

## **Conducting the Personality Interview in Journalism: A Discursive Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

The importance of the interview has been growing over the years as a news gathering technique (Shrivastava, 2012). It is now seen more in news columns and, at times, because of interviews, a newspaper scores over its rivals in news coverage. Rogers (2010) remarks that historically, physical mobility was the only means of making contact with the rest of the world but now, the mass media provide a route for imaginative access to faraway places. Similarly, through personality profile interview, the media bring distant celebrities close to their thousands and millions of their fans. Because big names are important and interesting to readers, features written after conducting the personality interview are high in human interest content. Therefore, the twin objectives of this investigation are to help push the frontiers of our understanding in this area, and to raise the competence level of reporters in interviewing, described as “The first resort of all journalists” (Kamath, 2014, p.10). Though documentary analysis, the paper finds that conducting the personality interview is fun, although it requires all the ingenuity of the reporter to make his subject talk and reveal himself. Among other things, it was recommended that the reporter should carefully choose the eminent person to be interviewed, making sure he will be interesting and important to readers because of his attractive story.

**Keywords:** The Personality interview; Journalism.

### **A. Introduction**

As noted by Shrivastava (2012), interview has been established as a major technique of gathering information in journalism. He explains that there is hardly any news magazine which does not carry interviews. Many a times, the cover story and some other major stories involve more than one interview.

Furthermore, the Sunday or the magazine sections of daily newspapers often carry interviews. Sometimes several people are interviewed on a particular subject and different viewpoints are compiled in one feature. Additionally, magazines often supply copies of their exclusive interviews to daily newspapers before they hit the newsstands so that news content of the interview may appear in newspapers (Shrivastava, 2012).

Obviously, there are several types of interviews — man-in-the-street or common man interview, the news interview, the casual interview and the personality interview etc. Each type calls for a special technique. Some of these types of interviews are intended for a news story eg the news interview; others for the making of feature. As Shrivastava (2012) explains it, feature appears in news columns but its news value content is lower as compared with hard news, also known as straight news. Backgrounders, tributes, anniversaries, profiles, situationers and stories describing “how” of an event (serious or analytical feature) come in this category of feature, according to the author.

However, the concern of this investigation is with the personality interview. According to Shrivastava (2012), the personality interview is usually obtained for preparing a feature story and, ordinarily does not figure in a news story. There is not enough space in a daily newspaper for such an in-depth interview, though of course there are always exceptions to the rule. The personality concerned may be a celebrity or a nonentity who is doing something out of the ordinary like raising a snake farm or a PhD holder shining shoes outside the local cinema house. The celebrity, whether a politician, a prime

minister, a president, a film star or a Nobel Prize winner, is a known entity. The interview will have to be devoted to finding something exotic ( very different or strange) about the individual that is not hitherto known to the public. The reporter will attempt to develop the personality of his subject through noting characteristics, tricks of speech, dress and appearance etc. Is he addicted to cigarettes ? Does he smile often? What toothpaste does he use? What is his favourite dish? The reader is interested in knowing all about the strengths and weaknesses of the men who make the news.

The interview is such a versatile technique that it can be applied to get a story in almost any field. A reporter may have a personality feature or a success story tagged on a news peg. For example, from the news of a vice chancellor ending his 5-year tenure, a creative reporter may interview him on his remarkable achievements in the last five years he was in office, as well as his general success story so far in life. And from the facts gathered, he may write a compelling feature on the vice- chancellor, published as a personality profile or a tribute.

## **B. Conceptual Clarifications: The personality interview: Journalism.**

### **1. The Personality Interview:**

According to Ufuophu-Biri (2016), the personality interview is also known as **personality profile**, **eminent persons interview**; or **celebrity interview**. Here, a stand-out person, a big name, a luminary or a notable person is interviewed on his personal life, and he talks about his birth and background, growing up years, schools attended and qualifications obtained, work experiences gathered, challenges of life encountered, his character, principles, philosophy, accomplishments in life, legacy and family. The interview helps not only to reveal him as a role model to many but to also inspire his fans and others to be like him, or even surpass him.

### **2. Journalism:**

To Singh (2011), journalism is reporting news or experiences in the form of writing reports, taking photographs or video for the press or television. He explains that although there is much variation within journalism, the ideal is to inform the people.

In the words of Harcup (2012), Journalism is a form of communication based on asking and answering the questions who? What? Where? When? Why? And how? In brief, these are called the 5Ws & H of journalism or the Six Serving Servants of the reporter. Harcup (2012) adds that journalism is a form of cartography: it creates map for citizens to navigate society, and the map should be reliable.

Similarly, Mencher (2013) says journalism is a mirror held to life which monitors the universe on our behalf. He explains that it captures the triumphs and tragedies of daily life locally, nationally and internationally.

## **C. Perspectives on Interviewing**

Scholars (Ogunsiji, 2009; Hohenberg, 2009; Pridmore, 2011; Fedler, Bender, Davenport & Drager, 2015; and Itule & Anderson, 2017) have provided clarifications on the concept of interviewing.

As Itule and Anderson (2017) define it, an interview is an exchange of information between a reporter and a source. When a reporter asks the right questions with finesse, a source becomes a window to the news. On the other hand, a story can fail if the reporter asks the wrong questions or not enough questions, does not know how to ask questions or gives up too early on a hostile or closed-lipped source. The authors add that interviewing requires patience, confidence and an uncanny ability to listen, participate, observe and absorb. According to them, reporters must be able to ask a question and then listen to the entire response, all the time zeroing in on the key points while thinking about the next question.

Similarly, to Ogunsiji (2009), the interview is the art of meeting people and asking questions with a view to eliciting information. He states that the primary purpose of interviewing a person is to get

information on any issue at stake. He further says generally, reporters conduct interviews when they need facts and figures about events or issues of public significance. He adds that the interview is a tool for digging out truth of importance in the news gathering process by reporters.

Along the same line, Fedler, Bender, Davenport and Drager (2015) say reporters interview people to gather newsworthy information and opinions. According to them, some interviews provide facts about events that reporters were unable to witness (this is called the news interview). Other interviews (the personality interview, or personality profile interview, also known as interview of eminent persons) provide opinions or colourful quotations about prominent people, problems or happenings.

Pridmore (2011) notes that interviewing people is not a simple process, and getting it right is one of the most difficult parts of Journalism. According to him, for a newspaper, a reporter may be interviewing everybody and anybody, from school children to visiting celebrities. He advises that before interviewing someone in person for a personality profile interview, the reporter should try to find out something about him through research. For example, if a reporter is to interview Abba Kyari the youngest Deputy Commissioner of Police in Nigeria who has gained distinction and recognition for his exceptional ability to arrest notorious criminals nationally, for a personality profile, archival material in the form of press cuttings may give the reporter an idea of his background, such as his number of years in the Nigerian Police Force (official records, too, should be checked) or awards given to him for bravery and brilliance.

In the opinion of Hohenberg (2009), the gentle art of interviewing is based on the principle of persuading the other fellow to do the talking. Just how to get him started is the reporter's problem. Everyone has a different method, depending on people and circumstances. According to the author, if it is at all possible, a reporter should know as much as the records and clips will tell him about his subject (personality or issue) before the interview begins. The opening gambit, after the reporter states his business, may be a bit of light conversation, or some common places about a topic of joint interest, or a casual compliment – almost anything that will establish an easy rapport. Within a very few minutes, though, the interviewer must take charge in an unobtrusive way by asking a question that is likely to touch on the principal subject of the talk.

Once the subject has been sufficiently primed with questions to keep the talk flowing at a satisfactory rate, the reporter enters the most difficult phase of the interviewing process (Hohenberg, 2009). He must listen. He must be patient, attentive, courteous. Even if the interview has taken a turn not precisely to his liking, he must show no displeasure. If the talk is veering from the subject, he can try to change the channel with a discreet question or two. Under no circumstances can the interviewer so forget himself as to be drawn into a lively discussion in which he does most of the talking, and the subject turns into a somewhat bored listener. Once the subject begins talking, the interviewer should relax and remember to save his toughest questions for the last.

#### **D. Conducting the Personality Interview**

Ufuophu-Biri (2006) has provided three stages involved in a news interview: the pre-interview stage, the interview stage and the post-interview stage.

According to him, the **pre-interview stage** comprises research (to be well-equipped with sufficient and relevant information about the topic of the interview, and probably the interviewee, arranging for the interview, booking an appointment, dress code, and punctuality).

The **interview stage** involves starting the interview from an informal and general angle, asking questions by following a set of prepared questions, demeanour (being friendly), attentiveness, and coaxing the source to talk.

In the **post-interview stage**, the reporter checks his notes critically before leaving, asking for any clarifications, and finally thanking the source for granting him the interview.

Another perspective from Dodge and Viner (2013) says interviewing consists of four distinct parts:

- a. Preparation
- b. Encouraging the source of information to talk
- c. Asking the right questions
- d. Verifying the information obtained

a. **Preparation:** The precise nature of the questions a reporter asks will be determined initially by the purpose of the interview, and the research he has done, but it is important that he listens attentively to people's answers and adjust his line of questioning if necessary. If it is an opinion interview or an issue-based interview (like asking to know why the standard of education has fallen), the reporter should be sure of the proper persons to interview: principals, teachers, education officials, lecturers, students etc. On the other hand, if the reporter is profiling a personality in an interview of an eminent person, he should check vital biographical data of the interviewee. For more information, the news gatherer should talk with his friends, secretary, members of his family etc. The reporter should make an appointment letting the interviewee know which publication he represents and the kind of information he is seeking. Before the formal interview, the news disseminator should phone the interviewee to name two people – his enemy and his admirer whom the reporter must interview thoroughly before meeting the real source (interviewee) for a comprehensive question and answer session. This way, the news gatherer is bound to get better quotes.

If the reporter is going to ask questions based on what those two – the source's enemy and admirer – told him, he should not reveal their identities. He should simply ask; "Somebody told me you are utterly unco-operative. How does this strike you? etc. The newsman should use the same strategy in probing the interviewee about facts he may have deliberately or innocently overlooked, facts which the reporter has conscientiously gathered about him in his pre-interview research and preparation.

Before the interview, the reporter is expected to search, collect and collate background and current information on the subject to be discussed. He needs to prepare a list of questions that will produce the facts and opinions needed for his story or personality profile feature. The reporter may arrange for a photographer to be present, who will graphically capture the interviewee in various moods and postures. He should also take along a notebook and a mini tape recorder to record the interviewee's voice. They stand a news gatherer in good stead to avoid misquotation or quoting out of context. He should put the mini tape aside so that the interviewee is not unduly or overly conscious of it. Also, he should not jam it on his face.

Tape recorders have pros and cons. A tape recorder is not a substitute for good notes. Tapes can break and machines can fail you when you need them most. They can inhibit a source. They can also prevent a reporter from taking good notes if he relies on them too much. And tape recorders can't pick up observations – a smile, a nervous tic, a source's appearance or mannerisms. But, according to Rich (2010), in these days of media convergence, they are essential for taping parts of interviews that may later be used as sound bites for video or the web versions of his story. The reporter should just make sure he also takes notes.

In addition, if the newsman wants to get the exact wording of quotes, or if he is interviewing a source about a controversial subject, a tape recorder is beneficial. But he should not play back the entire tape and transcribe it before he writes his story. That is too time-consuming. If he uses a tape recorder, he should scan the tape until he gets to the quotes he needs.

The reporter should know that he cannot secretly tape any conversation between two other people when he is not a part of the discourse. The most ethical approach is to let his source know he is taping the interview, except in a very few situations, e.g. when conducting an undercover investigation. However, most editors consider the use of deception or other undercover techniques a last resort.

On listening and note taking: These days, when the credibility of newspapers is under attack, trying to reconstruct interviews and direct quotes from memory is downright dangerous. It is even said that, "The quality of stories has something to do with the quality of notes" (Rich, 2010, p. 113)

To take good notes, the reporter has to bring extra pens. Then he has to concentrate on what he is hearing and block out everything else until he has written the quote. Also, the reporter has to use key words to remind him of facts and statements. He has to abbreviate as many words as possible. He should not be afraid to ask his source to repeat a quote or fact he missed. The newsman should not glue his eyes to his notes. He should make sure that he looks at his source during the questioning, and while he is taking notes. He should practise taking notes without looking at his notebook. The reporter should save his notes before and after the story is published.

As the interview progresses, the reporter should avoid questions that can be answered by "Yes"/"No", because he needs details. Rich (2010) elaborates that interview questions can be classified as two types: **closed-ended** and **open-ended**. Closed-ended questions are designed to elicit brief, specific answers that are factual. They are good for getting basic information such as name and title; yes or no answers; and answers to some of the Who, Where and When questions. For example, these are **closed-ended** questions: How long have you worked here? Who was at the meeting? How many people were at the rally? When did the accident occur?

On the other hand, **open-ended** questions are designed to elicit quotes, elaboration or longer responses. The reporter should avoid being judgmental in the way he frames his questions or responds with follow-up questions. The more neutral the news gatherer is, the more responsive his source is likely to be. He should keep his questions brief and simple. He should not ask a double question or precede a question with a long explanation.

The questions that will elicit the most quotes and anecdotes start with What? Why? and How?:

- **What** (What happened? What is your reaction? What do you mean by that? Can you elaborate?)
- **Why** (Why did you do that? Why do you believe...?)
- **How:** (How did it happen? How did you accomplish that?)
- Give an example! (a follow-up question to explain how the source felt, thought or acted in specific situation).

The reporter should keep his questions brief. He should also ask questions in simple sentences – one question at a time. He should not combine two questions into one sentence, generally. A long lead-in to a question can confuse the source. The news gather should slow the pace between questions so that he can take notes. He should remember to be responsive by making eye contact frequently during the interview.

Rich (2010) notes that beginning reporters often worry that they will appear **dumb** to sources. The author describes it as **the Dumb Factor**. But the news gatherer should not worry about what he doesn't know because he is there to listen and learn, not to be the expert. The whole point is to get information from the source. In fact, acting dumb can give him an advantage. Even if he knows the answer to a question, he should ask it anyway so that he can get the information in the sources words. If he thinks a question is too simple, he might apologise for not knowing more about the subject. He might say, "I'm sorry I don't understand this. Could you explain so that I can write it clearly for my readers?" Most sources enjoy taking the teaching role or showing off what they know.

Also, acting dumb does not mean forgetting about preliminary background work. It is dumb if he cannot tell his readers something because he was afraid to ask. It is better to feel dumb during the interview than afterward, when he turns his story in to an editor or when he reads it in the newspaper or hears it on a broadcast.

The final step in preparation involves personal appearance. The reporter has to dress well and be on time for the interview. And he has to be time-conscious as the interview moves on. Depending on the topic and the atmosphere of the interview session, the question and answer face-to-face encounter should normally be 45 minutes in length so that neither party is bored. The reporter should remember that time is precious to his interviewee. Therefore, he has to be as brief as possible.

b. **Encouraging the source to talk:** The reporter must act friendly and interested. Although he is expected to maintain eye contact with the interviewee throughout, he should not embarrass or make him nervous. He needs to establish rapport with some general conversations or questions designed to place the source at ease and encourage him to talk freely. A shy person or someone unaccustomed to being interviewed will require more encouragement or prompting than a public official, a celebrity and someone frequently in the news.

The news gatherer should not pull out his notebook immediately. He should try to sit at an angle to his source so that he is not staring directly at him in a confrontational manner. A desk might serve as a barrier and provide enough distance so that the reporter does not appear threatening. He should observe the surroundings. Does he notice something he can mention as an ice-breaker, a way to establish rapport? The reporter should not be artificial. If the interviewee has a picture of his family on his desk, he should not get overly familiar. He should use good judgment.

As the interview advances, the reporter may observe prominent objects and adornments. Is it a picture of his hero? Is it art collections? Is it a quotation on the wall? These will give a hint into his personality as well as give the reporter further things to ask him questions about.

c. **Asking the right questions:**

Unless the news gatherer guides the conversation, the interviewee may talk on generalities or on an aspect of the topic that has little new value. Accordingly, he asks those questions calculated to produce newsworthy facts. In this connection, the reporter will need some open-ended type questions that give the interviewee a chance to develop portions of the subject without interruption. He does not phrase questions the way they can be answered “Yes” or “No”. For example, “How were your days as the governor of Nasarawa State?” is better than, “I guess your days as the governor of Nasarawa State were fine?”.

However, some interviewees answer even open-ended questions (e.g Why? How? Describe) very briefly. In that case, the news gatherer asks follow-up questions like:

- Could you elaborate?
- Why did you say that?
- Would you like to describe how you felt?
- Tell us what happened after that
- Kindly explain that
- Tell me more please
- I want to understand more please etc.

It is often useful to respond to an answer with “Why?”. This brings out basic information that would not otherwise be available. The reporter should ask mumbling interviewees to speak more clearly, explaining: “This is such an interesting information that I want to be sure if get it all”. The news gatherer does not interrupt with a new question until an old one has been thoroughly answered. Furthermore, he does not forget to ask the appropriate 5W<sup>s</sup> (Who, What, When, Where, Why) and How of each idea.

When he begins asking his questions, the reporter starts with the simple ones and graduate from there to the difficult ones (Ganiyu, 2010). He does not press too hard if the interviewee refuses to answer questions. He leaves tough or personal questions, which the source would prefer not to answer, for near the end of the interview. This rule is simply common sense. If an interviewee is likely to become angry, if an edge of hostility is likely to enter the dialogue, let it occur after the reporter has gathered most of the information he needs.

Rich (2010) suggests 18 other types of questions an interviewer should ask:

a. **Plan the first question:** The reporter should try to find a question or approach that would interest the source, especially if the person is a celebrity, an athlete or an official who has been interviewed often. These people often give standard answers to questions they consider boring because they have been asked the same questions so many times. If the reporter researches well, he will find some tidbit or angle to a story that might lead to an unusual question – and an interesting answer.

b. **Put the questions in nonthreatening order:** However, if the reporter has only five minutes with a source, he may have to ask his toughest question first, or whichever one will yield him the most crucial information for his story.

c. **Ask follow-up questions:** The news gatherer frames his next question on the information he has just heard by focusing on key words in the last answer. When the reporter wants to change the subject, he should ask an unrelated question or use a transition e.g:

2. On another topic...

2. I would like to go back to something you said earlier. Could you explain why you were at the scene where the murder occurred?

The reporter employs follow-up questions to go from the general to the specific. If the source makes a vague (unclear) statement, the news gatherer asks for specific examples.

The reporter may have a long list of questions, but he should not let his interviewee see them. This is because a long list can make the source watch the clock. It will be better for him to write the questions on the front or back of his notebook so that he can refer to them easily without turning pages frequently.

Here are some general follow-up questions to provide context and interesting material:

- What was your reaction?
- What do you mean by that?
- How did that happen?
- How did you do that?
- What is the significance?
- Who will be affected?

d. **Keep quiet:** The news gatherer should not talk too much or try to impress his source with his knowledge. He should also not insert his opinions or comments. He should let the source talk. The reporter needs to quote the source, not himself.

**Be nonjudgmental:** The news hunter should not insert his comments or opinions into his questions. Nor should he judge his source's actions or answers. He should remain neutral and strive for fairness. He can get an opposing side of a dispute or other points of views from other

sources. If the reporter has to ask a controversial question, he should use the **“blame-others” technique**: “Your opponent said that you did not win fairly. How do you respond?”

- f. **Control the Interview:** if the news gatherer’s source rambles or prolongs an answer and he wants to move the interview in another direction, he shouldn’t interrupt. He should wait for a natural pause and ask his next question, using follow-up question techniques.
- g. **Repeat question:** Let’s say the reporter has asked an important or sensitive question, and the source has given him an evasive or incomplete answer. What should he do? The best tactic is to drop the question and continue the interview. After he has discussed a few other points, he should repeat the question he wants answered, but state it in a slightly different way. Sometimes, a source will recall more the second time the question is raised.
- h. **Ask background questions:** The news gatherer should get the history of the issue, if applicable. How and when did the programme or problem start? Why?
- i. **Ask about developments:** The reporter should go from the present to the past and to the future. What are the current concerns and developments? How did the issue evolve? What is likely to happen in the future? The answer to the question about the future may provide the news gatherer with a good ending for his story. In some cases, it may give him a lead and a new focus for his story. The next step in an action is often the most newsworthy angle. Many newspapers, broadcasters and online producers prefer this approach, which is called **“advancing the story”** (Rich, 2010 p. 119). Because the reporter may have to post his story immediately for the Web, he will need to update the news anyway for his next broadcast or newspaper edition.
- j. **Construct a chronology:** This tip is somewhat related to the previous point. When appropriate, the reporter should ask questions to establish a sequence of events. He doesn’t need to write the story in chronological order, but he needs to understand the order in which events occurred.
- k. **Role play:** If the reporter were in the reader’s place, how would he use the information? For example, if the reporter needed to apply for a loan, what steps would he have to take, and where would he go? What does the reader need and want to know?
- l. **Ask about pros and cons:** The news gatherer should ask his source to discuss both sides of an issue, when relevant. Who agrees and disagrees with his point of view? What are his responses to the opposition?
- m. **Ask for definitions:** The reporter’s job is to translate jargon for readers. Crump (2014) confirms this position when he explains that journalistic writing is a form of expression that seeks to interpret a group of facts frequently highly technical or confusing for the understanding of the reading audience. Therefore, readers, viewers and listeners should not have to strain or struggle to understand what is published or broadcast. Accordingly, the reporter should always get his source to define any bureaucratic or technical terms in a language that the reporter cannot explain. To clarify, the news gatherer might re-state the information in his own words and ask the source if he (the reporter) has the correct interpretation. For example, the reporter might ask, “Do you mean that...?” or “Are you saying that...?”

- n. **Use the silent treatment:** The reporter should pause between questions to let the source elaborate. If the pause seems uncomfortable, the source may break the silence first. One reporter was writing a profile of a nun. He asked her if she missed having a sex life and how she coped without one. She gave a brief, expected answer that she had made a conscious choice of abstinence when she took vows of celibacy. The reporter was disappointed with the answer. He said nothing. She said nothing. For several seconds, they just sat in silence. Both were slightly uncomfortable. Then she broke the silence and began elaborating about how difficult celibacy was for her at times. From this narration, it becomes clear that sometimes, the best follow-up question is no question. -
- o. **Use the “Blame others” Technique:** When the reporter has to ask tough questions, he should blame someone else: “Your opponents said you cheated on your income taxes. How would you respond to that?” Reporters and editors have mixed feelings about warning the source that a tough question is coming. A reporter should not do it, they say, in confrontational interviews when the newsman is trying to get a source to reveal information that could be damaging. It puts the source on notice and gives him a few seconds to become defensive and evasive. But, according to Rich (2010), the reporter may warn the source or apologise if it is going to be a tough, emotional question, especially if he is interviewing grieving people. In this case, the news gatherer tells sources that he will ask tough questions, but they don’t have to answer them. But he will try to convince them to do so.
- p. **Handle emotional questions with tact:** Emotional questions can be difficult. The newsman should ask his source to recall how he was thinking or feeling at the time of an incident. “Were you frightened when the train lost power? What were you thinking at the time?” The reporter should avoid insensitive questions. “How do you feel about the death of your three children?”, is an insensitive question. Instead of asking such an emotionally-loaded question, the reporter should ask the person to recall specific memories about his children, or ask how the person is coping with the tragedy.
- q. **Ask summary questions:** The newsman should re-state information or ask the source to clarify the key points – for example: “Of all the goals you have expressed, which would you say are the most important to you? What do you think are the tree major issues you face?”
- r. **Use the “Matchmaker” Technique:** Here, the reporter should ask if anyone else is involved in the issue, or if there are other people the source would suggest the reporter contact. The news gatherer should remember that he will want more than one source for his story so that he can strive for fairness and balance.

At this juncture, let’s turn our attention to the concept of **off-the record**. An interviewee may tell a journalist that something is “off-the-record”, meaning that the reporter should not attribute the information to him (Harcup, 2012, p. 135). That does not mean that the news gatherer cannot include the information in an unattributed form. The reporter should check exactly what information the interviewee is referring to. The interviewee may have a good reason – perhaps he might lose his job for criticizing his employer in public – or he may be feeling paranoid with little justification. As the interview continues, the source may begin to trust the reporter more, and so the reporter could try suggesting that something said earlier **off-the-record** might be restored to **on-the-record**. But if the news gatherer breaks his word, having agreed to something being **off-the-record**, then he will have betrayed the source.

Confusion arises if an interviewee assumes that a reporter will treat something as **off-the-record** without making it explicit, as when a politician stretched out his hand over a reporter’s tape recorder, in Britain, when he passed on some gossip about the Prime Minister’s wife during an interview about the health service. His comment was included in the subsequent article, causing outrage in Downing Street,

the official residence of the British Prime Minister. According to Harcup (2012), such an agreement cannot be imposed unilaterally by the source, and it certainly cannot be made retrospective by adding: “Of course, everything I have said must be off-the-record”. Harcup (2012) contends that in such circumstances, the journalist may choose to agree, but it remains a choice.

People may say things that, with hindsight, they wish they had kept to themselves. A reporter who combines a conventional tone with a keen news sense will sometimes be “lucky” enough to catch an interviewee in just such a mood.

#### **4. Verifying the Information obtained:**

According to Dodge and Viner (2013), this is the last phase of the interview – checking all the information/facts captured through the reporter’s questions. The news gatherer validates or authenticates the facts collected by using such statements as:

- Will I be reflecting your opinion on President Buhari by saying...
- Here is what I have in my note on your statement about the 2019 Presidential elections.
- I will like to quote you on your philosophy of life: “The core of my belief about living is that life is all about service to God and service to mankind”.
- Am I correct in saying you were born on October 29, 1960 in Soba, Kaduna State?
- Do I have these figures correct? – you have three wives and 15 children.

The reporter must certify his vital pieces of information. In this connection, he asks questions even if he knows the answers, because he needs to quote or attribute information to his source, not himself. The news gatherer checks the spelling of his source’s name – first and last names and middle initial. He also crosschecks the person’s title and dates of birth and of crucial events. He also confirms the accuracy of information on a resume or a news release. The reporter doesn’t have to repeat everything, but he should ask the source if the information released is correct. Then, he should ask some questions that expand on the basic information. For example, if the news gatherer is interviewing a prominent president of a strong civil rights organization, he might ask, “Have you ever been involved in injustice, or have you ever been a victim of injustice?” Such a question may not be as insensitive as it seems because many people get involved with causes after they have had a personal experience with the problem.

Also, the reporter should remember that if the source tells him something about another person, he must check it out with that person. Additionally, he should ask **Free-Choice questions**. In other words, the newsman should ask the source or interviewee if there is anything he would like to add. Sometimes, this is even the most important question to ask.

When the reporter has fully exhausted his questions, he should thank the interviewee for sparing his time for him, and as he packs his gadgets, he should continue to make small talks. Sometimes, the interviewee may say something at that time that is more significant than all he has said before. Before the news gatherer takes his leave, he could let the interviewee know that he may call him up again if he has issues for further clarifications. This is important because sometimes, in the course of writing his story, he may discover some gaps which he will need to fill up. At this point, the reporter could also ask for another way to reach the source, such as an e-mail.

At this point, the reporter should prepare to leave. He should not linger and bore the interviewee, because he may avoid him in future. At home or in the office, the newsman should organize his material and write his hard news (straight news) or soft news (personality profile feature) as soon as possible. He will write a better story/feature when the atmosphere of the interview is fresh in his mind.

From the discussion so far, it is clear that an important factor leading to a successful interview is that old Boy Scout motto: Be Prepared.

First, the news gatherer needs to consider his mission: he is a reporter, not a stenographer who just receives information and transcribes it. A reporter evaluates information for its accuracy, fairness, newsworthiness and potential to make a readable story. During the reporting process, he will look for facts, good quotes, substantiation and answers to the Five W<sup>s</sup> – Who? What? When? Where? Why? – and also “How?” and “So What?”. One question should lead to another until the newsman has the information he needs.

Furthermore, an interview with one source is just the beginning of reporting for most stories. For credibility and fairness, he needs other sources – human and written – for differing points of views and accuracy checks.

## **E. Conclusion**

We live in a world of confusion and complexity. And journalists must unravel difficult world situations for the comprehension of readers, listeners and viewers, who are constantly seeking for not only information but understanding and interpretation. In this connection, reporters through their interviews, and subsequent compelling reports, influence the thoughts of readers, listeners and viewers, and even drive them to action. Thus newsmen provide important societal function, bringing news, opinions and information to a concerned and interested public. And from this investigation, it has been shown that the personality interview is a significant tool in the news gathering business. Even in these days of Computer-Assisted-Reporting (CAR), interviewers (reporters) cannot be replaced by computers, even though sub-editors, proofreaders and graphic designers have been reduced or replaced by computers.

Thus the personality interview is an important instrument used by indispensable reporters to obtain irresistible information. The findings, in this research, show that conducting the personality interview requires proper planning and execution in stages. It is fun to have it, although it requires all the ingenuity of the reporter to make his subject talk and reveal himself. In the circumstances, preparation on the part of the reporter is essential. The news hunter who goes to such an interview unprepared can hardly expect to get a good copy. Preparation involves a lot of home work and reading up.

## **F. Recommendations**

Sequel to the findings of this investigation, the following six recommendations are hereby proffered:

1. The reporter should carefully choose the eminent person to be interviewed, making sure he will be interesting and important to readers because of his attractive story, being a role model
2. News gatherers should be comfortable speaking to all sorts of people, from presidents to peasants, from millionaires to the homeless.
3. It is good to approach the personality to be interviewed through a third party ----- a public relations department (if he is a top executive), through some other person who is well-known to the executive/prominent person ----- and tell him that it will be good for him to give the interview.
4. As a matter of courtesy, the place of the personality profile interview should be the office or residence of the interviewee. The reporter should not ask the personality to see him, unless he ( the interviewee) wants it the other way round.
5. The advance preparation or home work that the reporter should do before the interview takes place is in two parts ----- reading about the subject (personality) concerned and preparing questions to be asked. Reporters who do not prepare questions usually run out of questions. The questions should be framed with care, to achieve specificity and clarity.
6. The closing of a personality profile interview is as important as the beginning. Accordingly, the end should be smooth and meaningful. The reporter should not take more time than he has been given (one hour, to, one- and-half hours), unless he feels that the personality is also keen on continuing the

interview. If he has not completed his objective, and enough questions remain unanswered, then the reporter may ask for another session or sitting.

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