



**DEMOCRATIZATION OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP IN NIGERIA: THE
NEEDS FOR MORE PARTICIPATION.**

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a look at Democratization of Media Ownership in Nigeria, the need for more participation. It espouses the view that the issues of Democratization of media ownership can never be overemphasized due to the dwindling situations surrounding media practice in Nigeria and the world at large. The media is said to take the coloration of where the practice is being carried out i.e. the way the media operates in Nigeria cannot be the same as the way it will function in other countries such as Soviet Union, United States, Britain , Ghana, Canada etc. The paper is aimed at reviewing democratization of media ownership, various types of media ownership and how it is being controlled either privately or publicly and how the control affects the media operation. The work also elucidate the potential role of the media as a democratizing agent. The study recommends that both private and government media should be allowed to practice freely without any internal or external forces. The media should not allowed

to the hands of the rich at the expense of the poor which has advert effect to practice of journalism in the world today.

Keywords: Democratization, Media Ownership, Participation

Introduction

The issues of democratization of media ownership can never be overemphasized due to the dwindling situations surrounding media practice in the country. The media is said to take the coloration of where the practice is being carried out i.e. the way the media operates in Nigeria cannot be the same as the way it will functions in other countries such as Soviet Union. Asemah (2009) describes the media as a channel or technological devices through which messages are conveyed to a large heterogeneous audience, they are the vehicles used for conveying message from a source to a large destination. The Mass Media is divided into the electronic and print. The electronic media are mechanically or technologically operated devices of Mass Communication these are Radio, Television, while the Print are Newspaper, Journals, and Magazines etc.

Before 1992, media ownership was under the government until Ibrahim Babangida took over as the president. Presently, The Mass Media operate via: Private which falls under the Pluralist theory, Government Media which falls under the Marxist theory. The media acts as the voice of the elites that is the bourgeoisie uses it to air their view to the working class. In an ideal manner the government media ought to be more vibrant, and champions of the truth. But due to them being under the arm bit of government tend to do as the government wishes in other not to lose both license and sponsorship. Nigeria as a study uses the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) to air the voice of the Presidents, governors and ministers respectively.

Democratization is the transition to a more democratic political regime, including substantive political changes moving in a democratic direction. It may be the transition from an authoritarian regime to a full democracy, a transition from an authoritarian political system to a semi-democracy or transition from a semi-authoritarian political system to a democratic political system. Different patterns of democratization are often used to explain other political phenomena, such as whether a country goes to a war or whether its economy grows. Whether and to what extent democratization occurs has been attributed to various factors, including economic development, historical legacies, civil society, and international processes. Some accounts of democratization emphasize how elites drove democratization, whereas other accounts emphasize grassroots bottom-up processes.

Scholars are of the opinion that processes of democratization may be elite-driven or driven by the authoritarian incumbents as a way for those elites to retain power amid popular demands for representative government. If the costs of repression are higher than the costs of giving away power, authoritarians may opt for democratization and inclusive institutions. According to a 2020 study, authoritarian-led democratization is more likely to lead to lasting democracy in cases when the party strength of the authoritarian incumbent is high. However, Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo argue that democratizing rules implemented by outgoing authoritarians may distort democracy in favor of the outgoing authoritarian regime and its supporters, resulting in "bad" institutions that are hard to get rid of.

According to Michael K. Miller, elite-driven democratization is particularly likely in the wake of major violent shocks (either domestic or international) which provide openings to opposition actors to the authoritarian regime. The goal of "democratization" is the establishment of free and fair elections, and "democratization" can be considered the process by which the civil liberties and political rights necessary to achieve this goal.

The role of the media in the process of democratization has been greatly underestimated Randall,(1993), partly because the literature on political science and communication is largely fragmented Hackett & Zhao, (2005).Studies which have addressed the relationship between the media and politics in Democratization contexts usually have two major concerns which are democratization through the media and democratization of the media itself .

It is difficult to identify a direct relationship of cause and effect between the media and democratization as the available empirical evidence is anecdotal and so cannot be subjected to rigorous empirical testing Voltmer & Rowsley (2009).Giddens in Meier said, "The media have a double relation to democracy. On the one hand the emergence of a global information society is a powerful democratizing force. Yet, the mass media tend to destroy the very public." Within the context of supporting democratic transitions, the goal of media development generally should be to move the media from one that is directed or even overtly controlled by government or private interests to one that is more open and has a degree of editorial independence that serves the public interest.

The media of mass communication, is intended in a democratic setting to provide a space that mediates between civil society and the realm of power. The media creates a forum for open discussion of all issues of public concern during which discursive argumentation is

employed to ensure public good (Isola, 2010). This presupposes that media in a democracy should operate along the principle of freedom of speech and expression. This enables the people the right to freely participate in political debate and discussion making, which is central to democracy. Among the three factors that sustain democracy, as identified by Diamond (1999), is civil society, which include the mass media. The other two are political culture and political institutions. Among the mass media, the broadcast media with its unique advantages of impact selectivity and flexibility, exerts tremendous influence on the democratization process for good or for bad.

Former President of France De- Gaulle in his opinion once asked former President John Kennedy of the United States of America: “How can you control your country if you don’t control the media” Agbanu & Nwammuo (2009). In a similar vein, the various medium of mass communication are arguably one of the most frequently used means of communication in a democracy. While success or failure of democracy cannot be reduced to issues of mass media. Raja Gopal (2001), maintains that concern for democracy necessitates a concern about the media. Hence, to advance the process of democratization, media as the fourth estate of the realm is expected to discharge certain roles, which include the following, as given by Isola (2010) which are surveillance of contemporary events that are likely to affect citizens positively, identification of key socio-political issues, provision of platforms for advocacy for causes and interests, transmission of diverse contents across the various dimensions and factions of political discourse, scrutiny of government officials, their institutions and other agencies, giving incentives and information to allow citizens to become actively informed participants rather than spectators, provision of principled resistance to external forces attempting to subvert media autonomy, and respectful consideration of the audience as potentially concerned, sense-making efficacious citizens.

These functions suggest that the mass media in a democracy is expected to be a vigilant watchdog of public interest and under no circumstance should it demean itself into acting as lapdogs for establishment. It should not only be a mirror that reflects the face of the democracy, the beauty spots and the warts Dukor, (1998) it should also be a voice of advocacy for the collective good of the society. In this regard, the mass media in an emerging democracy like Nigeria should, as noted by Pate (2011), be answerable to the various constituencies that depend on it for information, education and direction on the functioning of the democratic system, it should strengthen its mediating role through increased interactions among the various parties and

stakeholders in the democratization process; it should ensure that the conduct of each of the stakeholders is in conformity with public interest, and it has a responsibility to stamp some element of legitimacy on the democratic credentials of the stakeholder.

Robert A. White (2008), says the public's confidence in the fairness of the reporting depends, in part, on the perception of the freedom of the media. He stressed further that there were ominous signs during the second term of Obasanjo that the freedom of the media would be curbed in the elections of 2007. In 2004 the broadcast regulatory agency announced that it would begin to enforce a section of Decree No 38 which bars broadcasters from the live transmission of foreign news, citing the danger that these broadcasts pose to national interests. More ominous still was the closure of a number of private stations that had been more outspoken in their critical reporting of the government activities Onwumechili, (2007).

As Onwumechili (2007) points out that, the majority of the broadcasting stations are operated by the government and, although the number of new licenses awarded for both independent radio and television increased, many of the licenses were given to members of the ruling People's Democratic Party and to the close friends of party leaders. Thus the great majority of the broadcasting stations in Nigeria continue to be solid supporters of the ruling party. There were also signs that the state media would be ready to compromise its ethical and social responsibility in the elections of the Houses of Assembly which took place in April 14, 2007 and in the gubernatorial elections April 21, 2007. The state media were giving overwhelming support to the PDP candidates, and the private media were evidently timid and cautious in their criticism of the government procedures in these elections. It was considered important that all major socio-cultural regions of Nigeria be represented because the religious and cultural factors of the regions do influence how people perceive the political process. For example, the fact that the presidential candidate of the incumbent party was a Muslim from the north could influence the perception of how the media covered the election process.

The Democratization Process in Nigeria

The process of democratization in Nigeria began even before the country's attainment of self-rule in 1960. As early as 1944 a political party was formed. That was the NCNC (National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroun). Later in 1951, the AG (Action Group) and NPC (Northern People's Congress) were formed Anifowose (1982), Uzuegbunam, (1998); Akoja, Shamija & Ocheibi, (2007). These political parties were formed with the main aim of taking part

in democratic elections. On attainment of political independence in 1960, the democratization process continued both with civil and military rules.

Aina (1999) refers to the democracy in Nigeria as uniquely Nigeria, because it is predicated along the “Nigerian factor” which is an easy approach to achieving individual and group objectives. The Nigerian factor is actually a lawless, immoral, unjust, ungodly, bad, and sometimes a criminal approach to doing things. Hence, the democratization process in Nigeria is predominantly tele-guided by wealthy elites; it does not accommodate the demands of the majority of the Nigerian poor, but remains sufficiently flexible to accommodate the interests of the main privileged groups. This kind of approach to democratization has a serious consequence on a democratic attempt as splendidly observed by Obasi (2001). Due to the exploitative dependent, capitalist nature of most African states, the attempt at democracy has been a dismal failure. The exploitation by the indigenous bourgeois class and the misuse of state power by leaders for capital accumulation jointly create politically marginalized, weak and helpless African masses. This implies that the majority of the African people are not exercising any form of popular sovereignty.

Odey (2002), thinks along the same line with the foregoing assumption, and is more apt in describing the democratization process in Nigeria. Odey (2007) maintains further that democracy in Nigeria is not of the people, not by the people, and not for the people. It is a homemade democracy, which is an organized consortium where the organizers convert leadership into a democracy that breeds unemployment, insecurity, hunger and hopelessness. “It is a government of political robbers, by political robbers and for political rubber it is a government of the looters by the looters and for the looters”. Due to the above analysis, the democratization process in Nigeria is characterized by class domination by a wealthy minority at the expense of the poor and weak majority. Other characteristics of the democratization process include: violation of human rights, electoral malpractices, abuse of state power, massive corruption in public places, insensitive and desperate conduct of politicians, bad governance, absence of accountability, executive fiat, incessant communal conflicts, disregard for rule of law, increased deprivations, debilitating poverty, rising public frustration, tyrannical attitudes, and structural weakness of democratic and other political and socioeconomic institutions Kukah (2007).

Media Ownership Patterns

The ownership of the mass media namely; electronic, print and the new media in Nigeria has different historical origins. Presently however, the electronic and print media in Nigeria appear to have arrived at a similar pattern of ownership. A look at their existing ownership pattern will reveal that there is dual ownership i.e. public ownership or government ownership, as well as private ownership of both the print and electronic media. This ownership pattern therefore involves the ownership of the print and electronic media by private individuals and/or private institutions. There is also the emerging ownership of the electronic media by institutions known as community broadcasting. What is interesting however for some inexplicable reasons is that in some instances the ownership of some media outfits in Nigeria is shrouded in secrecy.

Frankly speaking, Iredia (2018) in one of his public lectures says, media ownership in Nigeria is not transparent in most cases because most precise owners of some media organizations are not always known to the public and, in many cases, the professional journalists serving as directors of such media companies are seen as fronts for unknown investors. Under the National Broadcasting Commission Act, religious bodies and political parties are specifically precluded from owning broadcast media. Foreign ownership of broadcast media is also restricted, resulting in very little foreign investment in the Nigerian media.

Types of Media Ownership Pattern in Nigeria.

Private media ownership

These are media owned and run by private individuals or organization. They tend to act more sensitive than the government media because of profit making if they don't act as watchdog they won't be rewarded. So the private media fight tooth and nail to see they keep the business moving, for instance Journalist are paid more if they sought for advert so why wont to run helter -Skitter to sought for news when they know they will be rewarded for each and every acts they take. They see audience as consumers and this is linked with the pluralist theory in which it states that " The press is privately owned and relatively free from the state control" the aim of the private media is profit maximization. It is expected to act as a guard that is, we should rely on the media to keep us alert on various issues concerning the masses. Example of the private media is Guardian Newspaper, Niger Delta Standard, Radio/TV Gotel, Channels T.V, Silver bird, MINAJ, Ray Power etc. The question is how free is the private media?

Government Owned Media

The government owned media are those media that are completely financed and supervised by the government such as Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Co-operation of Nigeria and other state own radio and Television such as TSBS and TTV respectively

How free is the Media?

Nigeria is a country that practice mixed-economy that is the means of production is partly owned by government and individual. Though Nigerian private media flourishes but their continuity depends on not overstepping or overriding on the government power. Individual own the media while government policies influences its operation. Many agents of Nigeria's press have been imprisoned, exiled, tortured, or murdered as a result, among them being Ogoni activist and television producer Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed for treason by order of the Sani Abacha dictatorship in 1995 (resulting in the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations and sanctions from abroad).

Even under the somewhat less oppressive current civilian government, journalists have continued to come under fire, be it from the government as with the June 2006 arrest of Gbenga Aruleba and Rotimi Durojaiye of African Independent Television under charges of sedition or from other popular establishments such as the self-imposed exile of This day's Isioma Daniel following the riots in Northern Nigeria over "sensitive comments" which she had made in an article regarding Muhammad and the 2002 Miss World pageant; a fatwa calling for her beheading was issued by the mullahs of northern Nigeria, but was declared null and void by the relevant religious authorities in Saudi Arabia, and the Obasanjo faced an international public relations smearing especially within journalistic circles in the aftermath, which was not helped by the Amina Lawal controversy which had occurred prior to the riots, which had seen over 200 dead. However, as with most other countries, blogging has increasingly become a much safer, and much easier, conduit for Nigeria's growing Internet-enabled minority to express their dissatisfactions with the current state of affairs in Nigeria (e.n.m.wikipedia.org nd). So we can say that Nigerian private media is free to an extent.

Agenda Setting Theory

The power of the media to set society's agenda by focusing public attention on few key public issues is an immense and well-documented phenomenon. It was McCombs and Shaw that carried out the first systematic study of the agenda-setting hypothesis (see McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The agenda setting theory posits that what the media finds important will eventually be mirrored by what members of society will come to think are important. It facilitates the formation of public opinions and the distribution of pros and cons of a particular issue. Agenda-setting shifts the focus of attention away from immediate effects on attitudes and opinions to long term effects on cognitions (Protess and McCombs 1991). Lang and Lang (1959) agree that

not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news. Newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in the daily news, like lead story on page one, other front page display, large headlines, etc. Television news also offers numerous cues about salience as well as the opening story on the newscast, length of time devoted to the story. These cues repeated day after day effectively communicate the importance of each topic. In other words, the news media can set the agenda for the public's attention to that small group of issues around which public opinion is formed. The agenda setting theory fundamentally explores the relationship which the news media have on the perceived salience of key political issues.

According to Ghorparde (1986), agenda setting is a relational concept that specifies a transfer of salience from agenda primers (media) to agenda adopters (consumers). Agenda setting research has shown that there is a correlation between what the media deems important and salience in the public mind. The concept explains the ability of the media to tell us what to think about. Ngoa (2006) explained that agenda setting refers to media audiences' acceptance as important those issues, events and people because the media has made it so for people to think and talk about. McQuail & Windahl (1981) observed that the media, by simply paying attention to some issues while neglecting others, will effect on public opinion (adding that) the hypothesis would seem to have escaped the doubts which early empirical findings had on the powerful media effects view.

Conclusion

The issues of democratization of media ownership can never be overemphasized due to the dwindling situations surrounding media practice in Nigeria. The media is said to take the coloration of where the practice is being carried out i.e the way the media operates in Nigeria cannot be the same as the way it will function in other countries such as Soviet Union, United States, Britain etc.

Recommendations

1. Both the private and government media should be allowed to practice freely without any internal or external forces.
2. The media should not be let in the hands of the rich at the expense of the poor.
3. Government media should take the course of championing the truth in the society rather than remaining a pet dog to the government.

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