

## **An Evaluation of Current Trends in Energy and Business Specialised Journalism**

**Diri I. Teilanyo, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup> and Christian T. Diri, Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of English and Communication Studies,  
Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Otuoke,  
Bayelsa State, Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Email: teilanyodi@fuotuo.ke.edu.ng

<sup>2</sup>Email: dirict@fuotuo.ke.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

The article evaluates current trends in energy and business specialised journalism, and provides perspectives on how to report the sub-sector effectively. It posits that business, economic and energy reporting constitutes a branch of journalism which tracks, analyses and interprets changes in the economic state of a society's critical sectors of energy and business. In recent times, specialized newspapers in business have been launched while some mainstream papers would not miss the business section. The paper reasons that, in many instances, a business and energy story should be no different from a general news story as it must be accurate, thorough, well researched, balanced and fair. But, it needs to contain multiple sources of information to authenticate numbers, specific data and statistics which are the ingredients that help to make sense of the energy and business stories. It is advocated that for a journalist to achieve a balanced energy and business report, s/he must be objective, current, concise, clear and simple. The study contends that such challenges as inadequate research facilities, information hoarding, scarcity of well-trained and qualified science and technology reporters, illiteracy, poor data base, among others, still bedevil the special area. Therefore, it advocates the employment of current information and communications technologies (ICTs) tools such as software packages to edit visuals, audio-visuals and graphics; a hand-held scanner for digitising documents on the spot; a satellite telephone; videophone. It equally advocates that in addition to the regular undergraduate and postgraduate training, reporters in this emerging area in the Nigerian media ecosystem require continued training and retraining to keep abreast of critical developments.

**Keywords:** Media, Specialized journalism, ICTs, Reporters, Energy & business reporting.

### **Introduction**

Business, economic and energy journalism is a branch of journalism that tracks, analyzes, and interprets changes in the economic state of a society. In recent times, specialized newspapers in business have been launched while some mainstream papers would not miss the business section. Most TV and radio newscasts as well run exclusive business slots daily as a matter of editorial policy. This branch of journalism has become very important in the past few years as people want to know more about banks and the companies that they buy products and services from. Additionally, the growth of multinational companies and e-commerce has broadened the customer base for many companies who in the past would sell their products and services to small local markets. Good journalism brings business and economics to life, making them relevant and interesting to the general audience, not just businessmen. Just like journalists who cover politics and government are supposed to hold public officials accountable for their actions and have a responsibility to find the truth and report it to the people, business and economic journalists have the same responsibility.

In the same vein, the work of science writers and journalists is important in ensuring that 'bad science' does not influence public opinion and government policy; and that the facts are explained properly and clearly in a user-friendly way. A science writer does not always need detailed in-depth expertise in a particular field, but should have a broad knowledge of science and the scientific process, along with a passion for science and the ability to convey difficult concepts to a non-scientific audience. The last few years have seen an explosion in the amount of science information available to the general public, with media such as TV, radio and the Internet all jumping on the science bandwagon. With the number of discoveries and advances in science today, there is now, more than ever, demand for intelligent and engaging science writing and journalism. If a writer has got a way with words, he or she has numerous options available to get the message on science across to the masses. There are several courses available that will equip you for the competitive field, and many opportunities to build an impressive portfolio of experience, essential for many potential employers.

With specific reference to the energy sector, modern life depends largely on the availability of energy for homes, manufacturing, transportation and almost all domains of life. Thus, we live in a world whose global politics and economy are inextricably interwoven with the energy industry, especially fossil fuels and nuclear energy. This is easily noticeable as trade relations among the world powers such as the United States, Britain, Russia, Japan and China) inevitably influence the global price of crude oil. Besides, renewable energy such as solar energy, bio fuel, etc is daily making the news. Over a billion people in the world lack access to modern energy services such as electricity to power their communities' x-ray machines or clean-burning cooking stoves to prepare their families' meals. An estimated two times that number lack reliable access. While looking differently throughout the world, energy poverty has significant impacts on health, access to basic services and economic opportunity everywhere. What systemic issues are driving energy poverty? How are people on the ground impacted? And, perhaps most importantly, what potential solutions exist that also take climate change and other social and environmental issues into account? Moreover, what is the depth and mastery of reportage of aspect of the broad concept of specialised journalism? These questions place a lot of demand on journalists whose beat it is to report developments in these areas.

### **Methodology**

This study employed the qualitative and interpretive approach in investigating and discussing current trends in energy and business specialised journalism. This method as applied to this study focuses on interpretation and description that led to development of new concepts and theory in the area energy and business specialised journalism.

### **What Makes a Good Business Story?**

In many ways, a business or energy story is no different from a general news story. It must be accurate, thorough, well researched, balanced and fair, and contain multiple sources of information. In business and economic stories, though, numbers, specific data and statistics are critically important. A good reporter always starts with the basic questions of *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* (also

known as the 5Ws and 1H). However, a business reporter takes these questions further and asks “*how much*” and “*how many*”. Successful business reporters are not afraid to ask how much things cost, where the money is coming from, and who it is going to? A story about the sale of a company, for example, must include the sale price, the number of employees, and who the new owners are; a story about the sale of the building must include the sale price, the size of the building, its age and the size of the property where it sits. Otherwise, those stories are incomplete.

### **Creating Compelling Business and Energy Stories**

#### *a. Look for the human element*

All developments in business and economics, which reporters work on, are all about the people, who make business move and nothing else. So the reporter has to find real news and make it interesting and simple enough for all readers/ viewers to understand. He or she must get out of the office and find people producing things, selling them and shopping for them. Every successful economic and business story shows how the topic of the story will affect its buyers, suppliers, producers, and the general public.

#### *b. Go beyond ‘he said yesterday journalism’*

Behind news events are the gears and levers that drive real business trends. To discover what is keeping business maintain a certain direction on the market place, the journalist must make every effort to practice more than ‘he said yesterday’ journalism and to hunt for ‘hidden’ business agenda stories. For example, on the face of it, bottled beer sales promotions in the form of rebates are seemingly directed at the customers apparently to stimulate product interest, trial or purchase. However, closer scrutiny with industry insiders may reveal that rebates are prompted by the truth that certain brand stocks were nearing their expiry date and so the rebate is an effort to clear them off. Always remember: It might be *their* company or finance ministry, but it is your story — so *you* decide the angle and who else to talk to.

*c. Avoid the press release; dig up the news*

The good business reporter never has to learn about a news story from a press release or press conference. Instead, the reporter strives to be the first with the news, picked up through regular contacts with a wide variety of sources in the business community. By the time a press release is issued or a press conference is held, the reporter is just one of a pack covering a story. In cases where the public announcement of a new venture or major change is the reporter's first clue about a news story, it is still essential to use multiple sources, to look for competitors and rivals and to look for the labour angle to provide a comprehensive, balanced story that goes well beyond the single-source story. Never take a press release and "cut and paste" the text into your story. Such "cut and paste" jobs give politicians, public officials or companies free publicity and your audience no real information to evaluate the respective topic. It is a one-sided story.

*d. Ask an independent person and provide the context*

Always get someone independent to make a judgment about a decision of the government (e.g. for changes in the fiscal policy) or about what a company is doing (e.g. when a company offers shares for sale to the public for the first time). Such independent sources include analysts on the financial side, academics, research organizations and buyers on the product side. As with all stories, sit back a while and ask: What does the reader need to know to understand the story better: More about the wider economy? More about the company? More about the market? More about the person or people involved?

*e. Localize global stories*

Global business stories and other events allow you to link a local business issue to and make into a timely and relevant news story. Localizing a story means taking information about an international event and finding local examples and sources to tell the story. This technique allows a journalist to make an international story more relevant to its reader. Answer the following questions can localize global stories: (1) Who in the local community is affected by this story? If a global company shuts down, how will the local distributors be affected? If it is the destruction of a large

oil field, then what are the effects of this incident on oil prices in your country or town? (2) What is the human impact or universal human interest of the story? (3) Are there local experts – e.g. in universities and research facilities (think tanks) – who you can interview on the global issue or topic?

### **The Importance of Business and Energy Reporting to Society**

Daily breakthroughs occur in human society. In the areas of science and technology, it is even a more regular thing. Hardly is there any aspect of human life that is not affected by this regular occurrence. Nwabueze (2011, p.239) believes that the entire human existence and mutual coexistence in any society are, to a large extent, shaped by scientific activities or technology in the world. It is, therefore, no surprise that people are always interested in knowing and hearing of new developments in the field of science and technology. They want to know the latest scientific breakthroughs or how the latest technological development would impact on their lives (Nwabueze, 2011, p.239).

Ordinarily, people would want to know the latest technological breakthroughs in education, health, sports, information and communication, banking, business, automobile world, military warfare, etc. This may include even happenings in local technology. Nowadays, we hear the United States, Israel and the United Nations mount pressure on Iran and North Korea to halt their plan to acquire nuclear weapons. Although these stories are awash in the media, but many people do not even know what the uranium Iran is accused of is all about. It is thus left for the media to explain to the people that Uranium is a substance used in developing nuclear weapons and that nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction or weapons capable of destroying many communities or even wiping out the entire human race.

Such explanations are important because many people do not know what such technologies are and the reasons why it is detrimental to the world if Iran and South Korea succeed. This goes to show that science and technology is still an area where many members of the society show enormous ignorance. This is incumbent on the media because they are the information purveyors in the society, and as such, they are expected to play the watchdog

role of providing information, education, entertainment, etc, to the people, not only on political issues, economy, sports, etc, but indeed in every aspect of the human life, including in the new developments in science and technology. To do this and do it efficiently and effectively require that science and technology reporting should be treated as a separate genre in journalism. This is given the peculiar technicalities involved in reporting science and technology. Sometimes, the technicalities and complexities involved in science and technology reporting make it necessary that media houses employ the services of scientists to cover specific areas in science after which the scientists give such reports to the journalist who then give it the journalistic angle. Nwabueze (2011) drives this home when he observes that the essence of this is that a journalist does not have to be a scientist; neither does he have to read engineering to become a successful science and technology reporter, and that all a journalist needs is to master the art of applying journalistic principles in reporting about science and technology. He also needs to go some extra miles if he is to become a successful specialist in this field. He must develop a special interest in reading and understanding issues and happenings in science and technology. Specifically, science and technology reporting plays the following important roles in society:

*a. It facilitates socio-economic development*

This means that through science and technology reporting, people's consciousness is awakened and their attention is drawn to energy and technology issues that could contribute directly or indirectly towards social, economic and national development in general. Through science and technology enlightenments, the public becomes aware of trends in scientific and technological innovations and breakthroughs, including how these could be applied in enhancing various aspects of life and society in general.

*b. It bridges the gap amongst science, technology and energy in society*

By this, we mean that through science and technology news reports, feature articles, news analysis, editorial comments and columns on science and technology issues, the industry is brought closer to the society. By this, the people get to know what otherwise they would not have known as it pertains to science and technology

*c. It safeguards society from impending dangers*

This means that through science and technology reporting, society gets to know vital information that safeguards them from certain dangers e.g. dangers of smoking, drug abuse, STIs such as HIV-AIDS, Lassa fever, under-aged marriages, etc. They also highlight the benefits of certain virtues like exclusive breast feeding, personal hygiene, dieting, report on how to avoid certain sicknesses like cancer-prone activities, reports on the negative impact of certain technologies, etc.

**Characteristics of Good Business and Energy News Stories**

What makes a business and energy news good? What are the characteristics, qualities or determinants of good business and energy news? This is to say that a good business and energy news story must meet certain requirements. It is these features that distinguish such news from other forms of media writing. They include;

*a. Accuracy:* A science and technology news story is accurate if all names, addresses, numbers, direct quotations, and indeed, all facts in the story are accurate or correct. This implies that a good business and energy reporter must avoid guesswork or assumptions in his reports. He must be sure of his facts and figures to avoid unverifiable claims which could lead to legal actions.

*b. Objectivity:* This implies that a business and energy reporter should present his readers with all sides of issues to enable them to make well-informed decisions. For such a news story to be objective, it must not be laden with the reporter's views or biased opinions and prejudices. It must not be slanted or editorialised.

*c. Balance:* This is closely related to objectivity. It means treating all sides of a story without showing any evidence of partiality or preferential treatment. It means giving equal attention and prominence to all sides of a story without any fear or favour. It is unethical to give undue prominence to the view of one of two parties to the detriment of the other.

*d. Currency:* Nothing is as dead as yesterday's news or a radio/TV broadcast of many hours ago. Such news story is stale and is no



longer fit for human consumption. A news story is meant for the immediate consumption of the readers. A delay for a moment in getting the story across to readers may make the story stale and renders it useless.

*e. Brevity, Conciseness and Clarity:* A good business and energy news story must be brief, clear and straight to the point. No ambiguity in language and idea is expected. Long stories make for difficult reading. Newspaper and magazine audiences share time between reading and attending to other pressing needs. This makes it imperative that such news must be as brief as possible because most readers do not have time to waste reading papers. In other words, for a science and technology news story to attract readers' attention, it must be brief, clear and free from professional jargon.

*f. Simplicity:* A good business and energy news story must be simple and easy to understand. This is because readers vary in the level of knowledge and education. Again, not everyone, even the highly educated, is familiar with science and technological terms. Writing such news therefore requires simplicity of language and explanations of terms that are not frequently used in everyday life. A good science and technology reporter must, therefore, keep it simple and short (KISS).

### **Specialist versus Non-Specialist Science Journalists: The Issues and the Dilemma**

As commentators such as Cowen (1984) and Kapitza (1988) and others have often argued, specialist education appears a logical solution to the perceived problems of journalism and science. But this argument contains several flaws that become apparent under only a little scrutiny. The first is that journalism generally does not want or need science specialists, at least in Australia. Only about 50 science and/or medical and/or environmental specialists are listed in Gee's Media Guide (2001) and all of these are in metropolitan newspapers, specialist magazines and the ABC. Henningham (1995) observes that newspapers and other media generally need to be large organisations before permitting themselves the "luxury" of science specialists – or, indeed, any specialists. None of the hundreds of other news organisations list a specialist in anything, let alone in science.

The second failure of this apparent solution is that the specialist science writer in a media organisation may be in some ways least suited to the task of writing about science for lay audiences. Dornan (1999) comments that the creation of a full-time science beat within a news organisation makes the writer dependent on the cooperation of the scientific community. If science is to be a ready source of material, Dornan continues, then the journalist must cultivate the trust of scientists, and this can be accomplished only by producing coverage of which scientists themselves approve. The third and related difficulty is that, as Dunwoody (1994) suggests, specialist science journalists appear strongly to want to avoid the unavoidable non-science appendages of science, such as the political, social and economic aspects that attach to every significant scientific development. Such fastidiousness means that the science story, if left to the specialist, usually remains less than half told.

A fourth weakness in the idea of training specialists is that specialists appear rarely to remain in the news media they have trained to enter. Välliverronen (2001) observes that science journalism “has drifted apart from the journalistic field into separate media” (p 39). Although no reliable recent figures are available, Schoenfeld (1979) found that only a little over one-tenth of environmental-science-journalism graduates over 10 years remained in the news media. This may be for some reasons, but among them be the fact that, although scientists can learn journalism, they do not necessarily become competent journalists. The late Ian Anderson, who was Australian editor of *New Scientist*, quoted an anonymous science-journalism educator’s opinion that science graduates are “not terrific stylists” and who “asked the time, will tell you how a watch works” (1989, p 70). Moyal (1973) cites the then editor of *The Age*, Melbourne, as saying: “We have tried with dismal results to turn science graduates into journalists.” (p 134). Such “not terrific” journalists, or journalists who see their role as solely that of science writers, may well find difficulty adjusting to a newsroom in which they are often required to succeed at a wide range of general tasks.

An alternative is to train journalists to cover science. Yet there are problems associated with this, too. An examination of the relatively sparse literature on journalism students’ attitudes and experience with science would suggest that most journalism

students do not have a background in science and are not particularly interested in science. Cialdini (1997), for instance, suggesting that the media present a major obstacle to the goal of communicating science to the public, observes that media representatives are often not up to the task because those who cover science have little formal training in it. Case (1992) observes that editors complained that, given the growing demand for science news and news requiring numeracy, news people as a whole are neither well versed in science nor mathematics wizards. Fuller (1996) argues that journalists are rarely equipped to report science adequately and accurately, at least in the conventional manner.

### **Barriers to Effective Business and Energy Reporting**

Science and technology reporting face myriads of challenges in many developing nations. They include but not limited to:

#### *a. Inadequate Research Facilities*

In most developing countries like Nigeria, it is hardly debatable that there are gross inadequacies in business and energy research facilities. In most cases where they are available, what we call state-of-the-art facilities is already obsolete and completely outdated in the Western World. Under this condition, it is even difficult to have a breakthrough in science and technology that would be reported. You may recall that we earlier defined business and energy reporting as giving the account or telling the story of scientific and technological developments in the world around us; or the reportage of discoveries, advancements of achievements in the field of science and technology as well as explaining and interpreting their implications on the lives of the members of the society. This means that, to report science and technology, there must be newsworthy happenings in the area of science and technology. But this has been difficult as not many breakthroughs or developments are recorded in science and technology research in the third world due to inadequate research facilities.

#### *b. Information Hoarding*

This is another barrier to science and technology reporting in Nigeria. An average Nigerian is secretive, not always willing to disclose information. At many times, the persons involved are not

willing to grant interviews to reporters on science and technological achievements, feats, discoveries or successes. Many attempts end up with such phrases as: “No comment”, “No idea”, “I don’t know”, “Off record”, “...Who pleaded anonymity”. This has in no little measure hampered science and technology reporting in the country.

*c. Scarcity of Well-Trained Science and Technology Reporters*

Business and energy reporting is a new genre of journalism that requires special training to do well therein. At other times, many journalists are sceptical and sometimes afraid to venture into business and energy reporting due to the technicalities and the numerous hazards associated with this aspect of journalism. This has served as a barrier to business and energy reporting in Nigeria.

*d. Illiteracy and Ignorance of the Importance of Science and Technology*

Illiteracy constitutes a major hitch to business and energy reporting in Nigeria. People i.e the readers, the listeners or the viewers are meant to consume news items. Meanwhile, a good number of the members of the public are not literate enough to read or understand business and energy writings. Again, a situation where the majority of the population does not appreciate the value of science, business and energy does not augur well for science and energy writing in the country. This is indeed a major barrier to this genre of journalism in the country.

*e. Poor Database*

The absence of adequate statistical data and information storage system has been a serious hitch to the development of science and technology reporting in Nigeria. By this, we refer to the dearth of reference materials such as professional journals, books, newspapers, magazines, libraries, newsletters, computers, and Internet services, among others.

*f. Lack of Basic Amenities*

Lack of basic amenities indeed hampers the growth of business and energy reporting in Nigeria. This is because many of the science and technology news and information emanating from industries, companies, laboratories and institutions. These organisations depend on infrastructure to do well and provide the needed information for science, business and energy reporting.

*g. Endemic Poverty*

This is another hindrance to the growth of business and energy reporting in Nigeria. This is so because most of these reports are written and packed to be sold to the members of the public. These are people whose larger percentage, according to the United Nations, lives below \$1 per day. With such a standard of living, it is difficult to patronise science and technology writings. Without patronage, business and energy reporting suffers serious setbacks.

*h. Inadequate ICT Facilities*

In modern times, the business of news reporting has gone digital. Today, broadband and satellite technologies, among others have made media reporting quite different from what it used to be in the past. In reporting business and energy, it is even a more serious matter following the technicalities involved therein. Today, we have reporters that go into space along the astronomers, those that go to sea alongside with the ocean divers, report sophisticated wars alongside the air force, the navy and all manner of scientific ventures. There is little doubt that reporting these areas requires some technologies which are not available in the developing world.

*i. Systemic Corruption*

The science and technology reporter in Nigeria today is not operating from the moon. He is in a society where the fabrics, according to Aliede (2005:136), are already overwhelmed by high levels of corruption everywhere. Such a reporter, according to him, can hardly be expected to be able to isolate himself from the goings on around him.. In a report of the independent panel for the BBC Trust on the impartiality of BBC Business Coverage in April, 2007 it was discovered that:

1. Our overall conclusion is that most of the BBC's business output meets the required standards of impartiality. However, we have seen many individual lapses and identified some trends which lead to repeated breaches of the BBC's standards.
2. We are impressed by the BBC's publicly stated commitment to a high standard of impartiality and recognise that this is a considerable challenge for journalists working within constraints of time and space. However, while we can point to

examples of good practice, we believe that these standards are not always met.

3. From the evidence there is no doubt that the BBC takes business as a genre seriously - in terms of both the amount of coverage and the resources devoted to it.
4. Our commissioned audience research suggests that the BBC's business coverage is widely trusted and is regarded as being pre-eminent in providing accurate and balanced information.
5. The research also suggests that impartiality in the BBC's business reporting is not a major concern for listeners and viewers. It is not a salient issue for the audience because it is not perceived to be in jeopardy. What the audience does express is a desire for trustworthy reporting and thoroughness - as opposed to neutrality.
6. We noted many instances of good practice in impartiality in our monitoring of BBC output. Many witnesses across a wide spectrum who gave evidence to us also highlighted examples of good practice and in particular praised the quality and breadth of specialist coverage.
7. We do not believe the BBC has a systematic bias against business though at times the BBC can be unconsciously partial and unbalanced in its business coverage. This arises mainly from a lack of awareness of the commercial world - many BBC journalists have never worked in business - and from a preoccupation with taking the consumer perspective.
8. We believe that a lack of specialist knowledge and perhaps a lack of interest on the part of some mainstream programme editors can result in missed stories or angles.
9. Some witnesses were concerned about the poor level of knowledge among some of the researchers who contact them. There was also concern about the range and quality of the experts used on many business stories.
10. Focusing on the individual consumer angle can distort news values and important perspectives can be lost. The polarisation of views between business and consumer means that much of the ground in between is overlooked. This includes the role of business in society, the international context and the workplace.

Audiences are well served in their identity as consumers but they are not that well served in their role as workers or indeed as direct or indirect shareholders.

11. Some presenters, especially on Five Live, expressed their personal views and preferences about particular commercial products.
12. We found examples of partiality in some interviews with business leaders on mainstream output. Some were sycophantic in tone, others too hostile and aggressive.
13. Although many sections of the audience may not be particularly interested in business coverage the challenge for the BBC as a public service broadcaster is to deliver illuminating coverage that can appeal to a broad audience.
14. It can be difficult to persuade some business leaders to appear on BBC news output but we believe those who run businesses should do more to engage with the BBC and be prepared to explain their policies and activities to a wider public.

### **The Nigerian Imperative**

There is an increasing need to accentuate the level of reporting of the two sectors under consideration, especially the energy sector. This need goes beyond Nigeria. According to one source, "A lot has happened in the energy industry in West Africa in recent years that requires the attention of journalists covering energy issues" (GhanaWeb). There is interest by the non-governmental organisation (NGOs) such as human and environmental rights groups because of the impact of the energy industry on communities, climate change, flora and fauna and the environment as a whole. There is also globalisation, that is the importance of oil in the global economy. Any news about oil in one country affects many other countries. As a result of the ever increasing importance of oil in the global economy, energy issues are increasingly becoming front-page news around the world. Whether an energy story originates from the United States, Singapore or Nigeria, it has the power to affect market activities and policy decisions throughout the world (GhanaWeb).

Imperative as these sectors are, according to Ekeli and Nwanne (115), among the four genres of specialized reporting they discussed,

“it would seem that on science and technology is the least developed.” They attribute this underdevelopment of this genre to the fact that “Nigeria is not advanced in science and technology” such that many Nigerians and Africans give superstitious leanings to science-inclined issues. This has resulted in science-inclined magazines not thriving because of a lack of patronage. They cite the folding up of the erstwhile *African Science Monitor* published by the Concord Group of Newspapers as an instance. Indeed, the paucity of reporting on the energy sector has been very well noted:

Some experts and stake holders in the industry have often complained that coverage of the sector by journalists has mainly been about which politician or energy producer or distributor has said what, regarding this or that development in the sector. “Dutifully, they report what the government says about an energy issue and leave it at that. There is little analysis. It is a kind of cut and paste coverage of the sector”, one oil and gas expert has complained (GhanaWeb).

The low level of energy reporting is not peculiar to Nigeria and Africa. Even in a developed country like the US, the beat on “Energy went fallow after the Carter administration,” recalls John J. Fialka, a longtime energy reporter for the *Wall Street Journal’s* Washington bureau (qtd by Brainard & Russell, 2009) before its resurgence in the Obama era. Conversely, the business has enjoyed significant reporting in Nigeria. Ezeli and Nwanne have attributed the prominence of this specialized genre partly “to the upsurge in the activities of the financial sector, particularly banking” (120). This is evidenced by the resilience of such dedicated dailies or weekly journals as *Financial Times* and *Business Times*.

### **New Themes in Energy Reporting**

The field of energy reporting is currently characterised with such issues as the consequences of new renewable energy, damage to the environment and matters arising therefrom: community relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR), environmental impact assessment (EIA), new jobs from the new energies, etc. There is also new technology and the human angle (the loss of traditional well-paying jobs; tax holidays and the consequences when tax credits expire. The energy reporter needs to be familiar with the different sources of energy and energy diversification. These “energies” include fossil fuels (crude oil, coal, natural gas and their



by-products); renewable energy (solar, wind and water), as well as bio fuels (bio ethanol, biodiesel); and nuclear energy (from uranium) which are considered sustainable. It is known that fossil fuels are the most reliable because others rely on other factors like availability of the sun, water level which are beyond human control; The reporter needs to understand the energy matrix: what percentage of energy is derived from each of these sources? How much does each contribute to the GDP S/he should be conversant with the international politics and trade in the oil and gas (and generally energy) sector. S/he must be knowledgeable about OPEC, US-China Relations and the effect on the oil industry, US Shale, etc. It is also imperative that the reporter engages in special audio-visual reports on developments in the energy sector such as the advances in home-grown technology and business concerns as midwifed by the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB).

### **Special Skills for Energy and Business Reporting**

The energy and business reporter requires certain skills to do his or her beat in this specialised reporting.

#### *(a) Qualifications*

Each reporter is expected to have acquired basic tertiary education leading to National Diploma (ND), Higher National Diploma (HND), B.Sc, and B.A. in any discipline. If the qualification is in Mass Communication or Communication Studies, then the academic training is also professional. If not, the reporter needs some professional training in mass communication. Besides a qualification in communication studies, the specialized reporter needs extra training in the area of the beat. For example, a business reporter needs some training, possibly a postgraduate training in economics or a business-related discipline. There are also some hybrid disciplines like energy economics, petroleum economics, business communication, etc at the postgraduate level (PGD, M.A, M.Sc.)

#### *(b) Expand the Knowledge Base and Network*

The reporter requires continued expansion of his/her knowledge base and network with colleagues in the sector. S/he does this by

attending conferences, seminars and workshops within and outside the country on the area and network with people. To facilitate this s/he may need to apply for funding or fellowship where available. It also involves reading journal articles and published reports to verify and improve the accuracy of reports, beyond interviews, press releases and press conferences.

*(c) Interviews*

The reporter in this beat needs to get the most from an interview. S/he must avoid starting with probing questions, so that the interviewee does not see you as a spy and become overly careful. Ask pertinent questions (derived from some background study before the interview). Ask follow-up questions in order to a point clear. Ask for explanations of jargons you do not understand or may confuse your audience. Ask for a paraphrase. Make the interview more of a conversation than an interrogation (you're not a prosecutor or lawyer). You may offer some of your idea to stimulate a discussion or more information.

It is also a wise strategy to ask for referrals. Ask your interviewee or any relevant persons you meet: "Who else do you recommend I speak to when reporting on this subject?" Even if you do not need to interview the person in the end, you have gained a referral to a fresh expert for the future (Study.com).

*(d) Investigative Journalism*

This is one venture that has waned, especially in developing countries, but is needful in business and energy journalism. It involves digging deep for information beyond the surface. Instances include finding out the truth and issues in the practices of oil prospecting companies: for instance, that there is a dispute between the NNPC and governments (especially at the state level) about how much revenue is being remitted to the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) for disbursement to the different levels of government. Again, how much crude oil is being produced in Nigeria; beyond what the IOCs declare, how much of it is lost to illegal bunkering; what is the real subsidy for oil in Nigeria? In business, how much of looted funds have been recovered? From where and by whom? Where is it? What has it been used for?

*(e) Online Sources*

The present-day energy and business reporter needs to be conversant with available online resources. The Global Investigative Journalism Network gives a long list of Internet sources where one can obtain a lot of information about the extractive industry. The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) also has the annual *Journalists' Guide to Energy and Environment* which started in 2017.

*(f) Social Media*

Today's reporter needs to be social media savvy. The platforms Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. Being savvy goes beyond being knowledgeable about how to use and get information from them. It also requires knowing its limitations. For example, s/he must be suspicious of information on these platforms, including the issues of fake news, photoshopping technology, wrong attribution, etc. This requires him or her to seek other sources to verify information from the social media before propagating such, lest s/he becomes guilty of slander and/or libel.

*(g) Be Quantitatively Inclined*

In both business and energy reporting, some figures and statistics are involved. Some knowledge of descriptive statistics, and possibly of inferential statistics, would be essential for you to understand and cross-check figures you come across to ensure accurate reporting.

*(f) Language Use in Business and Energy Reporting*

These sectors involve specialised registers which the reporter must be familiar with and use appropriately. In the fossil fuel energy sector, for example, there are specialised vocabulary items like 'upstream,' 'midstream,' and 'downstream' whose reference s/he must understand. He should also be familiar with the full forms of acronyms like NCDMB, NCIF, NOGICD, LPG, LNG, AGO, PMS, DPK and jargons like "fossil fuels". In the electricity sub-sector, a reporter needs to know the meaning of words and terms like "grid", "boiler", "horse power", "kilowatt", "kilowatt-hour", "liquefied natural gas", "real time market", "real time pricing", etc. Weigh the options of using the technical term like AGO or giving the common term "diesel.". S/he should be familiar with alternative terms like British

'petrol' and US 'gasoline.' Again, the reporter must not be guilty of using the term 'fuel' to mean petrol or gasoline since the term 'fuel' in the right sense refers to most sources of fuel. Thus diesel, kerosene, wood, coal, etc., are all fuels. The reporter must avoid using scientific terminology that is archaic or outdated; except s/he strongly believes it is necessary for the comprehension of the audience: e.g. sulphuric acid, carbon monoxide. Be extremely careful in interpreting or paraphrasing scientific conclusions. Are you sure you should not quote them? Avoid the temptation to sensationalise science information. Avoid the temptation to exaggerate or over-simplify. For example, be careful in labelling a scientific idea as a "breakthrough." Be careful enough to use gender-neutral language. You may offend if you use the masculine gender for a female executive personality, or vice versa.

### **Tools for New Media Reporting in the Energy Sector**

In today's energy and business reporting, the beat journalist needs certain specialised gadgets to cope with the demands of the time. These include a digital camera that can take high-resolution still photos and videos; a laptop, notebook or tablet computer with working wireless Internet service, possibly handwriting recognition; a digital audio recorder that can record interviews which can be converted into editable documents, possibly a recorder with voice-to-text software. S/he also requires a digital Internet-ready cell phone for calls, e-mail, surfing the Web, shooting photos and videos and e-mailing stories to the editor with the attendant audio-visuals. S/he equally needs Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) or Google map to locate places; a high-capacity storage device (an external hard disk, flash drive or CD); a variety of software packages installed in a laptop or tablet to edit photos, videos, audios, images and graphics. There are also hand-held scanners which are needful for scanning and digitizing of documents on the spot. Furthermore, to overcome the challenge of network failure from the existing mobile telecommunication companies, the journalist may need a satellite telephone for making calls where cell phone service is unavailable. Moreover, there is also the device called the videophone: a combination of a video camera and satellite phone

### Conclusion

It has been discussed in this paper that energy and business constitute a special sub-genre in beat reporting in view of both the critical nature of these fields to the health of nations and the global community, and because of the technical nature of these sectors. Along these lines, the paper has demonstrated that the beats of energy and business reporting have become highly demanding, such that the reporter in these domains requires special attributes in knowledge and general exposure to cope with the requirements of today's journalism in the sectors. It has been emphasised that s/he needs both basic training and specialised training in the sectors to succeed in the journalistic enterprise. In addition, s/he needs continued in-service training to update him or herself on the developments in the industry. Also, to the matters of training are the personality traits of patience, thoroughness and ability to double-check facts and figures while still endeavouring to meet the general demands of currency with the news story. Besides these personal traits, it has been advocated here that the energy and business reporter of today needs to have some specialised technological information and communications technology gadgets recently available to enable him to meet the demands of accuracy and currency.

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