The Role of the Media in Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, 1999-2014.

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of the media as a watchdog for the promotion of democratic culture among the civil society and the government to engender good governance in Nigeria. Methodologically, the study adopted primary and secondary sources of information to examine the extent to which the media in Nigeria had impacted on the civil society to achieve the dividend of democracy as stipulated in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The paper discovers that the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) censorship gave little room for meaningful achievements in securing good governance for Nigerians. The censorship combined with government clamping down on perceived anti- journalists also hindered their monitoring roles considered a sine qua non for democratic governance. The ambiguities in the 1999 constitution also contributed to the challenges of nation-building, corruption, embezzlement, insecurity, nepotism etc. thus, democratic governance continues to be elusive to Nigerians. Therefore, the paper concludes that for the media to contribute effectively to enthroning good governance, there must be full implementation of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) as this will uphold the sanctity of justice, equity and fairness at all times.

Keywords: Media, Mass Media, Civil Society, Democratic Governance

Introduction

Globally, the quest for sustainable democracy demands active involvement of mass media in reducing the human right violation in our society today. The basics of societal values, including; sanctity of justice, fairness, liberty, equity, among others are expected to be promoted by the media. The role of the media is same all over the world, irrespective of creed, colour, race and the level of development. recongnised universally as the unofficial fourth arm of the government, the media's most important task is that of functioning as the watchdog of the society. The role provides mechanism which ensures that the media keeps a constant surveillance on the society in an attempt to ensure that masses follow the societal value and procedures which are right in the eyes of the right-thinking members of the society, (Andrew, 2018).

Therefore, mass media serves as an agent of sustainable democracy that play crucial role in the survival of democracy between the governance and the governing.

However, as aptly opined that Good Governance is a since-qua-none of mass media. For any nation to realize the dividends of democracy with its emphasis on liberty of the masses. There is need for the promotion of popular participation, representation, transparency, public accountability and promoting national sustainable development, (Grindle, 2014).

Further-more, the media provides an information for the countries to hold those in authority accountable and also articulating their public interest and preference for government to use in policy formulation. i.e. (ENDSARS Protected). Given this assumption, media reflect as an agent for the fostering and enforcing the government to allows the dignity of human right in the discharge of their fundamental roles under the Nigeria 1999 Constitution, (Jibo, 2013).

More-over, the essence of this paper is to critically examines the roles of media are expected to play in the strive to attain a more stable and mature level in democratic process since the advent of fourth republic in Nigeria, and also promote

sustainable development goals. The challenges of the media have had to battle with in asserting the roles and how these challenges can be completely overwhelmed in 21st century.

Objective of the Study

The major objective of this study is to examine the role of the media in democratic governance in Nigeria's fourth republic.

The specific objectives of the study are to;

i. examines the significant roles of mass media plays toward the democratic governance
ii. ascertain the significant level of mobilisation of media toward the democratic Consolidation

2. Conceptual Discourses

The main concepts discussed in this paper relate to Media, Mass Media, Civil Society, and Democratic Governance. Detailed explanation of the above concepts-based on the opinion of scholars is provided below;

Media

According to Olutokun, (2011), describes media as a means of political communication facilitates dissemination of facts and opinions through the newspapers, magazines, books, films, radio, television, the World WideWeb and other form of publishing.

Mass Media

According to Ojete, (2018), opines that mass media is the means of public communication reaching a large audience. In sense, mass media are the tools or technologies that facilitate dissemination of information and entertainment to a vast number of consumers in a society. Mass media reaches large numbers of people for information, education, persuasiveand entertainment reasons. It is a means of communication for interchange of thoughts or ideas. The mass media plays a pivotal role as agenda setters and also provides avenues for raising conflicts to the level of discussion in a democratic setting. It also functions as a

watchdog of ademocratic society by bringing to the people the information they need to exercise independentjudgment in electing public officials of their choice.

Civil Society

The World Bank (2010), asserts that civil society as the wide array of non – governmental and not for profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations.

Democratic Governance

National Democratic Institute (2015), asserts that democratic governance is a system of government where the public institutions and political innovation processes are functioning according to democratic values and norms within the society.

3. Theoretical Explication of the Study

The theoretical framework engaged for this study is Agenda-Setting Theory (1963). The theory describes that media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it's successful in telling its readers what to think about. The evidence is that the media have a strong influence on masses perception of which issues are significant and which problems they want their government to do something about. As postulated by Bernard Cohen, agenda-setting theory seek to explain the influence of mass media (news)increases when the need for orientation among the viewers is much.

Relevance:

Theory presumes the need for agenda setting in a democratic governance, the agenda setting effect is lower for unpleasant issues that masses can observe directly, as well as for other issues that the audience is well informed about. The media have little power to set the agenda when the masses have sufficient political knowledge to counter argue the claims made by the media.

Strength:

Therefore, the agenda-setting effect is stronger for concrete issues that are easy to visualize than for abstract issues. Agenda setting for issues of democracy must be

concrete and result oriented plans not issues that are products of sentiments otherwise the audience may be disregarded from accepting the news.

Limitation:
Arising from the above, the theory explains that there are some uncertainty issues about who sets the agenda. It has been shown by some studies that politicians have a strong influence on the agenda of mass media, at least in areas such as public policy. To solve this problem the media may put attention catching issues on the agenda for sustainable democracy, especially when it involves sensational issues like probity, liberty and fairness among the masses within society.

4. Methodology:
The study adopted a mixed method research design, through the uses of primary and secondary sources of gathering relevant materials such as document, diaries, reports, internet material, journal articles, and international publications, etc. Content analysis was employed to analyze the imperative of mass media in promoting civil democratic governance and decision-making in Nigeria.

5. Media as the Vital Ingredient for Sustaining the Gain of Democratic Governance in Nigeria
The roles of the media, including the social media, in promoting democratic Governance are being recognized by the governments and policymakers in various countries. In the UK, a "Survey of Policy Opinion on Governance and the Media" published by BBC (2013) reveals that although the emphasis on democratic governance in the development agenda is questionable, "there seems to be increasing recognition of the media's role in democratic governance in the development community. There are also some indicators that media are being more recognized by the policy-makers as having a vital role in development." The role of the media in promoting democratic governance is obvious. All aspects of democratic governance are facilitated by the existence of a strong, pluralistic and independent media within the society (UNESCO, 2015). Fortunately, the Nigerian media terrain to a large extent could be adjudged to qualify. The significance of the media in how well or not governance can be executed in the society is best

captured in this more than a century argument by Joseph Pulitzer, in 1904. Pulitzer summarized his views thus:

Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together. An able, disinterested, public-spirited press, with trained intelligence to know the right and courage to do it, can preserve that public virtue without which popular government is a sham and a mockery. A cynical, mercenary, demagogic press will produce in time a people as base as itself. The power to mound the future of the Republic will be in the hands of the journalists of future generations, (Oburota, 2013).

What Pulitzer was essentially saying here is that the media can make or break a society by the way and manner it functions. In our information-based society the media has a disproportionately visible and influential role in fostering an environment where democratic governance will flourish. As the watchdog, agenda setter of public discourses and interpreter of public issues and events, the media have a special role in governance. The main responsibility of the media as is widely acknowledged is to provide comprehensive, analytical and factual news and opinion to the people on everyday issues and events of popular concern. Indeed, this is the critical link between the functioning of the media and democratic governance. The media are the only institution with the capacity to allow and facilitate regular checks and assessment by the population of the activities of government and assist in bringing public concern and voices into the open by providing a platform for public discussion. In fact, the nature and character of the media greatly impacts on the governance process in any society.

Therefore, it is only when the media report, monitor, investigate and criticize the public policies and actions as well as inform and educate the masses can democratic governance be enthroned or not in our society today?

What we have done is to demonstrate how the Nigerian media have contributed in trying to enthrone democratic Governance in the country?

Further-more, it's pertinent as this junction to say that media play an indispensable role in ensuring better democratic governance in any society today

and that the Nigerian media in this regard could be adjudged as having performed fairly well even though there are still gaps which will now be considered briefly.

6. Debacles to Effectives Medial Role in Sustainable Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Despite acknowledging the various ways, the Nigerian media have indeed attempted to foster democratic governance, the fact remains that there are still critical issues that the Nigerian media need to deal with. Some of the more obvious and vital once will be briefly considered. Nigerian journalists, oftentimes tend to over censor themselves for fear of punishments, particularly the public media. This leads to factual inexactness, (Nanda, 2013).

A situation where information is often incomplete or deliberately down played or some facts missing. Some of the other challenges for the Nigerian media include: issue of poor remuneration for the journalists; the polarization of the media along with Fulani herdsmen's issue; Bandit issues; and Boko-haram terrorism issues that prevailed the Nigerian government and politics; ownership influence that affects media stand on issues, the private media, as well as the public media have often been accused of reflecting the ideological and political considerations of the proprietors; the issue of protocol journalism in which highly placed public officials are deliberately shielded from embarrassing questions and investigations from the media through the uses of freedom of information act (FOIA, 2015).

7.Media as a Necessary Product of a Functioning Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Whether or not the media can promote democratic governance also depends on the media themselves. UNESCO (2015) publication on Media and Democratic Governance clearly reveals what the media should be, and should have, in order to perform their duty effectively. According to the UNESCO document the preconditions for the media to effectively contribute to the democratic governance depend on these three elements; media liberty, independence and pluralism. Interestingly.

The Center for Development Communication (2016) document echoed similar argument this way:

> "To contribute to democratic governance, media should be editorially independent, free from any pressure and external interferences, and reflect the plurality of opinions and perceptions in order to truly help citizens be informed, understand the issues at stake, make up their minds, and finally, judge events by themselves".

The arguments from these documents point to the fact that the media must fundamentally be free from any kind of influence, particularly political, ownership, commercial or governmental control. However, this appears to be a critical challenge for the Nigerian media. Intellectuals have noted that the Nigerian media are plagued with the problems of tyranny and dictatorship syndrome of "he who pays the piper calls the tune" and is divided across ethnic lines. Secondly, the term pluralism has been defined as the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, periodicals and broadcast stations reflecting the widest possible range of opinions within the society. It is instructive to point out that the Nigerian media although pluralistic in sheer number, cannot yet be said to be truly pluralistic as argued in these documents since community media are yet to be established in the Nigerian media terrain as is the case in other countries. In addition to the above, there are three distinct ways for the media to effectively and efficiently contribute to the democratic governance: probity, liberty and fairness among the masses within the society.

8. The Imperatives of Media in Promoting Civil Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Over the years, media has come to be recognized as a significant aspect of democratic governance concept. First the media should uphold professional ethical rules set up through self -regulation, and constantly enhance professionalism, be accountable to the public in the way it informs, educates and entertains. In sum the media should recognize that they are accountable for their actions to the public, their profession and themselves.

i. The Significant Roles of Media Plays Toward the Democratic Governance

The media serves as an institutional control mechanism to abolishes the 3Cs: corruption, collusion and cronyism. They must promote human rights, uphold the

rule of law and keep the citizens constantly informed. To discharge this duty creditably, the journalists must be equipped with the necessary investigative capacity to bring out the truths to the public and fulfill their functions in promoting democratic governance. The Nigeria media have been accused of factual inexactitude where press conference release is in some cases distorted to give a slant that would suit the idiosyncrasies of either the reporter or the medium owners. What is obviously advocated here is that the media should shun unprofessional acts capable of jeopardizing the media in any way, and embrace professionalism at all cost. However, the issue of professionalism continues to remain a critical area of challenge in relation to the contentions surrounding the journalism practice in Nigerian as a profession, (Adaja, 2012).

ii. The Significant Level of Mobilisation of Media Toward the Democratic Consolidation

This implies that for the media to function effectively they must enhance the creation and /or maintenance of a favorable legal framework, which guarantees media freedom, independence and pluralism. However, we need to also point out that it is important for the country to as well provide an enabling environment for the media to investigate. An environment that is free from intimidation; detrimental media laws such as criminal, defamation laws etc., often used against investigative journalists so as to ensure the safety of journalists and their freedom to seek information, (Ogundiya, 2010).

9. Conclusion

Achieving democratic governance requires the understanding and participation of every member of the society. However, it has been observed that for governance to be just and democratic, leaders more than any other sector of the society need to use their power responsibly and for the greater good. Systems and procedures need to be in place that impose restraints on power and encourage government officials to act in the public's best interests. The media, their roles, channels and contents, are considered powerful enough to make this achievement a reality. The Nigerian media have been in the vanguard for the promotion and sustenance of the democracy we now have in the country, even the struggle for independence was pioneered and fought for by the Nigerian media. But a great number of existing media channels in the country need to take up the

responsibility of adequately engendering better governance in our democratic consolidation. As the institution mandated to hold those in governance accountable, the Nigerian media can effectively achieve this if they apply the basic principles of participation, accountability, transparency and responsiveness in the discharge of their duties as well as uphold the sanctity of justice, equity and fairness at all times. In result, for the media to contribute to the democratic governance, the media must embrace the principles of democratic governance themselves as a critical precondition for effectiveness in the discharging their functions to the Nigerian society. The watchdogs must watch themselves.

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