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## **Editorial Information Management and Social Responsibility of Local Tabloids in AkwaIbom State, South South, Nigeria, in 2014.**

**Akpan, Udo Usiere (PhD Student)**

Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies  
University of Port Harcourt,  
Nigeria  
usiereusen@gmail.com

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### **Abstract**

*This study analyzed the editorials of local newspapers to determine the theme, slant, quality and types presented on issues in Akwa Ibom state. The study made an assessment of the role of editorials in issues by analyzing their stand on state matters. Five local newspapers were analysed. The period of evaluation was from January 1, to December 31, 2014. A total of 216 copies were assessed, representing ten percent of 2160 copies of local newspapers in the State. The results of the analyses showed that editorials concentrate most of its themes on ethnic political news. To maintain editorials as the voice of local newspapers, it is recommended that professionalism, objectivity, ethical considerations, fairness and sound journalism should constitute the hallmark of editorial policies and writing. To also ensure that these journalistic principles are not flagrantly abused, editorial independence is suggested. To enhance this independence, corporate or people ownership of newspaper organizations is advocated. This will curb local newspaper publishers who are hell bent on parochial, personal interests against community and state goals.*

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**Key words:** Editorial, Information, Management, Responsibility, Local, Newspaper,

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Communication is a vital aspect of human living. It is fundamental to the growth and survival of any society because a good system of communication enables people to live in oneness, exchange meanings and share experiences.

According to MacBride et al (1981, p.3) Communication maintains and animates life. It is also the motion and expression of social activity and civilization, it leads people and peoples from instinct to inspiration through variegated processes and system of enquiry, command and control; it creates common pool of ideas, strengthens the feeling of togetherness through exchange of messages and translates thought into action reflecting every emotion and need for the humblest tasks of human survival to supreme manifestations of or destruction.

The assertion that whatever we do communicates something to others, further amplifies the importance of communication to human existence and interaction. As such, communication is a means of facilitating social integration and cohesion in a society and it takes place in various forms and at different levels.

One of such forms of communication, which has become popular in Nigeria among newspapers, is the editorial. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, an editorial is an article in a newspaper or magazine written-by the editor or under his .direction, giving the opinion or attitude of the paper upon some subject.

Editorial can also be defined as the subjective opinion of the management of a newspaper. It is that branch of journalism that conveys to the public the media organization's opinion on issues in the news, as well as issues on public interest. An editorial is also an article that

states the newspaper's ideas on an issue. It provokes debate and offer enlightened judgments to readers.

Editorials appear on the newspaper's editorial page, a page which includes editorials, opinion articles, reviews and cartoons. If the paper contains more than one opinion page, the others are called op-ed pages.

Another important item that appears on the newspaper 's editorial page is the masthead, also known as a staff box, which includes a statement providing the details of publication-that the editors, photographers and other key staff members are, as well as a synopsis of the newspaper's editorial policy (Kenneth, 1994).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Beginning in the early 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, editorial opinions engage in analysis that help many readers go through interpreting national and international events. Since then, editorials of many newspapers have carved out prominence between the publishers and the reading communities. They have helped to change, the condition in which people work. There is really no history of the emergence of editorial writing in Nigeria as it is very difficult to ascertain precisely when editorials' first featured in Nigerian newspapers. But the editorial page is one of the components of all major national newspapers in Nigeria and all over the world.

Almost all Nigerian newspapers publish editorials on a daily basis and although it is not easy to ascertain the number of people who read these editorials, it appears the readership is quite wide as it serves as a voice of the voiceless in the society. What attracts editorial writers to editorial writing? One attraction is the opportunity to help set the public agenda. The power to set the agenda for public discourse is no small power. Editorial writers generally have more freedom than reporters to decide what they will write about and the second vital reason editors are attracted to editorial writing is that they get the chance to have their voices heard in the making of policy. Editors are also attracted to editorial writing because of the flair involved in the writing. Writing a clear, insightful, educative and informative editorial can create a great deal of personality to the newspaper, attract credibility and set the agenda of discourse by readers in a given community and state. The above reasons also partly answer the question: Why maintain an editorial page? But do local newspapers, especially those in Akwa Ibom state take cognizance of these factors in presenting their editorials.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to analyze the editorial content of local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state.

- 1 To find out the commonest theme of editorials in local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state.
2. To find out the treatment/slant of editorials used by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state
3. To assess the quality of language in the editorial content of local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state.
4. To determine the outstanding types influencing editorial contents of topics in local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. What is the commonest theme of editorials of Nigeria's local newspapers?
- 2 What is the slant frequently published in editorials by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state.?
3. Are the editorial contents of local newspapers with the expected quality in the language of presentation?

4. Which type of editorial content remain outstanding in local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state.?

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study has the capacity to help local newspapers to refocus and redesign the role and place of editorials in newspaper business. This study therefore, will enhance the effectiveness of editorials in serving as a voice of the newspapers and the voiceless individuals in a society.

## **2.0 Theoretical Framework**

The theory of Social Responsibility was taken to examine the topic and assist in examining how editorials should be acting as a voice of the people and how the press should help to set agenda for members of its immediate community via its editorials. The Social Responsibility media theory owe its origin to the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the press, set up in the United States of America in 1947 to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the Libertarian press theory. As a normative theory, it explains how media ideally should operate in a given system of social values. This theory asserts that media must remain free of government control, but in exchange media must serve the public and be socially responsible for all actions to the public. (McQuail 1987) cited in Baran (2002, p.449)

### **2.1.1 Purposes of Editorials**

The purposes of editorials are vast as informed by the fact that the print media industry has not entirely done well in this area of reportage. Speculations in the media seem to suggest that socio-cultural cum political partisanship in the body polity has crept into the editorial boards of most Nigerian newspapers. Appointments to such boards are no longer made on merit or statesmanship but on socio-ethnic and political patronage. The ownership/publisher influence on editorial content is also becoming overbearing. The real media professionals are not completely allowed to do the press business. The consequence of this unhealthy situation is that the publishers (who are mostly non-media persons) call the tunes because they believe they are paying the piper. But it is a tradition that newspapers whether local or regional or national has to come to the news stand with an editorial. So for a century and a half or so, most Nigerian newspapers have set aside a page for the opinions of their writers, their readers and other contributors. A second reason for an editorial page is prestige. No self-respecting newspaper would dare appear without an editorial page (except maybe on weekends).

A third reason is that it offers the newspaper the opportunity to have a well informed subjective opinion on national and global issues that concern the public. A fourth vital reason is that the editorial usually provides leadership. Leadership does not necessarily require that opinions be changed. One role of the editorial is to reinforce and help clarify opinions that are already held.

Another role is to call the attention to action on such issues through persuasion, tribute, explanations, criticisms, emphasizing.

Omojola (2005) noted that editorials could be used as instruments of persuasion to influence public opinion on pertinent national issues. In other words, a media organization that discovers that a particular event, situation or circumstance has to be improved upon or changed, could write an editorial on that situation or circumstance, thereby using the medium to orientate the public towards its belief or stand on the issue, situation or circumstances. They also use such opportunity to move public opinion in support of the issue canvassed.

An editorial could also give critical and in-depth analysis on issues. It is also from this in-depth analysis that the conclusion is drawn, which gives meaning to the editorial. The publication of an editorial also gives readers the benefit of knowing all the sides to a story

with a goal of making him take a personal stand on the matter. An editorial also helps to uncover the "news" behind the news. This means that the part of the news left behind by reporters during their coverage of news situations are usually brought to light in informative and incisive editorials. An editorial could also help in the infusion of a new orientation concerning a particular issue, event or situation or better still, bring a media organization's experiences, expectations and innovations to bear on a particular issue.

### **2.1.2 Types of Editorials**

Six types of editorials are common in the Nigerian print media industry.

First is the news editorial. News editorials discuss issues raised in the news of the day. They have a news peg or lead. Social editorials on the other hand concentrate on controversial and contemporary socio-cultural issues of public concern. Policy editorials are basically about government policy. Special editorials on their part discuss issues of special concern as they arise in the society. The tribute editorial celebrates the lives of important personalities.

Speculative editorials carry unconfirmed reports about an issue or an event. This simply means that such editorials are not totally sure of the facts and figures presented. There are other types considering that editorials could be critical, condemnatory, expository or persuasive. The critical or condemnatory editorial criticizes issues and states that a matter of utmost importance has been neglected. This type of editorial is common amongst Nigerian national newspapers because Nigeria as a country is challenged by so many socio-economic and political problems that are urgently demanding attention. However, if the editorial criticizes, it should always be constructive, emphasize the positive about what is been criticized and ensure that convincingly.

Expository editorials on the other hand explain in precise details issues or subjects that are not easily understood by the public. This involves clarification of such issues in a way to make the public take a decision and also involves explanation of relevant technical terms if any.

Expository editorials could be descriptive, analytical and historical. Editorials that explain are somewhat like expository essays. They attempt to interpret or inform rather than to argue a point of view. The only expression of opinion comes in the interpretation of the facts.

The persuasive editorial is one by which a media organization tries to get its readers to agree on its position concerning an issue. It is a way of inducing agreement of cooperation from its readers. A media organization can persuade its audience by being objective in its analysis, pushing out arguments that are very strong enough to convince and persuade readers and also through emotional appeals. Generally, editorials that persuade offer specific solutions to a perceived problem and expect immediate action towards adopting such solutions.

### **2.1.3 The Significance of Editorials**

The editorial page is a natural source of thoughtful comment and analysis that put the news in its proper perspective and keeps the reader adequately informed about topical issues.

The average newspaper reader today is terribly short of time. The editorial writer can save time for him, and keep him well-informed. In this complex age, a newspaper's service to its readers cannot end with the collection of facts. The bare facts are often so misleading as to be false when taken alone, and issues presented by the bare facts are often so complex that they require extensive examination to find their real meaning. Since people are comment-hungry, world problems are so complex that the reader, hurried and confused, needs a page which interprets what's "happening", which is the editorial page.

From the above analysis, it can be vividly depicted that the need for an editorial page is very important and the place of the editorial page in a newspaper cannot be over emphasized.

The test of excellence in editorial writing is the clearness of style, moral purpose, sound reasoning, and power to influence public opinion in what the writer conceives to be the right direction.

The editorial is more than the published expression of the opinion of an editor. The modern editorial is not opinion only. It includes analysis and clarification, often with no opinion given. To expound, to interpret, to clarify what is obscure, to abstract patterns, significance and meaning from the chaotic medley of seemingly unrelated events—all this and more is part of the function of modern editorial. Editorial scholars have also said that an editorial adds to the personality and prestige of a newspaper. One of the major functions of the press is to report, to criticize, to clarify, to unify and this is where the social responsibility function of the press come in to play.

### **3.0 Methodology/Research Design**

This study made use of content analysis to determine the content and treatment of local newspapers' editorial. According to Dare (1991, p.6) cited by Ekeanyanwu (2005), content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.

**3.1 Population of Study:** The population of the study includes all the local daily and weekly newspapers published and circulated in Akwa Ibom state with the exclusion of magazines. According to Doghudje (2006), there are newspaper titles in Nigeria among which are dailies, weeklies, sports and business. The number of local newspapers stood at 52, publishing either daily, thrice a weekly, weekly, some monthly and occasionally.

**3.2 Sample Size:** The sample size for this study was taken from the local newspapers which publish thrice weekly only. These are *the Global Concord, The Sermon, The Guide, The Radar, The Post newspapers*. With three editions in a week, each of the local newspaper is seen on the news stand with 12 editions each in one month, making 60 editions of the five local newspapers. Therefore in 36 months of the year 2014, the five local newspapers had a total of 60 editions multiplied by 36 to get 2160 copies. Ten percent of the 2160 newspaper stood at 216 copies divided by the five local newspapers to arrive at 43 copies each for assessment of the editorials in 2014.

**3.3 The Units of Analysis:** This refers to the benchmarks used in analyzing and evaluating the data collected.

The types of editorials published by the newspapers are analyzed as Inciting, condemnatory, Speculative, Expository editorials. On the quality of the editorials, four levels of analysis are applied based on Ekeanyanwu (2007) thus:

**High:** These are editorials considered by the researcher as outstanding in quality with regard to the content and the language of presentation of the issue being discussed.

**Low:** These are editorials considered by the researcher to be poor in quality with regard to the content and the Language of presentation of the issue being discussed.

**Poor:** These are editorials considered by the researcher to be very poor in quality with regards to the content and the language of presentation of the issue being discussed.

The slant/treatment taken are positive, negative, neutral, determined by the stand taken by the newspaper concerning the issue under discussion.

As positive, implies that the editorial in question is favourably disposed to the position canvassed by the topic or policy under analysis. Negative, implies that the editorial in question does not support the position expressed by the policy, issue or topic under discussion. Neutral, this is an editorial which ends without taking any position regarding the

issue under discussion. Such editorials merely analyze issues in an informative manner and allow the reader to take his/her position.

#### 4.0 Methods of Data Presentation and Analysis

Statistical tables, which contain percentages, were used to present the findings of the study. These tables and their percentages were generated to ensure accuracy of results and analysis. The result of the analysis subsequently formed the basis of the discussion, and recommendations.

**Table 1: Themes of Editorials in Newspapers**

Editorial Theme	Global Concord	Radar	Insight	Sensor	Pulse	Total
Politics	38	32	28	32	26	156
Economy	2	5	7	9	10	33
Social	2	2	3	1	4	12
Disaster	1	3	4	0	3	11
Others	0	0	1	1	0	2
Total	43	42	43	43	43	214

Source: Tabloid Contents

In Table 1, the themes of editorial contents were classified under politics which had 38 in Global Concord, 32 in Radar, Insight 28, 32 for Sensor and 26 in the Pulse newspaper. Themes on the Economy attracted 2 in Global Concord, 5 in Radar, 7 in Insight, 9 Sensor, 10 in Pulse. The Social theme had 2 in Global Concord, 2 in Radar, 3 Insight, 1 Sensor and 4 in the Pulse newspaper making a total of 12 items. On disaster themes, the Global concord had 1, the Radar reported 3, the Insight had 4, the Sensor had 0 and pulse 3 to make a total of 11 items while in the unclassified or others the Global Concord and the Radar reported nil, Insight and Sensor share 2 and the pulse nil making a total of 2 items.

**Table 2: The slant/treatment of editorial Contents**

Slant	GBC	Radar	Insight	Sensor	Pulse	Total	%
Positive	2	12	13	21	18	66	30
Negative	38	28	29	17	22	134	63
Neutral	3	2	1	5	3	14	7
Total	43	42	43	43	43	214	100

In Table 2 the slant or the treatment of editorial was taken under positive which attracted 2 in the *Global Concord*, 12 in *Radar*, 13 *Insight*, *sensor* 21, Pulse 18 giving a total of 66 or 30 percent items. The Negative treatment had 38 in *Global Concord*, 28 in *Radar*, 29 *Insight*, *Sensor* 17, *Pulse* 22 making a total of 134 or 63 percent items. Neutral was *Global Concord* 3, *Radar*, 2 *Insight* 1 *Sensor* 5, *Pulse* 3 giving 14 or 7 percent.

**Table 3: The Quality of Editorial contents**

Quality	GBC	Radar	Insight	Sensor	Pulse	Total	%
High	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Low	38	40	36	38	41	193	91
Poor	5	2	7	5	2	21	9
Total	43	42	43	43	43	214	100

In Table 3 the quality of editorial contents were group under High, with no items, Low in Global Concord was 38, Radar 36, sensor 38, Pulse 41 making a total of 193 or 91 percent,

poorly quality editorial were Global concord 5, Radar, 2, Insight 7, Sensor 5, Pulse 2 giving 21 or 9 percent.

**Table 4: The type of Editorial contents**

Type	GBC	Radar	Insight	Sensor	Pulse	Total	%
Inciting	35	27	25	21	18	126	59
Condemnatory	3	12	10	3	11	39	18
Speculative	5	3	3	16	13	40	19
Expository	-		5	3	1	9	4
Total	43	42	43	43	43	214	100

On the types of editorial, the analysis was done on Inciting with 35 in the Global Concord, Radar 27, Insight 25, sensor 21, Pulse 18 having a total of 126 or 59 percent, condemnatory editorials were 3 in the *Global Concord*, Radar 12, *Insight* 10, Sensor 3 Pulse 11 to make 39 or 18 percent items. Speculative editorials were 5. *Global Concord*, Radar 3, *Insight* 3, *Sensor* 16, *Pulse* 13 making 40 or 19 percent, while in the expository group the analysis had nil editorials in the Global Concord and the radar newspapers, 5 in *Insight*, 3 *Sensor* and 1 for *Pulse* to make 9 or 4 percent.

From the analysis of the editorial content themes it could be inferred that the five local newspapers focus more on political issues as against other categories. This study also revealed that newspaper editorial content build on existing differences and on critical government policies. From the data gathered, the theme of editorials are not on issues that educate the public but to cause ill feelings and cast aspersions on public office holders in the state. From the profile of the publishers, the research found out that the newspapers are out to promote ethnic sentiments harboured by the owners of the local tabloids.

Furthermore, the data analyzed also indicates that more than half of the editorials are critical editorials as they took bias positions against the issue under analysis. This is a pointer to the fact the editorials did not support the position expressed by a particular policy or issue under discussion. The data presentation, analysis and discussion has also aided in answering the research questions satisfying the study objectives that editorial themes are derived from ongoing news issues in a given society.

**Research Question One: What is the commonest theme of editorials in local newspapers published in Akwa Ibom state?**

Table 1 provides answer to this research question. It is evident that newspaper editorials focus more on political at 156 or 73% than economic issues 15%, social 6%, disaster 5% and others at 1%. The economy of a nation is the foundation while other things are the superstructure. Thus, if the economy is bad, other things are affected as they all make up the economy. That the economy has been related in reports means that, the living standards of people are affected negatively. Hence, the individuals in the society look for means through which they can voice their suffering state to the government and also propose possible solutions. Since they do not have direct access to government, the newspaper medium is the nearest means as editorials are meant to serve as the voice of the voiceless in the society. Thus, this trend should be encouraged in the newspapers.

The impact of newspaper editorial is in the expectation that they come out with solutions to problems facing the society. Most news stories warrant only the coverage of the issue. This implies that there is no of time to delve deeply into the analysis of news events. As such, the news concentrates on important issues on the surface without probing the problems these issues are posing or may pose and the necessary solutions to them. Individuals in the society also believe that there are solutions to the problems affecting them and that these solutions

will only have immediate results, usually without much cost or pain if there is a way they can convey these solutions, their problems and views especially about government to the same government.

Furthermore, people believe the government is so complex and there is no way they can understand what is happening if there is no avenue through societal happenings can be explained to them and a medium through which they can also express their own views about such problems. This leaves them feeling frustrated and angry because they feel helpless. This is the point where the editorial in newspapers comes to play a vital role to serve as the voice of the voiceless in the society. The Nigerian press has a role to play to serve as the eyes and ears of members of the community by publishing editorials that air their views and also speak their minds as well.

By the social responsibility and agenda setting function of the Nigerian press, they are meant to determine important issues to be published as and ensure that such editorials portray the voice of individuals in the society. Since the newspaper is the voice of the community and the editorial is the voice of the newspaper, then the editorial should reflect the voice of the community. This voice can inform readers, stimulate thinking, mould opinion and occasionally move people to action. Therefore, the presentation and analysis of the data above explains in clear terms the editorial content of local newspapers in Akwa Ibom state and nay Nigeria.

### **Research Question 2: What is the treatment or the slant of local newspapers editorials in Akwa Ibom State.?**

Table 3 gives a clear answer to the question of the direction of treatment given editorials of local newspapers to issues in Akwa Ibom state. The negative editorial stories dominated the pages of the five sampled papers at 134 or 63%, against 66 or 30% and 14 or 7%. This means that the newspapers were not exhibiting objectivity and fairness but resorted to displaying subjectivity and promoting interest of the owners, took ethnic affiliations with politicians and peer groups. By and large the news stories cannot alone present an intelligible picture of events. If the picture is to be intelligible, what happened yesterday has to be fitted in with what happened and what may happen tomorrow and in the future. From the above analysis it can be vividly depicted that the need for an editorial page is very important and the place of the editorial page in a newspaper cannot be overemphasized.

The editorial page is the expression of the papers' conscience, courage and convictions.

The test of excellence in editorial writing is the clearness of style, moral purpose, sound reasoning and power to influence public opinion in what the writer conceives to be the right direction.

### **Research Question 3: What is the assessment of the quality of local newspapers editorials in Akwa Ibom State?**

This can be answered from Table 3 which shows that editorials of high quality in language, layout and aesthetics were not seen in any of the newspapers. But editorials constituting the low quality were seen at 193 or 91% while poor quality editorials were 21 or 9%.

The impact of such low and poor quality editorials is that the expectations of the reading public are dashed in patronizing the papers and putting confidence in the ability of journalist to help in proffering solutions to problems facing the society. This implies that the editorial teams lacked the time to delve deeply into the analysis of news events. As such, the news concentrates on important issues on the surface without probing the problems these issues are posing or may pose and the necessary solutions to them.



By the social responsibility function of the press, the editorials are meant to determine important issues to be published and ensure that such editorials portray the qualitative voice of individuals in the society.

**Research Question 4: Which type of editorial is mostly used by local newspapers in Akwa Ibom State.?**

Table 4 helps to answer this. From the data gathered, it was observed that most local newspapers focus more on editorials that dwell on inciting news at 126 or 59%. They dwell on issues already raised in the news of the past and build on already existing news pegs. This trend is followed by speculative editorials and subsequently condemnatory policy editorials, while expository editorials to educate the public on obligations to the state suffer. Such inciting, condemnatory and speculative editorials are capable of generating crisis.

This means that the social responsibility of the press in the protection of the government and the public interest had a poor treatment in the editorials of local tabloids in Akwa Ibom State in 2014. This work agreed with Omega(2015,p.112) that the mass media play an indirect role in generating or escalating crisis.

**Conclusion**

The journey to have outstanding, distinct editorial begins with the editorial staff. The importance of the editorial staff and the editor for the newspaper operation today goes deeper than the traditional reason for the pursuit of excellence in the editorial page. No newspaper today can be first-rate news medium without the support of a first-rate editorial staff.

The presentation of news as editorials cannot be just a mechanistic process hence individuals of different point of view and with huge responsibility of editorial writing staff are needed to give the reader the fullest understanding.

An increasing number of publishers accept the proposition that the service of an adequate editorial staff and the effort to produce a sound and creditable editorial page proves a leaven and a guide to the whole newspaper operation. Over time Nigerians have lost hope in the editorial page of our daily newspapers because they are not able to help in conveying their heartfelt feelings to the government. Thus, the readership of the editorial page diminished drastically. From the findings of this research, it is very much obvious that the newspapers are doing a lot to make the editorial take its place as a voice of the voiceless.

**Recommendations**

Editorial readership should be expanded and intensified for editors and publishers to take interest in developing strong editorial columns and pages.

This could only be achieved if the right kinds of professionals are hired on the editorial team and board discarding a situation where most of the newspaper publishers and editors are the same people who collaborate with top government officials in ruining the economy.

In correcting this notion, publishers and editors must give up, not only outwardly but in their heart all liaisons with economic and political groups by being non partisan in socio - political affairs of the nation.

They could be advocates of mass oriented issues but must do this with intelligence, finesse, fairness and journalistic objectivity in mind. For no reason must ethics of media practice be jettisoned for cheap popularity gotten from unnecessary mass sympathy and support. Sound journalism should be above parochial and petty individual interests.

Editorial independence must as well take top priority. The first requisite feature of editorial is that the newspapers must abandon their allegiance to political parties and fly the flag of freedom at their masthead.

Nigerian newspapers should also note that objectivity in opinion is achieved not by emasculating editorials, but by directing every ounce of missionary zeal and hellfire to the service of the entire community rather than merely to a part of it.

Newspaper editorials should also promote socialization where the individual is made to internalize the values, norms and acceptable behaviour pattern of the society.

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