

MASS MEDIA EVOLUTION AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian media has actively promoted democratic values since the country's independence in 1960. This has been achieved through critical analysis of successive administrations- civilian and military, mobilization and education of the citizens to support democratic ideals, preventing corruption, and holding public servants accountable to the public. Notwithstanding the media's optimal attempts to promote democracy, there are still difficulties, including discrimination based on ethnicity, a lack of contemporary communication technologies, pressure from government and interest groups, ownership issues, corruption, poor welfare, and security concerns. For the media to effectively contribute to the stability of democracy, they need to uphold professional ideals and address unethical practices within the industry. The government also supports the media by creating a favourable environment for the mass media to work without interference. This article assesses the evolutionary development of mass media in Nigeria. The functions and duties of the mass media in connection to Nigeria's political structure are discussed in this paper. This paper adopts a doctrinal research methodology by assessing qualitative research materials and subjecting the same to descriptive content analysis. Among other reflections, this paper proposes that to effectively perform its role in consolidating democracy, and changes need to be made to Nigeria's political framework and mass media culture as the country's fourth estate.

Keywords: Mass Media, Politics, Nigeria, Evolution, Democracy.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the media is vital in developing politics, governance, and democracy, both in Nigeria and globally. The media provide the communication necessary for effective management and contribute to attaining political goals. The media also serve as the source of information and education for the public, helping them to make informed decisions during elections and holding those in power accountable (Aliede and Ogodo2018, 196). However, the media can also contribute to public cynicism and democratic decay by engaging in sensationalism and dividing the public rather than fostering consensus and sober debate (Uche 1999, 41). The media's role in Nigeria's struggle for independence and the formation of public opinion has existed and is been acknowledged since the 17th century (Aliede and Ogodo, 2018, 196).

There have been varying opinions about the influence of the media on how public opinion and attitudes are formed. Many communication scholars believe that Nigerian politics and the media are interconnected, with the media often viewed as the driving force of politics (Onwumah 2015, 75). However, the nature of this relationship has not been thoroughly examined, and there is a lack of research on how politics affects the media. In communication studies, the focus is on the role of the media in supporting vibrant, people-centered politics rather than on the role of politics in supporting a vibrant press.

During the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria, political apathy and voter education emerged, and the media was criticized for not adequately mobilizing voters. However, the media has also faced challenges, including government actions that have been perceived as unfriendly towards the press, such as the illegal amendment of the National Broadcasting Code to impose a fine of N5m for "hate speech" (Bappayo, Abubakar, and Kirfi2021, 103). This research paper examines the prevailing relationship between politics and the media in Nigeria, using qualitative research methods to analyze available secondary data on the subject.

EVOLUTION OF MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

The early press (1800–1920), the nationalist press (1929–1960), and the modern press (1960–present) are some of the pivotal eras in the development of Nigeria's mass media. The Missionary efforts of Reverend Henry Townsend, who, in 1859, founded the first newspaper, *Iwe Irohin*, in Abeokuta influenced the early press. The newspaper aimed to spread Christianity and educate the Yoruba community on social, economic, and cultural issues. The growth of the media was also supported by increased literacy and the interest of African intellectuals in social, political, and economic matters. The establishment of *Iwe Irohin* marked the beginning of mass media in Nigeria and sparked political awareness and revival among the Egba people. Despite its success, the newspaper closed in 1867 due to political and cultural conflicts with European settlers. Later, in 1863, the *Anglo-African*, a weekly journal, was published in Lagos, becoming the first daily newspaper in the country. The newspaper was owned and edited by an African, John Payne Jackson, and aimed to educate and inform the public on issues such as colonial policies and human rights. The newspaper closed in 1864 due to financial problems.

The history of journalism in Nigeria dates back to the late 19th century, when the first newspaper, *Iwe Irohin*, was published in Lagos in 1882. The *Mirror* followed this newspaper in 1887 and several others in the following decades, including the *Weekly Record*, the *Lagos Standard*, and the *Nigerian Chronicle*. These newspapers often took an anti-colonial stance and sought to challenge the British colonial administration in Nigeria. In the post-World War II period, the newspaper industry in Nigeria became more popular, and the media became more nationalist in their views (Chioma 2014, 6).

The early days of broadcast media in Nigeria were marked by the establishment of the Western Nigeria Broadcasting

Corporation and the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation during the nation's independence phase (Njoku, Tornero, and Manuel 2019, 11). Before independence, the press played a significant role in opposing the colonial government, but following independence in 1960, the media faced challenges such as government censorship and media ownership by politicians (Chioma 2014, 12). In the 21st century, Nigeria's media landscape has developed further due to the emergence of digital media and the effects of social media on traditional journalism.

A mix of developments in the media industry in Nigeria marked the 1980s and 1990s. The 1980s saw the emergence of new publications such as the Guardian and Vanguard Daily Newspaper, as well as the return of military rule and accompanying restrictions on freedom of the press. This period also saw the assassination of journalist Dele Giwa, whose killers have never been found (Akeem et al. 2013, 13). The 1990s saw the rise of investigative and advocacy journalism through weekly news titles like Tell, The News, and Tempo, which exposed the abuses of the military governments led by Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. These publications faced crackdowns, including arrests, harassment of journalists, and the closure and seizure of their publications by the military (Ibid, 2013).

The 1990s also saw the liberalization of the electronic media sector, allowing private individuals to own and operate their stations, including Raypower Radio, African Independent Television, Channels News, and Silverbird Television (Okon 2021, 265). The return of democracy in 1999 led to the proliferation of print media and a decline in the quality of media output due to a lack of investment in training and resources (Ibid, 26). The mainstreaming of the internet and new technologies in the 21st century has transformed the media landscape. Still, the industry in Nigeria has struggled to adapt and has faced challenges such as fake news and limited access to information.

MASS MEDIA AND ITS ROLE IN NIGERIA POLITICS

The media, especially in the years before independence, played an important role in Nigeria's political evolution, as when nationalists used it to fight against colonial rule. The growth and development of the mass media in Nigeria are closely linked to the country's political changes and development. The print media, in particular, has struggled for centuries to gain the right to write and express oneself and criticize and report on events. The media, especially newspapers, are meant to inform and educate the public and serve as a watchdog for society.

However, some writers have criticized the lack of accurate information in the mass media in Nigeria (Ende, 2013). Politicians and government officials have also used the media to promote their interests and propaganda. Political development

involves addressing problems within the political system, such as legitimacy, crisis, participation, identity, distribution, and integration (Uche, 1999). The mass media is significantly involved in creating institutions to address these problems and the ability to manage and solve issues dynamically. The media is responsible for pursuing justice, fairness, and equity for society and should strive to maintain a balanced relationship with the public.

The public is well-informed about current events and topics through the mass media. In addition to reporting on public opinion surveys conducted by outside organizations, the press also increasingly conducts its polls and incorporates the results into its news coverage. However, the media's influence goes beyond just presenting information. Newspapers and television also can shape public opinion on important issues. Research has demonstrated that the media can influence people's positions on critical issues, particularly when they present a range of viewpoints and provide thorough analysis (McQuail, 2005). This is especially true for issues that are highly debated and have multiple sides to them. Overall, the media has the power to not only inform the public, but also shape their opinions and attitudes on essential issues.

The mass media in Nigeria serves as a source of up-to-date information for the general public and contributes to holding the government accountable. The media watches over the government and society to ensure they meet the expected responsibility and accountability standards (Dominick, 2009). They fulfill their duty to the people by reminding the government to fulfill its promises and responsibilities. The media also investigates and reports on corruption cases, such as the Lawan-Otedola bribery scandal and the Patricia Etteh misappropriation crime (Bappayo, Abubakar, and Kirfi 2021, 105). In performing these functions, the media helps reduce uncertainty and encourage rational reactions to conflicts and environmental changes. The media's surveillance function involves monitoring the environment and reporting to the public. In contrast, the watchdog function ensures that the government and other public agencies act within the boundaries of the law.

The media is critical in influencing public opinion and encouraging people to work toward the common good by promoting specific goals and stimulating action to achieve them. This is especially important in countries with low literacy rates, as it allows people to formulate policies and make informed decisions (McQuail, 2005). The media can also mobilize the public to protest against negative policies put in place by the government. This was demonstrated in 2006 when the press helped galvanize opposition to former President Olusegun Obasanjo's push for a third term in office (Bappayo, Abubakar, and Kirfi 2021, 107). Overall, the media serves as a reminder of people's rights and helps them advocate for them.

The media's agenda-setting role helps to ensure that critical national issues remain a topic of discussion until informed decisions are made. This role is based on Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's Agenda-Setting theory in 1972, which suggests that the media does not simply reflect reality but filters and shapes it. Additionally, the

public may perceive some topics as more critical than others because of the media's emphasis on those issues. This idea is supported by Cohen's observation in 1963 that the media is effective at influencing what people think about, even if it is not always successful at telling them what to think. In the context of the Nigerian general elections, the media's coverage of issues related to security and the readiness of the country's electoral body allowed Nigerians to make informed decisions about the elections by highlighting these as key factors that could impact their outcome (Bappayo, Abubakar, and Kirfi 2021, 106).

CHALLENGES FACING THE MEDIA IN NIGERIA'S POLITICS

The Nigerian mass media has experienced successes and failures from the First Republic. This is due to the various obstacles and pressures the media has faced to support and strengthen democracy in Nigeria. These pressures have come from multiple sources, including government, interest groups, political parties, and the general public, and have often led to the media being forced to take sides in its reporting to promote the interests of a specific party or organization. In line with Ogbu (2013), these problems have created an inhospitable environment for professional and effective media practice, with mass media practitioners needing more independence. Ende (2013), citing Adesoji (2010), notes that the Nigerian media's alignment with politics and its ownership and control by external forces have influenced its behaviour, perception, and attitude, rendering it unchanged despite modernizing attempts. This is particularly evident in government-owned media establishments, where biased reporting, spin, and partisanship have become standard practices.

A related issue is the need for a careful and impartial investigation into problems and issues, particularly those involving the government. Ojo (2015) notes that a study sponsored by the UNDP on coverage of the general elections in 2011 by the media found that the media's coverage was not issue-based. Additionally, the press demonstrated a lack of investigative journalism and frequently failed to distinguish between incumbent public officials, such as governors, official and political activities. Government-owned media in particular, often violated the guidelines of Nigeria's political broadcasting laws, the professional code of ethics, and the Electoral Act. Candidates from opposing parties, for instance, have expressed dissatisfaction with the state government broadcast stations for rarely airing the opposition party's political jingles and advertising on their radio and television stations. Despite complaints being made about this backdrop to the regulatory authority in charge of regulating such operations, more needs to be done. This disregard for democratic ideas and principles hampers the growth of a democratic culture.

The Nigerian media is now struggling with issues related to ethnicity. The journalism profession in Nigeria has been and is still being challenged by race, according to Okpeh (2005). This challenges journalists since it compromises their professional ethics and sense of moral and social duty. In Nigeria, the issue of ethnicity

has a long history, as can be seen by examining the development of the media industry. Okpeh (2005) refers to ethnicity as an "axis question" and the "North/South dichotomy," which puts the interests of ethnic groups ahead of those of the country. According to Galadima and Enighe (2001), there were geopolitical splits within the press during the first republic since the mass media was not unified and showed tribal and regional biases in reporting national events. Jibo (2003), referenced in Iwokwagh (2011), notes that the Nigerian media frequently takes a North versus South stance on a national issue while it is being discussed in public. He also mentions how race has been used, particularly recently, to defend the excessive actions of the government.

Additionally, present security issues in Nigeria pose a severe threat to the country's democracy and the practice of journalism. Particularly aggravating this are the insurgency's actions, including those of the Boko Haram group. On multiple occasions, the group has sent warnings to media organizations and journalists nationwide. For instance, a suicide explosion at the Abuja headquarters of the ThisDay newspaper on April 26, 2012, resulted in two fatalities and thirteen injuries, including a 12-year-old child. Shortly after this attack, another bomb blast occurred in Kaduna, this time affecting the offices of the newspapers

ThisDay, The Moment, and The Sun. If the government does not take action, these attacks could impede the free flow of information in society and threaten the press's fundamental duty to report and gather news for the general public.

Another element that has had a considerable impact on Nigeria's mass media operations and threatens to undermine democracy is corruption. Corruption has reportedly made it more difficult for the media in Nigeria to promote social engineering effectively. The issue of corruption among media practitioners is one of the ongoing issues that media practice faces in the context of Nigerian democracy. According to Alemoh (2011), journalists in Nigeria have been charged with bribery, corruption, and other unethical practices while reporting regularly. It is common for journalists to request "brown envelopes" after completing assignments, and some even sacrifice the ethics of their profession through unscrupulous practices such as bribery and lying to the public to enhance a political figure's reputation.

Last but not least, it is important to note that many Nigerian media outlets need more modern communication tools. Instead, information dissemination still relies on old-fashioned hardware and software, making it difficult for Nigeria to meet the deadline for digital transmission. This is mainly due to the government's unwillingness to modernize the media sector and the prevalence of corruption. Okpeh (2005) observes that Nigerian journalists frequently use equipment from several decades ago in a globalized environment with competition to benefit from information technology advancements. The sad development has severely influenced the media's ability to enlighten the Nigerian people.

REJIGGERING THE MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA'S POLITICS

Establishing complete autonomy for the media is essential, as this will ensure a free and independent press, enabling it to function without interference or coercion from external forces. The autonomy of the press is essential because it allows journalists to report on political events and issues objectively and without fear of reprisal (Alemoh and Ukwela, 23). It also allows the media to hold political leaders accountable for their actions and decisions and to check the state's power. Autonomy of the press is a cornerstone of a functioning democracy and is necessary for the free exchange of ideas and the promotion of transparency and accountability in government.

The independence of the media is crucial for effective and purposeful political mobilization. In the researcher's opinion, media independence can significantly contribute to the fair and accurate dissemination of information to the general public. When the media is independent, it can objectively report on political events and issues without fear of reprisal. This allows the media to check the state's power and hold political leaders accountable for their actions and decisions. Media independence is also essential for freely exchanging ideas and promoting transparency and accountability in government. By operating with autonomy, the media can better serve the general public's needs and interests and contribute to society's overall well-being.

It is crucial to provide media professionals and journalists with adequate remuneration to do their jobs as effectively as possible. Fair compensation can serve as a motivation for media professionals and help to boost their morale.

When adequately remunerated, media workers and journalists are more likely to be committed to their work and motivated to provide top-quality content for public consumption. It is also essential to recognize that media work can be stressful and demanding, and providing appropriate compensation can help to alleviate some of these challenges and encourage media professionals to continue to perform their duties effectively. In short, adequate remuneration is important in promoting the wellbeing and effectiveness of media workers and journalists.

Self-regulation is critical to protect professional values and promote confidence in the Nigerian media. This can involve being open to professional censure and taking steps to ensure that their reporting is accurate and unbiased. To further enhance the quality and credibility of their work, media houses should consider strengthening their quality control units with knowledgeable and experienced editorial staff. This helps ensure that media content is accurate and meets professional standards. By adopting self-regulation and prioritizing quality control, journalists and media houses can demonstrate their commitment to upholding professional values and maintaining the trust of their audiences.

CONCLUSION

In the almanac of Nigeria's struggle for independence and constitutional democracy, the Nigerian media has made significant progress. The roles of the government and the media cannot be dissociated as they both work to further the general population's wellbeing. As a result, they ought to cooperate and get along well with each other. It is suggested that the government should take the initiative to safeguard press freedoms, improve media accountability, expand media capacity, and democratize access to the media, as doing so will support the media's vitality and efforts to advance democracy and political growth in Nigeria. By encouraging the media's independence, financial viability, and freedom from political influence – all necessary for an enabling environment for media institutions to thrive – the press will be better poised to promote a more profound democratic culture in Nigeria.

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