closely linked. For one thing, they often affect each other, so prediction is an intrinsically holistic business. As shown above, a storm's impact depends on the conditions on the ground and can have huge economic consequences (Orrell, 2007, p. 9).

Orrell revealed that before his discourse on predictions, there were other attempts at forecasts about human health, the economy, and climatic conditions. "Since Galton's time, a huge scientific effort has been devoted to looking into our future weather, health, and wealth, now using mathematical models," (Orrell, 2007, p. 10). Another social scientist, Dixon wrote a book entitled, *The Future of Almost Everything*, which concentrates on predictions too and why people, should be more conscious of what the future entails.

With the aforementioned works, it could be gleaned that prediction is common in social sciences. A discipline like journalism more or less deals with the mechanics of human behaviour, so journalists could study situations, individuals, and project what they may do based on facts. The evolving fad in journalism where the media predict trends, events, actions, inactions, etc. further portrays the scientific inclination of the profession. Folarin (2002, p. 18) admits the scientific nuance of mass communication or journalism, while noting that the field has "taken a lot of its content and methods from the social sciences, especially social and behavioural psychology as well as sociology. It touches on anthropology at several of its edges, while even political science and economics are not completely alien to the mass communication fare." Therefore, the prediction vogue reveals more that journalism belongs to social sciences.

### **Why Prediction in Contemporary Media?**

There are natural and human-made phenomena that feature in the media news, especially the negative or unexpected thing(s) that make people uneasy nowadays. The *Awake!* Magazine (2017, p. 4) says "if you are apprehensive or scared out-right by the barrage of bad news, you are not alone. In 2014, Barack Obama, the then President of the USA, suggested that because of all the bad things reported in the press, many conclude "that the world is spinning...fast and nobody is able to control it." When people are oblivious to unexpected incidents, it exposes them to negative consequences as they lack the knowledge of precautionary measures to mitigate any adversity.

However, people with hindsight would be focused on steps to take for advancement, especially in the moments of adversity. Thus, arguably, good journalistic skills now should include the ability to dissect circumstances and forecast what may happen and why it may happen. The skills also entail the aptitude to explain to the audience, what made it not happen if it failed to happen as foretold (Edogor, 2018). All that has made the mass media substantially become the social scientific oracle and play the roles well for the audience in this century replete with uncertainties.

The media industry has attained significant growth in human communication enterprise. That height is envisaged to imbue the journalists and the present mass media with the capacity to predict trends. The famous MacBride Commission

(1981, p. 31) alluded that, in noting that, “communication...is now sufficiently well advanced for it to be possible to forecast trends...as well as to identify likely risks and stumbling-blocks.” This view is an ideological principle evolving in contemporary journalism. It is a perspective emphasising another novel dimension of professionalism in media practice. Journalists are social scientists who apply reportorial skills to dissect social events and make forecasts through the media.

Social scientists should be curious and think beyond today concerning the future of their societies. This corroborates the views of Lasswell (1941) referenced in Neiger (2007, p. 309) observing that, “when we act rationally, we consider alternative versions of the future that are so often buried in the realm of hunch. In the practice of social science, as of any skill in society, we are bound to be affected in some degree by our perceptions of future development.” There are claims that journalism captures certain future developments in human society owing to the gamut of present uncertainties in the world.

As professional information managers, journalists scout every part of society and can pontificate on possible future events from the facts assembled from different sources. This position differentiates journalists’ reportage as professionals from the reporting by lay reporters – the non-professionals. MacBride Commission (1981, p. 229) underscored that point noting that, “surely it is perfectly normal that professionalism should exist in communication no less than in any other domain.” The commission’s emphasis on the need for trends and their likely consequences to be identified is a mandate that the journalists should embrace to alert their audience, about the possible effects of an imminent phenomenon. Also, Edogor et al. (2023a, p. 186) argue that the “nature of the audience of nowadays has made media practitioners to move beyond mere chronicling of epochal matters to forecasting or predicting social trends for the audience.”

### **The Media as the Oracle, is the Sacredness of Facts Sacrificed?**

The mass media’s role of forecasting what may happen could conflict, with the objectivity often expounded in journalism practice and studies. In journalism, the sacrosanctity of facts with verification of information is valued immensely. However, the journalists’ propensity to report what may transpire brings critical questions about the preservation of the principle of keeping facts sacred. Over the years, journalists and journalism scholars held the idea that ‘comments are free, but facts are sacred.’ The import of this notion is that journalists expectedly propagate facts in their reportage of events.

The forgoing views and the media’s position in reporting future matters could be seen in the view that “yet its objectivist stance notwithstanding, the press has long seen its task to be not merely a window on the world but also something akin to a crystal ball into the future, offering a prophetic, if tenuous, blueprint of what is to come,” (Huxford, 2003, p. 2). To Edogor (2018, p. 23) “the ‘oracular’ idea of the mass media espouses the application of science in journalism to make reliable forecasts for the audience. When the media capture and relay what has happened, the institution is a mere relater of events.”

The journalistic task of beaming searchlight to navigate the hazy future, and project what might happen, accords the media, the status of ‘the Social Scientific Oracle,’ (Edogor, 2018). This informs this argument “the charge that journalism constructs rather than simply reports becomes most acute with the issue of prediction in news-work. This task must inevitably draw journalism beyond the “simple” reporting of facts - itself a constructive process,” (Huxford 2003, p. 3). Edogor (2018) revealed that beyond reporting what has happened, news stories, cartoons, side-bars, personal opinion articles, columns, cartoons, and other contents of the Nigerian media forecast what may happen.

Such a revelation about media contents brings a reminiscence of the Africans’ belief in the oracles wielding powers for predictions. It could be deduced that some contemporary Nigerian journalists offer reportage with the semblance of the Africans’ socio-cultural ideology of looking into the future through the oracles. That ideology in the Nigerian media reportage would sustain the Africans’ tradition of prediction on certain issues. Negedu (2014, p. 81) argues that “classical philosophy largely favours the African system with its emphasis on the preservation of tradition.”

The principle of predicting future events was originally not embedded in the fundamentals of journalism practice or studies. Journalism involves assembling and disseminating information and facts about what has happened. Generally, facts are highly regarded in journalism. This belief emanates from the statement popularly attributed to the *Guardian* Editor, CP Scott (1921), whose observation has it that “comment is free, but facts are sacred...Fundamentally it implies honesty, cleanness, courage, fairness, a sense of duty to the reader and the community,” (Rogers, 2013). But if the media stand as ‘the Social Scientific Oracle’ that predicts, their predictive stance should not undermine journalism’s respect for the sanctity of facts.

According to Loo (2013) playing on the ORACLE acrostic, one sees the inherent calling of journalists to be their readers’ eyes and ears, to be ‘out there’ to Observe, Reflect and Report, Analyse, Contextualise, Learn, and ultimately, Enlighten their readers about how certain future issues would transpire. Loo (2013) further argues that ‘fundamental to the ‘oracle’ concept of journalism is the synthesis of facts in context, transforming hard data into meaningful knowledge.’ This calls for journalists as social detectives to anchor media predictions on facts from thorough investigations on any issue.

Thus, the media’s ideological operation as ‘the Social Scientific Oracle’ does not provide, the institution with the impetus to pontificate through the barrels of unfounded sentiments. Also, it does not arrogate to them the power to double-speak like the oracle at Delphi. This is to avoid losing their gloss as people’s main source of information on future societal matters. Journalists should take cognizance of the fact that there are a plethora of other alternative sources from which the populace could get information. These alternative information sources pose challenges to contemporary journalism, as such journalists should continue to prove their mettle as the professional information purveyors.

Arguably, before now the human race relies on the media and the practitioners, as the major sources of their daily information. As a routine, human beings cast their dependence on the mass media for reliable information applied in making worthwhile decisions including but not limited to economic and socio-political matters. Agbese

(2008) avers that it is impossible for most people today to imagine a morning or any day without the mass media and their services. The journalist also argues that many people begin and or end their days with news from the media. Based on this perspective, people's extent of dependence on the media could be seen.

Nonetheless, the media audience nowadays is more enlightened and expects more useful information from the media more other than what non-journalists offer. Bloggers and social media influencers provide the audience with headline news also called trending news, but deep-rooted facts are expected from the media. So, journalists should discharge their 'oracular roles' with deep regard to facts – pieces of information established to be true and presented as having objective reality, (American Press Institute and Merriam Webster) referenced in American Psychological Association (APA, 2024). This has been the operational principle of journalism practice across the world.

### The Oracle in African and Greek Contexts

The idea of the oracle in scholarly discourses is more prominent in ancient Greece as Orrell (2007, p. 18) explains 'the oracle played an enormously important role in the Greek culture.' He notes that in Greece, people consult the oracle when faced with anxiety or uncertainty in decisions about critical issues such as their likely fortunes in war, business, illness, marriage, etc. However, Heraclitus, cited by Orrell (2007, p. 18) avers that 'the Pythia never gave a straight answer, but only hinted at the truth. King Croesus of Lydia famously asked the Pythia if he should invade Persian territory. The oracle told him that if he did, a mighty empire would be destroyed. He took this as a green light, but unfortunately, the empire she was referring to was his own.' The double-speak attribute of the oracle in ancient Greece puts the Greeks' conception of the oracle at variance with the Africans. Croesus's experience with the Oracle at Delphi portrays it as an author of ambiguity, uncertainty, obscurity, distortion, and confusion in its prediction.

Against such a backdrop, in Africa, oracles are seen as authoritative sources of information that speak without any iota of equivocation. In the African sense, the oracle is portrayed as the master of certainty and clarity. This manifests in two literary works of Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Achebe reported that 'the elders consulted their oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan...' (Achebe, 1958, p. 111). In *Arrow of God* "...as many oracles prophesied, the white man had come to take over the land and rule..." (Achebe, 1964, p. 42).

The strange or white man being referred to was the colonial team. The oracle predicted that the colonialists would bring strange government and religion that would be inimical to the aboriginal African system of governance and religious worship. In *Things Fall Apart*, another assertion that conveys the reliability of the oracles is seen as follows: "A great evil has come upon their land as the Oracle had warned," (Achebe, 1958, p. 112). This Africans' notion of the oracle cited above is why this paper in corroboration of Edogor's (2018) idea of the mass media institution as the 'oracle' conceptualises the media as 'the Social Scientific Oracle.'



It is contrary to the Greeks' sense of 'Oracle,' which connotes an author of confusion and uncertainty.

## Methodology

The library or desk research method which entails the use of secondary data to investigate research objective(s) or problem(s) (Ohaja, 2003) was used in this study where the contents of selected Nigerian news magazines were analysed. The method allows researchers to use avalanche of literature from libraries and other relevant sources for a study. Due to the nature of this study, the researcher also, adopted the constant comparative technique (frequently called grounded theory) enunciated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and afterward advanced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as referenced in Wimmer and Dominick (2014, p. 123). The four steps in the constant comparative technique suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2014) were applied in the textual analysis as follows:

- (1) Comparative assigning of incidents to categories.
- (2) Elaborating and refining of categories.
- (3) Searching for relationships and themes among the categories.
- (4) Simplifying and integrating data into a coherent theoretical structure.

The researcher applied qualitative textual analysis to examine three Nigerian news magazines namely: *Tell*, *TheNews*, and *Newswatch*, which were purposively selected as the population of the study. They were chosen because (Edogor, 2018) observed that they make more predictive reporting. The two themes defined after data collection as the categories are:

- (1) Predictions by Retrospection.
- (2) Predictions by Hunch.

### Predictions by Hunch

The data generated revealed situations where Nigerian journalists predicted some things through hunch and the instances, include: *TheNews* Magazine issue of December 25, 2006, that concluded the magazine's doom prediction on the 2007 presidential bid of Nigeria's former military President, Ibrahim Babangida. The publication with this title, 'Babangida: End of a Dream,' concluded the magazine's serialized predictive reportage that foreshadowed disaster for Babangida's presidential ambition in 2007. The same publication with the prediction that Babangida wouldn't rule Nigeria again; also predicted that Umaru Yar'Adua (the then Katsina State Governor), would succeed the then President Obasanjo. This was evident in one of the titles 'Paving way for Yar'Adua' in the same issue of *TheNews* magazine on December 25, 2006. The magazine's prediction on Yar'Adua came when many people in Nigeria barely heard about him, unlike Donald Duke and Peter Odili who

were candidates publicized to succeed President Obasanjo. One of the reporters, specifically Omoarelojie (2006, p. 35) captured the scenario noting that, 'in its edition of 12 June 2006, *TheNews* had given an insight into why Yar'Adua may emerge as Obasanjo's successor in 2007,' and not Donald Duke or Peter Odili as public analysts averred.

Similarly, the *Newswatch* magazine of June 19, 2006, used a cartoon entitled 'Search for the next president,' to predict the action of President Obasanjo. The magazine published a cartoon where President Obasanjo was wearing a microscope-like eye-glass with a cap bearing PDP and a statement attributed to him says, 'Gawd, this thick forest in the South-south is blocking my view, should I face the North?' *Newswatch* by Emenike (2006, p. 6). The cartoon predicted the former president's likely change in selection of his successor from South-south Nigeria, to Northern Nigeria. The prediction later came to pass.

Also, in a piece entitled 'Obasanjo's next move,' the *Tell* magazine, on June 5, 2006, equally predicted President Obasanjo's decision in choosing a successor. The magazine's prediction conveyed in their reporter's words explaining that President Obasanjo 'yet to recover from the defeat of his third-term ambition ... may have set in motion a plan that would see him install a trusted ally,' Aiyetan (2006, p. 19). The president eventually did what the magazine predicted – he chose a successor and supported him to win.

### **Predictions by Retrospection**

The incidents identified under this prediction category include the predictive media stories that emerged through retrospection or introspection, and some of the instances from the magazines are presented below. In 2010, *Tell* magazine used the story entitled, 'Ibori: The road to jail,' to predict that the former governor of Delta State, James Ibori would be jailed. In the story, one of the *Tell* reporters scrutinised the processes through which the London Courts incarcerated three acquaintances of the former governor of Delta State, Nigeria. After an examination of the circumstances the magazine predicted that 'the prosecution and imprisonment of the three associates of Ibori in the UK now means that Ibori himself might be going to jail not long from now, as soon as his extradition to the UK is completed,' (Adewuyi, 2010, p. 44). The former governor was later imprisoned as predicted.

Besides, *TheNews* of December 3, 2006, used a story entitled 'We saw through him,' to elaborate their predictions about the actions of Professor Maurice Iwu, the then Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The magazine variously predicted that Iwu was unreliable, thus, he wouldn't conduct transparent elections. The prediction was against what Prof Iwu was preaching with his team. *TheNews* reporter, Adegbamigbe (2007) offered insight into their forecast on the character of Prof Iwu, and generally what it takes to forecast political matters. 'To be able to foretell the future in the area of politics, one does not need to be a peripatetic gypsy, a stargazer, or a necromancer. The power of prophecy, on many occasions, depends on the ability to use the past to judge the present and say accurately what would happen in the future,' (Adegbamigbe, 2007, p. 22). The

reporter noted that that was exactly, what happened when *TheNews* magazine in different editions predicted that Professor Iwu would rig Nigeria's 2007 elections.

Also, the *Newswatch* magazine of September 7, 2009, with a story entitled: 'It's a bubble,' predicted that dismissed chief executive officers of some commercial banks by the leadership of the Central Bank of Nigeria over corruption-related allegations would go unpunished. Dan Agbese, a columnist in the *Newswatch* argued that such cases in the past were treated with kid gloves, so the dismissal of the bank managing directors won't be different. According to Agbese, 'President Umaru Yar'Adua dismissed two ministers in January 2008 for helping themselves to a Christmas bonus they did not earn. They were charged in court with some directors of the ministry. What happened next? It was a bubble,' (Agbese, 2009, p. 5). With the impunity trend, the columnist predicted that the bank chief executive officers arrested and detained would go scot-free. He avers 'let me tell you. This is a bubble. And it too shall pass away. The celebrated arrests, the stuff of press sensationalism, amount to a noisy nonsense...', (Agbese, 2009, p. 5).

### **The Relationships among the Categories**

The relationships among the categories identified in the data could be seen in their connection with the sources of knowledge. For instance, by close examination, the media prediction through hunch is related to the source of knowledge called 'emotion/intuition.' In using hunch for forecasts, journalists make use of intuition. This is defined as, 'the process by which insights or bits of knowledge emerge into consciousness from the subconscious or as the direct apprehension of knowledge which is not the result of conscious reasoning or immediate sense perception,' (Dolhenty, 2014). Another category: prediction by retrospection, relates with the source of knowledge – appeal to the sense of perception, for its explanation, a scholar argues, 'you know certain things because you can see and perceive them yourself.' So, journalists predict through retrospection by using their perception of a past incident to predict what may happen in the future.

### **Integration of the Data into a Coherent Theoretical Structure**

The data analysed provide a hint to journalists' knowledge of virtually everything including, future developments the audience is often oblivious of. This view resonates with the 'Omniscience theory' in journalism and media studies as propounded by Edogor (2018) and refined by Edogor et al. (2023a). The import is that through their skills and surveying of society, journalists know certain things that would happen that members of the public are utterly oblivious to. Such efforts accredited to journalists differentiate them from historians and delineate journalism from history which is a discipline, with a total focus on examining past events and trends. The foregoing provides the impetus for this researcher to conceptualise the media as 'the social scientific oracle.'

## Research Result

The notion of the mass media as the oracle entails that they have to be social and secular institutions that will enlighten the audience about the future using verifiable evidence or facts. For people to continue depending on mass media information, journalists should ensure that the media are seen as the oracle in the African ideology, as explained in the literature review. Also, the dictionary meaning of 'Oracle' puts it more in the Africans' perspective. For instance, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* sees the word 'Oracle' as "a person of great authority or wisdom whose opinions or judgements are regarded with great respect." It describes 'Oracle' further as, "one who is considered or professes to be infallible." Also, it recognises the term as, "something as a scientific instrument on which one can rely for guidance or direction."

With those definitions above, conceptualising the mass media as the 'Oracle' in the African notion is not a misnomer. The mass media are authorities and are expected to be the authority that would deliver reliable information at all moments. The import is that journalists should use reliable data in their predictions to avoid undermining the audience's dependence on the mass media. A Nigerian philosopher, Agbakoba (2005), in a lecture note, explains the reason traditional Africans of Igbo extraction consult the oracles or go for soothsaying (Igba Afa). According to him, the word 'Igba' is an Igbo verb meaning 'running to,' and 'Afa' is an Igbo noun meaning 'authority.'

The belief in the system as the authority that provides information could be gleaned from a popular Anambra State griot or crooner, 'Ozoemena Ayaka Nsugbe.' In a music, the crooner described how Mr Chinwuba, a soothsayer expert used 'Igba Afa' to tell the exact number of items hidden in a calabash. So, Africans believe that every true soothsayer is an authority that can provide authentic information. This 'Igba Afa' is part of the extramundane communication in Africa which entails 'fortune-telling or soothsaying, as it used to be called,' (Christianity.com Editorial Staff, 2020) referenced in Asemah et al. (2021, pp. 157–158). So, soothsayers as the oracles reportedly have superior knowledge and relevant information from "supernatural beings – ancestors, spirits, gods, the Supreme Being..." (Asemah et al., 2021).

Similarly, the Yoruba-speaking people of South-Western Nigeria have the practice of 'Ifa divination' that somehow indicates the kind of oracle which the media are conceptualised to be. According to (UNESCO, n.d.) the Ifa divination system which applies "an extensive corpus of texts and mathematical formulas, is practiced among Yoruba communities and by the African diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean. The word Ifa refers to the mystical figure Ifa or Orunmila, regarded by the Yoruba as the deity of wisdom and intellectual development." The clearer picture of the belief that Africans perceive the people who provide authentic information as 'the authority' or reliable source could be seen in the description that, "in Yoruba land, the divination system is orally transmitted by Ifa priests to apprentices," (Asemah et al., 2021). The priests in African cosmology, are people with authority often received as hereditary power, bestowed on someone who offers reliable information

or knowledge to people. This is also akin to the attributes ascribed to the priests in the Judaeo-Christian religion.

### Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher conceptualised the mass media as ‘the Social Scientific Oracle,’ and this stance is antithetical to some media audiences’ vulturous belief about the institution. Some people believe that the mass media are like vultures that always await to see crises or bloody violence taking place to afford them the opportunity to report. This paper’s conceptualisation providing a reverse sobriquet for the media was derived from the observed predictions in the three news magazines analysed herein. The paper conceptualises the mass media as the ‘Oracle,’ that forecasts or predicts future developments or events to help the audience to eschew some costly dangers. Unlike the traditional Greeks, the traditional Africans believe the ‘Oracle’ is a dependable source of information and knowledge. Accordingly, this paper recommends that the mass media should be the oracle in the context of the African worldview that captures the idea of true authority. The implication is that the mass media are to remain dependable sources of reliable information to the audience even in their prediction of any phenomenon. Therefore, journalists should forecast trends using verifiable and reliable data, for the media to be accepted and valued in the status of ‘the Oracle’ in the actual African notion.

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