

## **USE OF TICKER IN TELEVISION NEWS PRESENTATION BY NTA AND AIT YENAGOA: ATTENTION-GRABBING- OR DIVERSION TECHNIQUE?**

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### **Abstract**

News is presented differently by the different mass media. Scroll bar, ticker or Crawler or crawl is a technique of presenting the synopsis of the news bulletin in animated form at the bottom of the television screen. This study sought to investigate if using a ticker, scroll bar, crawl, or crawler in television news presentations is an attention-grabbing or diversion technique. The study adopted the mixed method research design using survey and focus group discussion as data collection instruments. All residents in Yenagoa metropolis formed the study population which stood at 524,400 in addition to the universe of 56 NTA staff and 17 AIT staff for the focus group discussion. The sample size of 382 was arrived at using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table of 1970. The purposive sampling technique was adopted, while the suitable theory adopted is the technological determinism theory. Findings show that the use of tickers in television news presentations serves as an information reinforcement technique, as well as enhances the understanding of audiences with hearing problems as television newscast is oral-based. This study concludes that diverse opinion exists between the audience and the staff of the television stations on the use of tickers in television news production. The author recommended among others that the use of scroll bars in television news presentations should be encouraged.

**Keywords:** Television, ticker or scroll bar, attention-grabbing. AIT, NTA

### **Introduction**

Television is a pervasive and audio-visual medium with distinctive features. It has the potential to captivate audience attention which is manifested through the art of news presentation. "Television is further extended with visual advantage over the radio. And it gives it the popularity it has garnered over the years as a prominent medium" (Akpan & Ihechu, 2011, P.189). Technological breakthroughs have continually played significant roles in the process of information dissemination through the television medium. Every medium is unique in its pattern of presentation, and the television medium is not an exception. It is amenable to changes in technology. Television programming uses different techniques in news presentations aimed at capturing and sustaining the target audience. Among them are: the visual quality, photographs, headline types, dress code of newscasters, and scroll bar or crawler or ticker. Guanah (2023, p.128) while discussing visual structure informs that "they can use visual and other elements to help convey information clearly and effectively, and to keep the audience engaged and interested through the programme".

In our rapidly growing technology-induced world, the television audience is surrounded by different electronic devices that enhance our access to information and also provide effective and efficient techniques for audience interactivity. One such technique is the scroll bar or ticker or crawler or crawl, considered an effective tool that makes it possible for the audience to navigate and explore content fluidly on television screens. Such techniques are used the television stations to either reinforce the audience's understanding of the message or give additional information. "Recent studies suggest that ticker content, unlike news captioning, does not necessarily reinforce the primary news story being presented by the anchor or reporter but rather tends to present new information" (Blackmon, Benson, & Berhow, 2004).

Scroll bar, ticker, or crawler is a text-based animated information dissemination technique that consists of the summary of salient points of the news which scrolls from left to right at the bottom of the screen. They are bullet points that

correspond with the news but not necessarily the particular item being read by the news anchor. Accordingly, Nwabueze and Eluemuno (2024) argue that:

The need to break news and necessary information to the teeming television news audience, amid news and non-news programme(s) without necessarily breaking the flow of such programme(s), introduced as an innovation whereby the audience does not only watch and listen to television news, they also read the news. The innovation is called news ticker bar. (p.1)

This style or format of information dissemination has its positive and negative aspects or prospects and disadvantages. Some scholars argue that it serves as an attention-getting technique or attention-diversion technique. Tjarnhage, Söderström, Norberg, Andersson, and Mejtoft, (2023) describe the ticker or scroll bar as “a popular communication device because of its ability to capture an audience's attention” (P.1). Aaron (2009) informs that “the attention age – “the age of human history in which information has become so abundant and available that attention has become the greatest commodity” (p.1).

The use of Scroll bars, tickers, or crawlers in television news presentations has been observed to have enhanced information dissemination for people with hearing problems and also could supplement as a sign language device for television news presentations.

Tickers are a dynamic way of presenting news on television with different intents and purposes by the audience or the television stations either way. According to (Brenchman, Bellman, Robinson, Treleaven-Hassad, & Varan, 2015) “Studies have shown that when presenting news content with a ticker, the updating ticker format has significant advantages over the traditional scrolling format. News items were more likely to be recognized later if they were presented in an updating ticker rather than a scrolling ticker”.

### **A Brief History of NTA and AIT Yenagoa**

Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Yenagoa branch is a Nigerian government-owned and partly commercial broadcast station established in 2003 and is situated at Azikoro Street, Yenagoa. It has a staff strength of 56. The Africa Independent Television (AIT) Yenagoa is a subsidiary of DAAR Communications situated along Elebele Road, Yenagoa established in 2007 by the founder, Chief Aleogho A. Dokpesi. It has a population of 17 members of staff.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Technology shapes the media landscape and often impacts the mode of news presentation. The television medium broadly classified under the broadcast/electronic media is pervasive with its unique audio-visual feature. Different media over the years have been affected by technological dynamics, particularly in their mode of presentation and use of certain devices/techniques for information dissemination.

A recent phenomenon in television news presentations is the use of certain techniques in conveying information on television as a supplementary way to reinforce the information content of the news presented on television. Such techniques are referred to as tickers, scroll bars, or crawlers. Accordingly, Nwabueze *et al.*(2017, p.37) stated that:

The use of news tickers by television stations to reach a wider audience is reflective of the era of media convergence, in search of audience attention. One of the strides brought about by media in the area of technology is the use of news ticker or crawler, on television screens. (p.37)

A scroll bar, ticker, or crawler is a text-based animated information dissemination technique that consists of the summary of salient points of the news which scrolls from left to right at the bottom of the screen.

Ugoala (2020) posits that “Scholarly works on television news reports of the use of news tickers in television news discourse are quite few. Among the few, some found that news tickers helped viewers to retain information more than the

main newscast; while some others state that news tickers are distractions for viewers” (p.4)

In the light of the foregoing, this study sets out to investigate how the audience perceives the use of the ticker in television news presentations and the reason television stations make use of the ticker, crawler, or scroll bar. Is it for grabbing the attention of the audience or an attention diversion technique?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study sets out to analyse the dynamics of the use of tickers in television news presentations by NTA and AIT Yenagoa: attention-grabbing- or diversion technique. The under-listed objectives were stated to guide the study.

1. To find out the level of awareness of Yenagoa NTA and AIT viewers of the use of tickers in television news presentations.
2. To determine viewers' perception of the use of tickers in television news presentations.
3. To determine if the use of a ticker in television news presentation is an attention-grabbing or diversion technique.
4. To find out the rational television stations use ticker in news presentation.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent is the level of awareness of Yenagoa NTA and AIT viewers of the use of tickers in television news presentations?
2. What is the perception of the Yenagoa NTA and AIT viewers of the use of tickers in television news presentations?
3. How do the Yenagoa NTA and AIT viewers perceive the use of tickers in television news presentations?
4. What are or is the reason(s) television stations use tickers for news presentation?

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Ticker, Crawler, or Scroll Bar (Overview)**

Ticker, crawler, slides, or scroll bar are text-based messages usually displayed at the bottom of the television screen that scrolls from right to left. According to Everett & Caldwell, (2003, p. 11),

“24-hour News networks sustained adoption of the continual News crawl is an effort to ensure that we don't avert our gaze from the television in the information-rich internet age”.

The scroll bar functions majorly to introduce the headlines in television news presentations. “Also referred to as news ticker or crawls, this is a small screen space on news television networks dedicated to presenting headlines or minor pieces of news. This moving strip of news often located at the lower part of the screen provides viewers with the headlines while they are watching reports on related or other events” (Nwabueze, 2011).

These techniques have sort of extended the practice of being used for breaking news and emergency alerts. Keefe- Feldman (2007) emphasised “they have evolved to a nearly 24-hour practice on some networks, continuously offering pieces of information ranging from hard news to updates on celebrity love entanglements” (Keefe-Feldman, 2007). Another scholar who contributed to the debate on the effect of the ticker, scroll bar, or crawler argues that “although some researchers have begun to grapple with the Crawl's effect on viewers' attention to and recall of news broadcasts” (Blain, 2002),

#### **Reasons for the Proliferation and Growth of the Use of Ticker, Crawler or Scroll Bar**

Tickers, crawlers, or scroll bars are techniques used by television stations to reinforce the informational content of news presented on television. Some reasons have been adduced for the use of tickers:

According to McClellan *et al* (2001), “We use tickers to compliment what's being said on the air. We do that so it won't be distracting or contradictory. For example, in NTA Yenagoa, during prime-time news presentations, the ticker gives a summary of the news as well as the headlines

One of the primary reasons for the use of the ticker at the initial time was that it introduced breaking news. It is used to attract and sustain the attention of the audience. For instance, AIT Yenagoa 11 am news on 27<sup>th</sup> February with headlines; NLC Proceed with 2 Day Nation Wide Protest, South Korean Government Launches Investigation into Death of Woman, etc when a piece of breaking news crept in the scroll bar of a “Ghastly Motor Accident along Amasoma Road”.

It serves as a supplement to the audio and video content. (Sella, 2001, p. 66) posits that “news has become impossible to channel through a single televised human”. Nwabueze and Eluemuno (2024) also affirm that “Speculations on the reasons for the growth of the news ticker bar are numerous. Many point to the events of September 11, 2001, as a launching pad for the technique, observing that the amount of demand for information required a supplement to audio and video footage”.

It enhances the understanding of people having hearing problems. It serves as a sign language device during a newscast on television. It furnished those who missed the news with the salient points as the ticker continued to scroll through as programmed.

### **Historical Developments of the Use of Scroll Bars by Television Stations in Nigeria**

The Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan said the world is a “Global Village”, this is a depiction of the term globalization. These terms when extrapolated could mean different things. However, in the context and perspective of the study. It means the generation, replication, proliferation imitation, and use of technology-driven information communication techniques worldwide.

The origin of the use of tickers, scroll bars, and crawlers in communication annals has been traced to the developed world, particularly the United States of America. “The birth of text on a television screen dates back to 1980 when financial news networks added a stock ticker to the bottom of the screen” (Sella, 2001).

Nigerian media stations also replicated the use of these reinforcement information communication techniques – ticker. Scroll bar, and or crawler. Sella (2001) argues that “Fox News Channel first broadcast a continuous news ticker on 9/11. Sella added that Fox's crawl began at 10:49 am. CNN followed 22 minutes later and MSNBC joined the pack just before 2 pm”.

In Nigeria, Channels Television and African Independent Television (AIT) were the first to use tickers, scroll bars, or crawlers in their news presentations, and the use of tickers started in the early 2000s. Today, almost all television stations (public or private) make use of tickers, scroll bars, or crawlers in news presentations. While contributing to the emergence and use of the

ticker, crawler, or scroll bar in television news presentations, Nwabueze and Eluemuno (2024) inform:

In Nigeria, major television stations now feature permanent use of news tickers. Such television stations as Africa Independent Television (AIT), Channels Television, Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Silver Bird Television, and many other state or federal government-owned and privately owned television stations feature news ticker bars on screen. Today, the use of news tickers is seen as a sign of modernization of television news presentation. (p.11)

In a study - Exposure to Economic News on News Tickers and its Influence on Perception of Nigeria's Economy by Television Audience in Awka by Nwabueze, Okafor, and Obiakor (2017) note the frames adopted by The Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), African Independent Television (AIT) and Channels Television, were analysed to find out the framing patterns of economic news content of news tickers. The objectives of the study amongst others include finding out the volume of economic news in news tickers in the selected television stations in Nigeria. The study used the mixed methods approach: The survey and qualitative content analysis methods were used for this study; 591 news tickers were analysed for three months. The survey research design was used to interview 50 respondents purposively selected from five Ministries in Awka. It was found that the majority of the television audience in Awka was exposed to economic news in news tickers but this exposure did not influence their perception of the Nigeria economy. Findings also indicate that private television stations reported economic news in a predominantly fear frame while the government-owned television stations adopted more of a solution frame in economic news on news tickers.

The point of difference is that while Nwabueze, Okafor, and Obiakor (2017) focused on economic news on news tickers and their influence on the perception of Nigeria's economy by television audience in Awka, this study focused on the use of tickers in television news presentation by NTA and AIT Yenagoa: attention-grabbing- or diversion technique? However, the study did not offer any recommendations.

## Theoretical Framework

The theory relevant and suitable for this study is the Technological Determinism theory postulated by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. The theory explains that the media did not only alter the environment but the very messages conveyed through them. Rodman (2012, p.60) posits that “the introduction of every new technology changes society, sometimes in unexpected ways”. Similarly, Asemah (2011) argues that ‘the media bring new perceptual habits while their technologies create new environment’ (p.215). Pavlik and McIntosh (2013, p.454) affirm that “technology causes certain human behaviours”.

As it relates to this theory, technology determines the news presentation format in television thereby creating a new perceptual habit in audience behaviour. It also determines television stations on the format of presenting television news – using the ticker, crawl, scroll bar as additional information reinforcement techniques.

## Methodology

This study adopts the mixed method research design. Accordingly, Leavy (2017) states that “Mixed methods research (MMR) involves collecting and integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a single project and therefore may result in a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation”. Furthermore, Creswell (2014) also corroborated Levy's proposition when he states that “Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing or integrating of both approaches in a study”.

In other to gain a comprehensive insight into the use of tickers in television news presentations by NTA and AIT Yenagoa, the data collection instruments used are the questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD). The questionnaire was used to elicit information from viewers. In contrast, the focus group was used to gather information from the staff (programmers/ news editors/newscasters/reporters) of the select two television stations on the justification for employing tickers in television news presentations.

The population of this study consisted of all residents of Yenagoa metropolis, the population figure for Yenagoa metropolis is 524,400 according to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (web), National Bureau of Statistics web [https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/bayelsa/NGA006008\\_yenagoa/](https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/bayelsa/NGA006008_yenagoa/). The population of NTA Yenagoa is 56, while AIT has 17 members of staff. The study adopted the purposive sampling technique. Based on this population figure and using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table of 1970, the sample size is 382. Out of the 382 copies of the questionnaire administered 328 were completed and returned. This constitutes 86% and is considered an adequate return rate. Data were presented in tables while analysis was done using simple percentage and weighted mean score (WMS) based on a four-point Likert scale. Therefore, the data presentation and analysis are based on the 328 administered copies of the questionnaire. The population of NTA Yenagoa is 56, while AIT has 17 members of staff. In analysing data from the four points Likert scale, responses were weighted as follows:

Very high	= 4 points
High	= 3 points
Low	= 2 points
Very low	= 1 point

## Data Presentation and Analysis

The responses obtained from the completed questionnaire were analysed with the use of mean statistics based on a four-point Likert Scaling System and presented in tables of frequency distribution. The total values allotted to the responses were divided by 4 points to arrive at the level of acceptance.

The weighted mean score (WMS) is calculated as  $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10$  divided by  $4 = 2.5$ . The score of 2.5 was used as the criterion for a decision on the responses to each item which meant that if an item in the questionnaire had a mean value greater than 2.5 (level of acceptance/affirmation) then it implied that the statement had a high level of acceptance with the respondents or affirmation of the respondents. Still, a mean value lesser than 2.5 (level of acceptance/affirmation) means rejection.

**Table 4.1: To what extent is your level of awareness of the use of tickers in television news presentations?**

Nature of response	Response in mean score				WMS	Decision
	SA	A	D	SD		
Item: 1 Very high	79	184	41	24	2.9	Affirm
Item: 2 High	116	152	45	15	2.7	Affirm
Item: 3 Low	88	160	60	20	2.9	Affirm
Item: 4 Very low	98	49	120	61	2.5	Affirm

**Source: field survey, 2024**

The information in Table 4.1 clearly shows as it was affirmed that the level of awareness of the use of tickers in television news presentations is quite high

**Table 4.2: How do you perceive the use of tickers in television news presentations?**

Nature of response	Response in mean score				WMS	Decision
	SA	A	D	SD		
Item: 5 information reinforcement technique	95	148	45	40	2.9	Affirm
Item: 6 Diversion technique	103	167	35	23	3.0	Affirm
Item: 7 Attention grapping technique.	108	80	94	46	2.7	Affirm
Item: 8 It enhances the understanding of audience with hearing problems	96	83	85	64	2.6	Affirm
Item: 9 Sustains the audience	82	150	64	32	2.8	Affirm
Item: 10 The use of ticker is good but some of them scroll too fast	93	162	45	28	2.9	Affirm
Item: 11 The ticker is used to introduce breaking news in television news presentation without necessarily interrupting the flow of the news cast	126	142	45	15	3.1	Affirm

**Source: Field survey, 2024**

Data presented in Table 4.2 shows that affirmation was given to item 5. It was affirmed by the respondents that the use of tickers in television news presentations was a diversion technique. Affirmation was also given that the use of tickers in television news presentations enhances the understanding of audiences with hearing problems. Respondents' acceptance was also given that the use of tickers in television news presentations was to sustain the audience. It was further affirmed that the use of ticker in television news presentation is good but scrolls too fast and it is also used to introduce breaking news without necessarily interrupting the flow of the news.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Focus Group Discussion**

Two focus group discussions comprised of 18 people, purposively selected with 9 persons from each television station. The participants include Directors of News, Directors of Photography, Technical Directors, Non-linear Directors, and other members whose tasks are related to the display of items on the screen. The two focus group discussions were held: one with the staff of NTA Yenagoa and the other with the staff of AIT Yenagoa. The focus group engagements centered mainly on the justification of using tickers in television news presentations. This was considered appropriate to understand and gain insight from the professionals on why television stations use tickers in their news presentations. The moderation time for the focus group discussion sessions was thirty-five minutes each.

### **Question: What is the rationale for television stations' use of tickers in news presentations?**

On the above issue, the majority of the participants of the focus group discussions were unanimous in their opinion that tickers are used by television stations to mainly attract and sustain the audience to stay glued to their station. For instance, 5 discussants from NTA Yenagoa and 6 from AIT Yenagoa said they are aware that television stations use the ticker in news presentations to attract and sustain audience, emphasizing that AIT and NTA Yenagoa use the ticker for the same reasons. Discussants' opinions on the television stations' use of tickers as a reinforcement of the information content was overwhelming. 6 discussants, 3 each from AIT and NTA Yenagoa who gave their opinion said that there is no doubt that the tickers reinforce the information in the news.

Further, some of the discussants also agree that tickers enhance the understanding of people with hearing problems. This implies that the use of tickers serves a complementary role of the sign language. However, there was a high level of disagreement on the use of the ticker as a diversion technique.

Some of the participants gave insight into the fact that, in some stations, the ticker captures only the current headline news while it is a blend of the topical news headline preceding and the current news headline.

Participants of the focus group discussion were unanimous in their view that the ticker is majorly used to introduce breaking news in television news production without necessarily breaking the flow of the newscast.

Interestingly, the AIT focus group discussant comprising of the Director of News, Technical Director, Director of Photography, Non-linear Director, and four other members of staff gave an insight that the scroll bar continues intermittently even after the time for the newscast, thereby, giving relevant information about the news to the audience who did not listen to the news an idea of the content of the news.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Television news presentations in the contemporary world are technology-driven immersed with visual structures of which the audience should be aware. Findings in the light of data presented in Table 4.1 show a high level of audience awareness of the use of tickers in television news presentations as reflected in item 1 with a weighted mean score of 2.9. Nwabueze, Okafor, and Obiakor (2017) study titled "Exposure to Economic News on News Tickers and its Influence on Perception of Nigeria's Economy by Television Audience in Awka" corroborates the above finding as their study found that the majority of the television audience in Awka was exposed to economic news in news tickers.

Data presented in Table 4.2 item 5 which focuses on the use of the ticker in television news production as a reinforcement technique recorded a weighted mean score of 2.9. This aligns favourably with the position of McClellan et al (2001) who informs that "We use tickers to compliment what's being said on the air. We do that so it won't be distracting or contradictory".

Responses to item 6 in Table 4.2 were in agreement that the use of tickers in television news presentations is a diversion technique. It should be

noted that this response is for the viewers only while the response by the two television station staff differs or in opposing directions from the viewers', stating that the use of tickers in television news presentations is not to divert the audience's attention rather is designed to attract the audience attention. This interestingly is in line with Ugoala (2020) who posits that "Scholarly works on television news reports of the use of news tickers in television news discourse are quite few. Among the few, some found that news tickers helped viewers to retain information more than the main newscast; while some others state that news tickers are distractions for viewers" (p.4)

In Table 4.2 item 7 survey data aligned positively with the focus group discussion on the use of tickers in television news presentations as an attention-grabbing technique. This is represented in the weighted mean score of 2.7. The focus group discussants' responses were unanimous, affirming that the use of tickers in television news presentations was to attract and sustain audience attention. Scholarly, illuminations in this regard were given by Tjarnhage, Söderström, Norberg, Andersson, and Mejtoft, (2023) they describe the ticker or scroll bar as "a popular communication device because of its ability to capture an audience's attention" (P.1)

It was also upheld in item 8 that the ticker used in television news presentations is designed to enhance the understanding of audiences with hearing problems. This finding is in line with the core tenet of the technological determinism theory as postulated by Asemah (2011) who argues that 'the media bring new perceptual habits while their technologies create new environment" (p.215). Findings also show in item 11 with a weighted mean score of 3.1 that the use of tickers in television news presentations was to introduce breaking news without necessarily breaking the flow of the newscast. This aligns positively with the responses of the focus group discussants where the majority opinion states that tickers are used to introduce breaking news without necessarily breaking the flow of the newscast. Accordingly, Nwabueze and Eluemuno (2024) in an earlier elucidation note that:

The need to break news and necessary information to the teeming television news audience, amid news and non-news programme(s) without necessarily breaking the flow of such programme(s), introduced as an

innovation whereby the audience does not only watch and listen to television news, they also read the news. The innovation is called news ticker bar. (p.1)

## Conclusion

Based on the data presented and analysed, this study concludes that ticker, crawl, scroll bar or crawler are information reinforcement techniques deployed by television stations. This aligns with the proposition of McClellan et al (2001), "We use tickers to compliment what's being said on the air". Incontrovertibly, tickers are used to attract and sustain audience attention. According to Everett & Caldwell, (2003, p. 11), "24-hour News networks sustained adoption of the continual News crawl is an effort to ensure that we don't avert our gaze from the television in the information-rich internet age". This study also concludes that diverse opinion exists between the audience and the staff of the television stations. While the television stations posit that the use of tickers is not diversionary, based on the data presented the audience justifies the ticker use in television news presentations as a diversionary technique. The study further concludes that the use of ticker, crawl, and scroll bars enhances the understanding of people with hearing difficulty as the newscast on television is oral-based. While the use of a ticker is good in television news presentations some audience members are of the view that it scrolls too fast.

Finally, both responses to the questionnaire and the focus group discussion participants who are staff of AIT and NTA Yenagoa agreed that the ticker is majorly used to introduce breaking news without necessarily interrupting the flow of the television newscast. . it was also upheld in the focus group discussion that the speed of the animation of the ticker, or scroll bar, or crawler is too fast thereby audience is unable to read through the text in the crawler.

## Recommendations

Given the foregoing, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Viewers awareness of the use of tickers should be encouraged
2. Television stations should be encouraged to use the ticker, and scroll bar crawl in their news presentations.
3. The study further recommends that the speed of animation in the ticker be reduced a bit to enable audience members to read through the text in the ticker.



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