

**CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS
MEDIA IN NIGERIA**

By

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Abstract

This paper is an exercise in the area of political economy of mass media in Nigeria. The media are meant to serve both the elite, and those at the grass root level. They are expected to focus their time and resources on sensitive issues that matter most to the people. The study therefore, explores some contemporary issues militating against the smooth practice of the media in Nigeria. The study made use of secondary sources of data collection i.e both, journals, books, newspaper and magazines articles. The study explicated seven key issues namely: media ownership, news commercialization, standard education, ownership control, legal control and press politicization and corruption amongst myriad of issues confronting the media practice in Nigeria. Meanwhile, in reversing these issues, the study recommends that ownership, both government and private should allow the media practitioners free hand to perform without any internal and external control. And banks and other financial institutions should support media industry with affordable financial assistance among other recommendations

Keywords: Media Ownership, Financial Sustainability, News Commercialization, Press Politicization, Media Control

Introduction

The media are supposed to contribute toward making the society achieve its social goals. It must, therefore, see itself as an instrument of championing a new cause which will empower the people to take informed decision that will better their lives. The Nigerian citizens need a totally committed mass media based on development of the people's socio-economic and political goal not a resemblance of the idea of either the East or the West (Kadiri, Muhammed, Raji, & Sulaiman, 2015). The mass media as a social institution and an important part of the civil society which plays the intermediary role between the government and the governed. In every sector and phase of a nation, the role of the press giving voice to the various sections of the society to enhance public participation in the governance and developmental programmes cannot be overemphasized. The press variously regarded as the "Fourth Estate of the Realm" that is equated with the three arms of the government in importance; that is "the watchdog" ; monitoring government activities to ensure constitutional compliance, "the mirror" which helps to see things from clearer perspectives and " the compass" being an instrument required for direction is an acknowledged mover and reflector of social change and therefore, cannot be underestimated in the development or otherwise, of the society. Therefore, to truly understand the media, one must first understand the political and socioeconomic context in which they operate. This becomes obvious because the environments where the media operates will have influence on its performance. In view of the above, the objective of the study would be to identify some of the contemporary issues bothering the media professionalism in Nigeria; look at some of the challenges militating against smooth media operations in Nigeria; proffering solutions to solving some of the problems identified in Nigeria media space.

Issues in Press Ownership

The issues of Media ownership and media control are not always easy to be separated, and can never be overemphasized due to the uncertain situations surrounding media practice in the country (Apoke 2016). In Nigeria, ownership is a critical factor in the regulation of the mass media, Media managers are often faced with the dilemma of balancing the media owner interest and public interest without infringing on the laws of the land or the ethics of the profession. Whether media ownership is private, public, institution and so on, the interest of the owner plays a dominant role in determining what the media managers do or fail to do. As the saying goes "he who pays the Piper dictates the tune". Therefore, as critical as it is media ownership has remained a topical issue in media discourse, Also, important is the fact that, type of Media ownership determines the level of freedom and the

efficiency of the organization. The above was corroborated by Shobowale (2005) quoted in Apoke (2016), that ownership has had some influence on the operation of broadcasting organization. He further explains that, the policy of the person who paid the media workers salary determined the operation of the media station. Sometimes, instead of performing the function of surveying the environment, correlating parts of the environment and transmitting culture; or providing entertainment, the media are turned into indispensable tools for relating power by those controlling them. (Spoke 2016).

Similarly, Udejah (2004), Posits to the fact that ownership adopts various measures to exercise the desired level of control on media management at various level at all cost. a list of such measures according to Ekweli, (1986) includes giving directives on what should be covered, redeployment of staff to lower position or instant transfer, creation of fear and intimidation within the media establishment.

The under mention are the kinds of Media ownership category in Nigeria.

1. Government Ownership; federal and state-owned e.g NTA, FRCN, VON. State owned stations; Radio Lagos, LTV, BCOS, OGBC, OSBC. e.t.c.

2. Private Ownership:

(a). Individual ownership e.g Raypower, AIT, TVC, Star Fm, Fresh Fm, Flash Fm, Crown Fm, Oodua Fm Etc.

(b). Educational Ownership e.g FUTA FM (Federal University of Tech Akure) UNILAG FM (University of Lagos) Great Fm (Obafemi Awolow University). Campus Watch (University of Ilorin) Infogiant 97.1 (Oduduwa University, Ipetumodu) e.t.c

Print; Kwasu Times (Kwara State University) Print; Campus Echoes (Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin) Print etc.

(c). Religious Owned Media, these are media sponsored and funded by religious organizations, their broadcast is mainly on evangelism e.g Olive Television, Hosanna Television, Emmanuel TV, Redeemer's 103.5 FM (Yisa O.I. 2016) etc.

Lacuna in Constitutional Provision for Media Ownership in Nigeria.

From the ongoing, it is clear from the above observations that ownership remains a critical factor that media managers have to contend with in Nigeria. A quick look

at the statutory provisions for media ownership in Nigeria. Sec 39(2) of the 1999 Constitution, of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, provides for media organization ownership and establishment as follows: without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the designation of information, ideas or opinions, provided that no person, other than the government of the federation or a state, or any other person or body authorized by the president on the fulfillment of the constitution laid down by an Act of National Assembly, shall own, establish and operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever. The provisions to the above section can be interpreted to imply that it is easier to establish a print media organization in Nigeria by any person other than government. But to establish a broadcasting station, the provisions must be fully complied with. Thus, whoever is interested in establishing a broadcasting station must comply with the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act. It should be recalled that prior to the promulgation of the NBC ACT, under Decree No. 38. of 1992, during the military regime of general General Badamosi Babangida (retired), it was not possible for any person other than government to own or operate a broadcast station, as it was exclusive preserve of Nigeria government (Apuke, 2006).

The major Lacuna Observed in the constitution is that it's suppresses the press in Nigeria, as a result of weak constitutional backup among others, which did not provide the press any special regards or recognition as the fourth estate of the realm. This is because the phrase 'every person' obviously refers to every individual man or woman. Hence, it has been said that since section 39 only guarantees the right of 'every person' it has not conferred any special rights on the press as a social institution than that of the ordinary citizens. To Arewobegbe (2009) the correct position of the section 39 seems to have been compromised given the court of appeal ruling in Senate Vs Tony Momoh, where the court held that the court heard that possess no special privileges or immunity under the section (i.e Constitutional provision) as the right guaranteed is for every person without distinction.

Financial Sustainability

Media organizations in Nigeria is grappling with the reality of the economic meltdown, which is "melting" on most organizations and individuals in Nigeria. In order to meet up with your organizational running cost, the media houses had to be up on doing to generate funds. Herman and Chomsky (1999) cited in Kehinde,

Yinusa, Abdullateef & Abdul-rasheed (2015) support the statement by arguing that "News organization become interested in attracting audience with buying power not audience per se, and as a consequence it is the advertiser who can exert influence on news content over and above audience interest. According to Campbell (2004) the financial constraints of the media houses are also taking their toll on the resources at the disposal of the media practitioners. Lack of or inadequate resources at the disposal of the media practitioners is another factor inhibiting their productivity on the reportage of development news. Most Journalists in Nigeria are largely under resourced, with some being owed salary arrears or not even paid in months.

Corroborating the above, Dogari, Sheu and Akupe (2018) in their work titled "Media Ownership, funding and Challenges: Implication for State Owned Media Survival in Nigeria". Observed that amidst the current economic situation and fluctuation in workers' salary funding of state-owned media in Nigeria, has become problematic. They further asserted that currently, the only state-owned newspaper in Taraba State (Sunrise newspaper) is not working as a result of non- payment of salary staff amongst other fund related challenges. Also, John Momoh, Chairman/ Chief Executive Officer of Channels Media Group, Lagos in an article published in the Premium Times publication, titled " Media Development and Sustainable Funding in Nigeria, acknowledged that government – owned media in Nigeria are currently in a very poor state- economically, managerially, technologically and politically" in addition, misappropriation of funds and employment of non – professional, were discovered to be the major challenges affecting media outfits in Nigeria, (Momoh 2022).

News Commercialization

News commercialization is a circumstance in which media organization begin to charge fee for news reports that would otherwise be broadcast free. It is a phenomenon whereby the electronic media published as news or news analysis a commercial message given by an individual unidentified sponsor, given the impression that news is fair, impartial and socially responsible (Uchenna, 1996).

According to Jesse and Samuel (2022), the media in Nigeria have since 'commodified' its products and services in a bid to cope with the exigencies for survival. The issue of serving the interest of the public in terms of provision of information, education and entertainment had long been relegated to the background and even where they featured, they must have some sort of political undertone. Let Them Pay (LTP) has now become the chief determinant of what

constitutes news. Commercial considerations have also taken over a lot of time of Media stations as it is, one of their major sources of income. Meaning that profit-seeking motives have now turned media into a full-blown industry, always working towards the maximization of profit rather than the interest of the audience. Some scholars even argued that the privatization and commercialization decree of 1988, alongside the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the military era 1983-1999 is probably what gave media commercialization its present impetus in Nigeria, (Jesse & Samuel 2022).

Standard of Education

Giving the current realities particularly, political and economic situations in Nigeria, the standard of education of most journalists covering news reportage is rather low and this is unfortunate. In order to cut costs, some media organizations hired journalists who are merely educated or with any type of qualifications. This is rather unfortunate because these 'so called' journalists do not have orientation on what it takes to professionally gather, report and disseminate news items that will benefit their audiences. Therefore, this constitutes some peculiar challenges for the media industry in Nigeria. According to Kadiri, Muhammed, Ruji and Sulaiman (2015), “an environmental issue like climate change is always challenging for journalists to interpret because it is termed as a science issue” only a few African journalists or other editors have good understanding of science that is often woven around climate discourse. Therefore, there is need for training and re-training of journalists in Africa (Jesse and Samuel, 2022)

Issues of Media Control

According to Onabajo (2001), control of media organizations is both internal and external since there is a nucleus of interdependence or coexistence. Firstly, control through ownership is a fact of life in every society but the nature of this control usually varies greatly, depending upon the political system, the orientation of political leaders in control of government and the political climate prevailing; the calibre of journalists and other professional communicators. Also, control may be dependent on the economic situation of the mass media and their stated objectives and policies.

Ownership Control

Onabajo (2001) posits that besides owners of the media who may be government, private institutions or companies, there are other forces that exercise control over media. These include the general public, the courts, law enforcement agencies,

pressure group, information sources and professional bodies. Media are public service organization and as such come under several control. One of such control is ownership control. It is often said that "he who plays the Piper dictates the tune", this statement is true as far as media control by ownership is concerned in Nigeria. For example, owners of newspapers control their newspaper through editorial policy. The editorial of a medium is a broad-based set of ideas normally or usually formulated before the takeoff of the medium, especially the print medium. The editorial policy states that the angle or point of view that will guide the newspaper news and features including its editorial, ideas, desires and interest which it will protect and project the owners' interest (Apuke, 2016).

Legal Control

Ndolo (2006) says every society is governed by plethora of laws that guide human actions and activities. Platos notes that "without law, man differs not at all from most savage beasts". To this effect, some set of laws are made to regulate the activities of the media to avoid abuse of industry by the bad eggs. Specifically in Nigeria, media practitioners have some laws to contend with; laws such as defamation, obscenity, contempt of court, sedition, copyright, privacy, official secrets Acts and some other laws which media practitioners should not run foul of.

Press Politicisation and Corruption in Nigeria

Olukotun (2004) cited in Omotoso (2015) avers that; most media proprietors and editors are quite close to the Nigerian political class and often get enlisted in the battle or alternatively seek to profit from publicity projects and outright deals with the political class. In the democratic dispensation in Nigeria, corruption in the media in the shape of bribe taking to kill or publish stories is a rampant feature of the fourth Republic. This is contrary to tenet of the media social responsibility theory that makes it imperative for the media to adhere strictly to the ethics of the profession and hold a high sense of responsibility for whatever actions they take and information they disseminate to the public. But the pertinent question is, can there be a socially responsible press (one that will not be politicised and corrupt) in the absence of press freedom? (Omotoso 2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has taken an in-depth look at some of the contemporary issues bothering media practice in Nigeria. Though, this is inexhaustible as it were but they can serve as eye opener to the general public. The knowledge of these issues is important to the media owners, media practitioners and the government. In this paper, I have

identified contemporary issues both on media ownership, financial sustainability, media control and press politicization and corruption. These issues are germane to the success or failure of media profession in Nigeria.

Having explored some contemporary issues bothering the media practice in Nigeria, the study recommends that:

- On the issue of ownership, both the private and government owned media should be allowed to practice freely without any undue hindrance.
- Banks and other financial institutions should support media industry with affordable financial assistance anytime they request for it.
- To discourage the issue of press politicisation and corruption, journalists wages, welfare and other remunerations should be improved upon. Salary should be paid promptly as and when due.
- The media practitioners too should be up and doing. Professionalism should be their watchword so as to earn the respect of the society they serve.
- Training and re-training in organizational management; as the industry continues to expand in size, shape and workforce, it becomes imperative that media managers are trained and re-trained in organizational management.
- Meddling by media ownership especially, privately owned media should be addressed. Once engaged, the media professionals should be allowed to perform their duties without interference

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