
Mass Media, Press Freedom and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2019)

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ABSTRACT: *The paper sets out to evaluate and appraise the roles of mass media and press freedom in the process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2019); and the nexus between mass media, press freedom and democracy. In addition, the paper discusses the conceptual meaning of mass media, press freedom, democracy and democratic consolidation. The paper also identifies the factors acting as constraints to the effectiveness of the print and electronic media in ensuring democratic consolidation. The data for this study were collected through secondary sources. The secondary data were retrieved from textbooks, journals, newspapers, internet materials and literatures from academic journals in relation to the subject studied. The study adopted social responsibility theory of the press and Agenda Setting theory as a theoretical framework. Findings revealed the need for the autonomy of the mass media as a needed instrument for the stability of the democratic process. The paper observes that the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria depends on several factors, some of which are located within the media itself while others are based on the prevailing political, socio-economic, legal, infrastructural, cultural and religious environment of the country. The paper concludes that the role of mass media and press freedom is facilitative, supportive and integrative to Nigeria democratic consolidation. To achieve greater media effectiveness in promoting democratic ideals and governance in Nigeria, there is need for private sector partnership and involvement of civil society organizations in media ownership in order to achieve a balance.*

KEYWORDS: Press Freedom, Mass Media, Democracy, Democratisation, Consolidation

INTRODUCTION

The mass media have been described as the fourth estate of the realm, that is after the executive, legislative and the judiciary arms of government in any democratic society in the contemporary

world. One form of government that continues to enjoy widespread support and acceptance is democracy (Mc-Quail, 2008). With no doubt the mass media and press freedom played varying roles and still playing it in this noble area of strengthening the democratic process. Suarez (2008) stated that in a democratic environment, the role of the press (mass media) extends beyond these basic functions. The center for democracy and governance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 1999) gives reasons why press freedom is essential in democracy. Therefore, the available or access to information is essential to the health of democracy. The mass media is responsible for sustaining and nourishing the ideals of individuals and that of the media itself which is the heart of popular participation in liberal democracies (Isola, 2008).

According to Andrew (2010), the print media include newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, direct mail circulars, billboards, sky writing and any technical device that carries a message to the masses by appealing their sense of sight. While the electronic media include radio and audio recordings that appeal to the sense of sound as well as television which is described as motion pictures and video recording that appeal to both the sense of sound and the sense of sight. The latest entrants into the world of electronic media are the E-mail and the internet systems, which are also in a way communicating to the mass of the people (Sadeeq, 2010).

Mass media, press freedom and democracy are soul mates. One cannot do without the other, democracy create an avenue and platform for the media to strive, while the media is a basic instrument for democracy to be sustained and nurtured (Asekome, 2008). Therefore, press constitute the brain box of democracy. The media help in the supply of the required political information that electorates would base their decision. They are the watchdogs for uncovering errors and wrongdoing by those in power (Fog, 2004; Kellner, 2004). It is only a democratic environment that can foster the best of mass media. Just as democracy itself can never take root nor be nurtured in an atmosphere inimical to the provision of alternative choice which mass media (journalism) promotes.

The morning of Saturday 29th May, 1999 saw Nigeria return to another experiment of democratic norms and institutions with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo sworn as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigeria Armed Forces. Ever since, the polity has been awashed with different policies, strategies and programmes aimed at consolidating the process that entrench the values of democracy into the system and laying a solid foundation for its sustainability.

The Nigeria media landscape has shown significant shifts and tremendous expansion in the number of press organisations as democratic dispensations have replaced dictatorial regimes (Karikari, 2004). The transition in Nigeria from military to civilian administration since 1999 resulted in an increase in the number of press organisations. There were two government-controlled television broadcasting stations, fourteen licensed private television stations, eighty-two AM radio stations, thirty-five FM stations and eleven short-wave stations in Nigeria as of

1999 (Hudgens and Trillo 1999). Today, the narrative in media industry have changed tremendously.

The section 22 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, specifically assigns a noble role to the mass media within the democratic setting. The print and electronic media (press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media) shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this section and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government of the people. (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Amended, 2019).

Meanwhile, there is a growing concern that the mass media are not fulfilling some functions properly to enhance democratic ideals. Becker and Raveloson (2008) observed that commercial mass media controlled by a few multinational conglomerates have become antidemocratic forces supporting elements of capitalism to further pauperize the masses, even when they disseminate news, the news is more of entertainment than information and education; they rather the mass media prefer to broadcast sensational news such as sex, violence, fashion and the likes. The political news they broadcast are more about personalities than about political ideologies. Therefore, there is the absence of serious debate where voters are left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans making them disinterested and cynical about politics (Bandura, 2002).

The impression that the press is an essential factor in the democratic atmosphere (Merrill 1974) has been reflected in the interplay between the different cultural and ideological forces affecting press freedom in Nigeria. The prevailing political system in Nigeria determines the scope of press freedom. Conversely, democracy has opened up spaces for the survival of press organisations across the world (Abati, 1998). Nigeria is not yet a free and open society despite the availability of diverse viewpoints flowing from a remarkable abundance of press organizations in the country. However, several press organizations in Nigeria lack complete freedom due to censorship, multiple power centres and volatile political institutions (Agbaje 2002). In spite of the proliferation of press organisations, constitutional provisions for press freedom have not been fully enforced. There are tales of government officials and elected representatives of the people deliberately embarking on actions that serve as obstacles to the mass media thereby preventing it from being able to play its constitutional roles effectively.

Conceptual Clarification

Mass Media

Globally, there seems to be a discussion of varying degrees on what really constitute the mass media what is however worthy to point as the comparison of the terms. The Africa Leadership Forum (1991) described the press as too restrictive and therefore opted for a broader label and that is the mass media, and this seem considerable a definition of what constitute the mass media as newspapers, journals, magazines, radio, television, music, drama, town-crier and other news agencies among other form points of the Mass media. According to the Africa Leadership Forum through their publication firm House Dialogue, the mass media in

Democracy (1991) refers to any agency modern or traditional that operates for the articulation and dissemination of ideas and information, generally with intent to influence or control the audience or the institutions that constitute legalized power and authority. Nevertheless, there seem to have been a restriction in the use of the term mass media, as it is often associated with radio, television, newspaper and magazines as sources of news, entertainment, education, public information, advocacy and dialogue and functions as a mirror (Department for International Development, DFID, 2003). But the African leadership forum's conception as stated above shows that the mass media extend beyond these. This is also reflected or showcased by the drafters of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in section 22 and in assigning a role for the mass media.

The United State Agency for International Development (USAID) also offered a broad conception of the mass media as methods of communication that reach large groups of people quickly and effectively. Such methods of communication can include radio, television, newspaper, magazines, music, traditional theatre, advertising, marketing and publicity.

Press Freedom

Press Freedom refers to media practice without restriction by law and government regulations. Such media practice therefore must follow the ethics of the media profession. The freedom of the press according to Ogunsiji (2008) means allowing the press to perform its traditional role of keeping the masses informed about events taking place within or outside their immediate community without any hindrance harassment or legal and social constraints.

Accordingly, press freedom is the fundamental principle and standard that communication and expression through various media, it involves electronic and printed media, mostly published documents are considered a right to be used freely. Subsequently, these freedoms entail the absence of interference from an overreaching state; its preservation through the state constitution or other legal protection and security.

The United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedoms to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers".

Democracy

Democracy is popularly conceptualized as government of the people, by the people and for the people. As a concept, its definition has problem of homogeneity. It is often being used in an ambiguous and inconsistent way, such that it means different things to different people; in different contents (Ojo, 2006). The concept can better be examined from two points of view; that is, as ideology and as politics (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992). Democracy as an ideology is the philosophy of governance which sets a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizens, the rule of law, the right to property, the free flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions. On the other hand, democracy as politics is concerned with the institutions and processes of governance that tend

to foster consensus whilst simultaneously promoting and sustaining respect for its ideology (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992). However, democracy as conceived in the West may present an ideology that has problems for developing countries in Africa and other developing countries (Diamond, 2008).

As Nwabueze (1993) observed, “western democracy places people into artificial antagonistic boxes, turn friends into enemies and aims at arousing unnecessary competition”. He maintains that democratization is not only a concept, nor is it synonymous with multipartyism but a concept concerned with conditions of things, conditions such as a virile society, a democratic society, a free society, a just society, equal treatment for all citizens by the state, an ordered, stable society, a society infused with the spirit of liberty, democracy, justice and equality. Although many definitions have been given but there is no agreement on definition. Democracy means only the people have the opportunity of accepting refusing the men who are to govern them. By this, democracy implies conducting elections and choosing leaders that will represent the majority.

Democratic consolidation

This implies a democracy that can stand the test of time. This can be assured if those values that make democracy worthwhile are fully institutionalized. Diamond (2008) stated that democracy becomes sustainable when there is credible opposition capable of replacing an incumbent government by offering an alternative outline of politics and strategies that is likely to appeal to the electorate.

The Nexus between Mass Media, Press Freedom and Democracy

It is an indisputable fact that the mass media is the watchdog of any society. It is in line with this enormous responsibility that the Nigeria Constitution (1999) in Chapter IV, Section 39, Sub-section 2 like all modern constitutions across the globe, provided that people be free to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions. Over and above this provision, however, the 1999 Constitution gives a charge in Chapter ii, Section 22 which categorically states that “the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government of the people”. It is based on these provisions that the mass media could monitor governance in a democracy.

Taken together, the mass media and democracy are inextricably linked. The Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM, 2007) clearly understands this link when it avers that modern democracy and the mass media are vital, indispensable link between those who govern and those who are governed. If the mass media do not inform the citizens thoroughly and impartially about government policies and their consequences as well as about the alternatives of government policy proposed by opposition parties and civil society, the people’s democratic choice is severally limited (Ugande, 2010). Umaru and Abdullahi (2012) equally confirm that the mass media are very important and centrally located in the lives of the people and the democratic process. They went further to establish that because of this centrality, the media

justifiably focus their attention and accord high priority to government programmes. Accordingly Ende (2013) cited Balkin (1998) argued that the mass media stimulate political transparency for “without the mass media”, openness and accountability is impossible in contemporary democracies. He further contend that transparency entails the assistance of the mass media give to citizens to understand the operations of government, participate in political decisions; and hold government accountable to the people.

In addition, Ojo (2015) pointed out that the media and political system” are involved in an intricate nexus of relationship, cooperation and complimentary activities, all geared at promoting individual and collective interest of the society”. He equally noted that in the performance of these roles, both estates exert considerable influence on one another. Not only do they exert considerable influence on each other, both the media and the political system work towards the same end in the society; ensuring good governance, providing a sense of direction and exercising control over the affairs of a state, protecting the rights of citizens and defending the rule of law.

The Emergence and Evolution of Press and Mass Media in Nigeria

According to Africa Leadership Forum (1991) efforts to disseminate ideas and information to exert influence in the African societies were perhaps as old as formal society. As noted by the Farm House Dialogue 15 of the media in democracy (1991), the ancient Yoruba kingdoms had many rulers overthrown by the collective dictions of the people mobilized by drummers and town criers. Similar events also took place in the northern parts of the country where Arabic writing had existed long before the British colonialists came. As a corollary, the first attempt recorded to formally use the mass media to influence society in the effort that eventually developed into Nigeria was by one Rev. Henry Townsend in 1859 in his publication of the “Iwe Ihorin”, the first newspaper in Nigeria (Dialogue 15 of Farm House Dialogue, 1991). The adversarial naturalist press begins in Nigeria after the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern protectorates in 1914 when colonial governance of Nigeria was affected from Sierra-Leon. The Anti-colonial crusading Sierra Leoneans, such as Richard Blaise came into Nigeria with the mindset of how to use the newspaper to mobilize the population against colonial rule.

The first truly Nigeria popular newspaper called the Daily News was founded by Herbert Macaulay. *The Daily News* articulated clear Nigerian position on many issues and was read by the literate minority of the elite in Lagos and its environs. The paper naturally became a major tool in the nationalist crusade. The West African Pilot founded in 1937 was the first mass circulated newspaper devoted to promoting serious broad-based anti-colonial crusade in Nigeria. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe started and founded the popular indigenous newspaper with readership of a national scope.

The West African Pilot founded in 1937 was later to serve as the mouth piece of the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC). The Nigerian Tribune was founded in Ibadan in 1949 to champion the cause of the Egbe-Omo Oduduwa and the Action Group, and the welfarism doctrine of its leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. *The Gaskiya Ta fi Kwabo* had been

set up in Zaria in the 1930s by the Colonial Development Corporation as a “Vernacular” newspaper to serve the needs of the Hausa-speaking groups in Northern Nigeria.

The Nigerian citizen came into bear by the 1940s while the *New Nigerian* emerged in Kaduna in 1966 as a newspaper owned by the Northern Nigerian government with a clear mandate to promote “northern” interest. The *West African Pilot* began the promotion of “Eastern” Nigerian interest when Zik emerged in the 1950 as the premier of the Eastern Region. Since then ownership became a crucial factor in determining the nationalist outlook of most newspaper. In 1980s the print media, especially the private newspaper with no clear political leaning. The emergence of the Punch newspaper in the 70's helped to fine tune the destabilizing role of the adversarial newspapers either affiliated to political parties or owned by government. The news magazines, and the soft-sell magazines, regarded by some people as the “Junk” press impacted a lot in the evolution of the mass media in Nigeria.

The news magazines were more analytical and they relied on researches that promoted investigative journalism. Examples of these news magazines were: the Afriscope, Newbreed, and Newswatch etc. They were able to cover a wide range of issues than mere reportorial (Farm House Dialogue 15, 1991).

On the aspect of the electronic media, it was clear from the onset that government, colonial or post colonial saw the electronic media essentially as a propaganda instrument. The evolution of the electronic media took off on an entirely different direction, first from the late 1940's when Redifussion services were first introduced especially on television. The ownership and control of these media was by government, this is because the government saw the electronic media with potentially wider reach, their ability to transcend the barriers of literacy and education and their important to national stability.

The News Agency as the network for the dissemination of news to other media houses came into being in the 1940s as “African News Agency by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe to service his chain of newspapers across the country but was limited in scope. The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) which in the true sense was meant to service the country emerged after the Nigeria Civil War with the motive of collecting and spreading information within and outside the country to enhance national stability. The NAN therefore has widened the horizon of the Nigeria press with its widely dispersed network of correspondents than any other medium. It has enhanced the reporting of world events to Nigeria and consequently reporting the developments of Nigeria to the world as well. (Farm House Dialogue 15, 1991).

Theoretical framework

The author uses the social responsibility theory of the press and Agenda setting theory as a theoretical framework for the analysis. The Social Responsibility theory which has its beginning from the Hutchins Commission of 1947. The Commission of Freedom of the press has one of its basic postulations that freedom carries a concomitant obligation. In it, the press is to be responsible to the society by carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication (Ojobor, 2002).

While the theory emphasizes the need for an independent press that scrutinizes other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news reports, the most innovative feature of social responsibility theory was the call for media to be responsible for fostering productive and creative great communities. The media is responsible to the society no doubt in its functions of reporting news. Here it infers again not just news as it is but truthful and objective representation of the society. Therefore, the press has the right to hold the government accountable to the people. The press does this through investigating and reporting to unearth hidden information about corruption in government activities. The basic assumption of the theory as stipulated by McQuail (2008) is a clarion call on the mass media to be guided by the principles of fairness objectivity and accuracy in working assiduously hard to ensure the stability and sustenance of democracy.

The agenda setting theory as a second construct for this study posit that “the media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society”. The mass media institution is seen as a responsible one for raising issues they consider vital, to the platform of public discourse and draw public attention to it. The media successfully do this through the quantity and frequency of reporting; prominence given to reports through headlines displays, pictures, adverts, layouts in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or prime timing on radio and television (Folarin, 1998, cited in Ojete, 2008). Through agenda setting the media monitor events and report to the members of the society. That is, the media are the “watch dog of the society”. Thus, the theory is relevant to the study because it lays emphasis on using the mass media to draw attention of the people to salient event that happen in our society, so that they will reflect such issues. The media can therefore be used to educate the audiences on the things happening in the society, so that they can reflect on them.

Role of Mass Media and Press Freedom in Consolidating Democracy in Nigeria

Much has been said by scholars across continents on the link between the mass media and democratic governance with a lot of emphasis on what ideally should be the role of the mass media in entrenching democratic value.

The media, throughout the history of Nigeria have always been in the forefront of the struggle to establish democracy in the country. Lending credence to this assertion, Obilade (1999) opined that the “press in Africa constitutes an active force in the realization of the goal of the evolution of sustainable democracy in the continent of Africa. The press in Africa is playing a prominent role in the democratization process in African states which have non-democratic governments”. Going back to the history of the country, during colonial period, it is an established fact that the media is the main agent with which the Nigerian nationalists used to struggle for independence, and by extension the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria.

Nigeria nationalist leaders like Chief Anthony Enahoro and Chief M.C.K. Ajuluchuku used their newspaper as veritable weapons to fight against and dethrone colonialism and establish an independent democratic Nigeria. The giant stride by the Nigerian media was carried all through to the first, second, third, and fourth republics respectively. Even during the periods of

military rule, Nigerian media fought gallantly for the restoration of democracy. This struggle culminated and usher the nation to a new era of the fourth republic in May 1999 with a former military head of state in the person of President Olusegun Obasanjo as the democratically elected leader of Nigeria.

As part of their constitutional role, the mass media are expected to mobilize the people to participate in the democratic process. This was aptly demonstrated by the Nigerian media during the period under review. For instance, immediately after the Abdulsalami Abubakar led government instituted the transition programme that usher in a new democratic government, the media swung into action by creating awareness on the electoral process. Massive voter's education was carried out by the media to enlighten Nigerians on the need to participate in the electoral process (Ciboh, 2010). For citizens to meaningfully participate in the democratic process, they need to depend on the mass media to help them define and sort out complexities and participate meaningfully in the democratic process as informed participants. The mass media are the most common source of information about elections in democracies and societies in transition around the world.

In all the elections held in the Nigeria Fourth Republic beginning from 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and the just concluded 2019 elections, the mass media gave a substantial coverage of the elections. Political programmes and articles on newspapers and magazines became a prominent feature before, during and after the elections. The mass media also covered electoral cases that were taken to court by several political candidates who were not satisfied with the outcome of the elections. In holding government accountable to the people, the Nigeria media through investigative and inquisitive journalism held so many politicians to account.

The media acts as a watchdog by uncovering political, economic and corporate corruption, alongside other forms of abuses of power or inept policies. This was exemplified in the series of senate gate scandals, budget paddling that were uncovered by the investigative prowess of the Nigerian media. Jibo and Okoosi-Simbine (2008) reported the speaker gate scandal that involved Alhaji Salihu Buhari, the first speaker of House of Representatives in the Obasanjo presidency. The News magazine professionally pursued the allegations of certificates forgery until Buhari was forced to resign and was subsequently tried and convicted for perjury.

On the protection of the fundamental human rights of the people, the Nigeria media fought vehemently well to ensure that those whose rights are violated are brought to face the wrath of the law. It is the duty of investigative journalists to search and uncover the truth regarding human rights abuses perpetrated by the government or its actors. Through investigative reporting, the journalist can uncover hidden facts in relation to human rights violations, since the public has the right to know the truth concerning happenings in the society. The mass media through their surveillance responsibility can monitor and report human rights violation. Through constant vigilance on infringement of human rights and by exposing police brutality and repression, the media would cause a significant members of the public to be aware of their fundamental human rights and seek justice when the need arise. For instance, toward the end of year 2020, the media were used to facilitate 'THE ENDSARS' protest in order to move

against security operatives brutality. During the ENDSARS protest about 18 journalists covering the nationwide protest were assaulted and brutalized by Nigeria Police (Punch, 2020). In addition, the Nigeria Tribune on Tuesday, 16th April, 2013 in its editorial captioned “still on police brutality” reported the killing of a pregnant woman in Akure, Ondo State, by a police man who had allegedly demanded a bribe from a commercial driver in whose vehicle the pregnant woman was killed. The punch newspaper on Wednesday 14th January, 2021 reported incident of police brutality that resulted to the killing of Akaniyere in May 2019. Reporting human rights abuses of this nature by the media will make the public know their rights and privileges as well as draw public attention to the issue. In year 2020, about 34 journalists were victims of assaults, including female journalists. The assaults took place in across the country, including in Lagos, Ondo, Osun, Abia, Anambra, Bauchi, Edo and Rivers States and in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (Bulakali, 2020).

One fundamental role of the mass media in a democracy is the formation and molding of public opinion. The mass media do this through setting agenda for public discussion. Ochonogor (2008) affirmed that for the mass media and press freedom to sustain democracy there must be agenda setting for public debate on topical political issues. This would create participatory democracy and thus go a long way to guide citizens to either accept or reject policies initiated by the government.

For instance, this was clearly exemplified during the third term debate of the former president Olusegun Obasanjo. The mass media through featured articles and broadcast, media programmes engaged Nigerians by educating them on the need to reject the president’s ambition to vie for another term in office. Through media campaign, the people resisted the move and the inordinate ambition of the president die a natural death. Furthermore, the mass media are the fulcrum of all forms of democracy. This submission is on the premise that in a democratic society, the media operate as the market place of ideas for political thought. They likewise ensure that the citizens are well informed about political process and developments in the society. In doing this, the media are generally engaged in political reporting. Political reporting is necessary for the sustenance of democracy where the system of check and balances is required for good governance and democratic sustainability. It affords the media the opportunity to provide an open forum for “legitimated interest groups” to participate in public affairs (Umaru & Abdullahi, 2012).

In order to keep the people current on political issues, the Nigeria media came up with series of political programmes to sensitize the people and awaken political consciousness in them. For example, the broadcast media design programmes like “Mr Governor Explains, Presidential Media Chat, political platform, inside the senate, Democracy today, Politics today and Radio Link, and a host of other political programmes fashion out to educate the citizens on political issues. These programmes have succeeded in creating awareness about government policies and programmes.

The major functions of the mass media while exercising the press freedom is to respect the report given through news casting, to interpret it, for setting agenda for government’s actions,

to serve as watchdog over government and other powerful institutions in the society and to take a more active role in public debate, have clearly demonstrated potency in a democratic setting. In any democratic polity, there must be a two-way communication flow that is from the government to the citizen and from the citizen to the government.

Therefore, the role of the mass media in any society is to inform, educate, interpret, entertain, enlighten, inform, persuade and mobilize the citizenry. The mass media are windows that enable us see beyond our immediate surroundings, interpreters that help the entire public make sense of experience, platforms or carriers that convey information, interactive communication that includes audience, feedback, sign posts that provide people with instructions.

The media as multipliers of the sources of knowledge, an institution that provides information daily, to aid the steady development of the citizens as well as other socio-economic and political organizations that operate within the country. The basic goal of the mass media (journalism) is to serve the society by informing the public, scrutinizing the way power is exercised. Stimulating democratic debates and in these ways aiding political, economic and socio-cultural development. The significant roles of the press in democracy include periodic civic education, election monitoring, reporting political activities and disseminating election results. To the extent to which a vibrant media environment affects citizens' engagement with their political system.

Problems and Challenges Confronting the Press Freedom and Mass Media in Promoting Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria Fourth Republic

Since the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, there have been no favourable political philosophy and ideology among the new leaders to promote egalitarian and democratic ideals among the populace. Consequently, the marriage between politics and the media was broken by ethnic loyalties. The unstable political and economic climate that prevailed in the current Nigeria fourth republic coupled with idiosyncratic media policies and laws by autocratic leaders have led to a divisive disloyal, psychopathic praise singing, conscienceless and downright corrupt mass media in Nigeria. As a result the politicians are able to use the media to remain in power rather than use it for mobilizing the people for national development. The study identified factors in the Nigeria environment which constraints the effectiveness of the press freedom and mass media in democratic consolidation of Nigeria fourth republic. These include the low level of infrastructural development and essential facilities, pattern of media ownership and control, unstable socio-economic and political conditions, low level of literacy and political education, ethnicity, parochialism, unfavourable legal environment and limited private sector involvement. Other factors include religious pluralism and military clampdown during periodic electoral process.

The prevalence of government owned media is acting as constraint to effective performance of media as watchdog. The mass media in Nigeria are mostly government owned. The owners perform gatekeeping functions that are conditioned by political, parochial and economic interests. As a result, the media serve the interests of elites or the government in power at the expense of the majority. Consequently, the impacts of the socialization and democratization

function of the mass media are limited. This has served as a self-limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to positively champion the cause of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. For instance, a situation where government owned, especially state government owned media organizations are used as instruments of propaganda and the opposition are tactically prevented from accessing such media organizations to make their voices heard.

Apart from political constraints, other factors have affected the role of the press as the fourth estate. The commercialization and a decline in the observance by journalists of their professional ethics principally caused by the daily struggle for survival in a highly competitive but limited market

Ethnic and Parochial Loyalties: Democracy relies on divergence of interests and opinions to survive in pluralistic societies. In Nigeria, however, the pattern of horizontal and vertical segmentation among the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies has given rise to familism, parochialism and chauvinism in the body polity. This segmentation has served as a self limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to effectively champion the cause of democracy. For instance, some print and electronic media represents the Western, Eastern, Southern and Northern interest. The conflicting interests between ethnicity, politics and religion on the one hand and politics on the other hand has made the media and journalists victims of the endemic chauvinism, parochialism and sectionalism that now characterizes the media in Nigeria.

Clampdown on Media Houses and Journalists: Several cases of arrested journalists were reported in Nigeria even during democratic dispensations (The Punch 2008). Generally, state restriction of freedom of expression and police brutality were regular threats to members of the press. Police raided editorial offices and arrested employees of press organisations including the Daily Independent, The News, and The Observer during the 1999-2003 democratic dispensation (The Punch 2008). Press freedom was not fully achieved during the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. There are several reports on harassment of members of the press and human rights abuse in Nigeria. For instance, it was recalled that in 2004, the State Security Service raided the office of Insider Weekly, seized some vital documents and arrested some journalists. In September 2007, two German journalists and a US activist were intercepted and detained for two weeks, while four US documentary filmmakers and their Nigerian counterparts were detained for six days in April 2008 (The Punch 2008). The Punch (2008) reported that 22 journalists including an American were arrested and detained in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on the allegation of not obtaining clearance before taking photographs and footage of some facilities at the Shell Petroleum Development Company's gas plant in the Niger Delta. Other media houses including The News, Raypower, Freedom Radio/Africa Independent Television in Bayelsa and Kano Broadcasting Corporation were recent victims of an official clampdown. The editorial section of a popular newspaper in Nigeria observed that: It is sad that while international standards, which allow journalists to perform their duties without hindrance, are respected even at war fronts, Nigerian journalists and media houses face intimidation and harassment on a daily basis at home (The Punch 2008). The police action was

said to be the result of press publications considered critical of the Nigerian government. As such, the power of the press to check governance institutions has been curtailed, with grave implications for socio-economic development in Nigeria.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- a. The findings of this study show that the Freedom of Information Bill (FIB) has not been empowering and promoting democracy in Nigeria after it was passed into law.
- b. The study reveals that the mass media is an essential and indispensable part of democratic governance. It also reveals that democratisation in Nigeria, generally has been rather slow compared with the expectations of the people, and among the factors that account for this is the less than conducive political climate under which the mass media have had to carry out their responsibilities.
- c. Press organizations have contributed immensely towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria whereas the Nigerian socio-political environment has hindered complete press freedom. Constant intimidation and arrest of members of the press is an indication that Nigerian governments lack the political will to address development crises in the country. Different stories in various media featured public outcries over lack of government transparency and foul play in governance.
- d. This study has confirmed that the mass media keeps the public informed, entertained and enlightened, and that it set standards and established values for public conduct. Different press organisations in Nigeria keep the local and international public informed on the remarkable socio-economic news and political development.
- e. The repression of press freedom has remained widespread even in democratic dispensations and may adversely affect the investment climate in Nigeria. If the government remains adamant on holding back the Freedom of Information, the public would be denied access to correct information and deprived of the immense benefits that can accrue from transparent governance.

CONCLUSION

The notion that the press and mass media is an important factor in the democratic environment has been reflected in the interplay between the different cultural and ideological forces affecting press freedom and mass media in Nigeria. The role of the press freedom in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria is facilitative, supportive and determined by nature of the society itself. The impact of press in sustainable democracy in Nigeria cannot be underrated. Therefore, the press and mass media must look for avenues to improve on the quality of information they disseminate in order to sustain Nigeria's flagging democracy.

The media institutions must play the role of providing strong link between those in government and the electorates by inculcating, articulating and constructively criticizing the policies and goals of the former and communicating the views and opinion of the latter. Media houses in Nigeria must assist in building and maintaining an environment conducive to democracy in the country. Since the freedom of information bill has been passed and signed to law, public

officials must grant the media access to public information as a constitutional matter. Journalist should be well trained so that they can function positively in promoting development within the culture of democracy. To sustain democracy, the media must maintain its independence while still being responsible; the media must operate an effective system of self-monitoring and self-supervision. The mass media institutions have a lot role to play in ensuring stability and sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

In view of the identified and hugely conspicuous reasons for an effective mass media sector as a driving force of a virile democracy, it is important that all stakeholders rise up to the tasks in raising the standard and potency of the mass media in Nigeria. Therefore. This paper recommends that press organizations in Nigeria should pursue their professionalism and the ethics of journalism rather than succumb to socio-political forces influencing the quantity and quality of information made available to the public.

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