



MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA

RESEARCH, THEORIES
AND PRACTICE

A BOOK IN HONOUR OF

Prof Suleiman Salau



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AND **HASHIM MUHAMMAD SULEIMAN**

MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA:

Research, Theories and Practice

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Media, Public Opinion and Democracy in Nigeria: A Critique of the Current State of Affairs

**Rasheed I. BADMUS, Kayode L. MUSTAPHA,
Simon A. OKAIYETO and Hashim M. SULEIMAN**

Introduction

Various studies from political science and allied disciplines have, over the years, attested to enduring and continuous interlinked of public opinion, mass media and Democracy (Shapiro, 2011; Burstein, 2010). According to Delli Carpini (2004) discernible in virtually all normative theories of representative democracies is a robust information environment through which citizens come to know vital issues of the day as well as communicate their views on such issues. In other words, democracy as a system of government hinges on a rich and all-inclusive communications environment that helps provide citizens with the motivation, ability, and opportunity to participate in various democratic tensions and decision makings (Shapiro, 2011). Hence, media, as the major institution of public communication, are expected to provide a public sphere which Ernst in Pate (2011) described as the "distinctive discursive space within which individuals combine to assume the role of a politically powerful force' (p.3). Explicitly, media are expected to provide comprehensive and highly accessible amphitheatre for articulation

and crystallization of public opinion as well as provide a conduit pipe for channelling of such opinion to the institutions of government. While this is the ideal positioning of media in democracies, various socio, economic and political factors in democratic societies have reconfigure media to 'elites sphere' (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) in which the media function as handmaid of the ruling elites rather than voices of the masses (Burstein, 2010). This transposition of the media in democracies has then translated to shrinkage of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; Curran, 1997). This line of thinking fit perfectly within a highly disputed but relevant 'propaganda model' of the media as put forward by Herman and Chomsky (2002) in which media are no longer seen to "represent a wide range of issues from a variety of perspectives and with a diversity of voices" (Fenton, 2004, P.2). Rather, media in advanced liberal democracies are seen to be operating within a varying degree of market and government influences (Herman and Chomsky, 2002; Bagdikian, 1992) in which the ideal 'public arena' imperative of the media have come under interference and gate-keeping. In his historical study of changes in ownership trend of American media, Bagdikian (1992) bemoaned how American media over the last two decades have become fully absorbed by global media conglomerates. In his words:

For the first time in the history of American journalism, news and public information have been integrated formally into the highest levels of financial and non-journalistic corporate control. Conflicts of interest between the public's need for information and corporate desires for "positive" information have been vastly increased (p.xxxx)

Other scholars researching outside the 'propaganda model' have also observed the increasing shortcomings of the media as to their ideal democratic functions especially in advanced democracies. Lamenting what they called 'crisis in public communication' Blumler and Gurevitch (2002) talk about the emerging norm of 'Machiavellian political communication' in which media are increasingly bowing to State and market forces at the expense of the public interest. Hence, this 'induction' of the media as "part of the economic system with close link to the political system" (Mcquail, 2010)

in the countries that can be dubbed as Godfathers of Liberal Democracy has far-reaching consequences for the vision of 'Athenian Agora' in the media. In these climes, what the media tout as public opinion may not really be public opinion borne out in an unconditional and widely accessible level playing ground of public sphere. Rather, such supposedly public opinion may be agglutination of "the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic" mediatised as public opinion (Bennet, 1990, p106). Thus, if it is plausible and acceptable in mainstream studies that Media in Advanced liberal democracies are increasingly becoming handicapped in their democratic functions as a results of various constraints levied on them by the larger political economy of the countries (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2002; Curran, 1997), what then will be obtainable in emerging democracies like Nigeria in which past years of Military rule have recalibrated the psychic of the people to see themselves as an irrelevant factor in political decision/policy making, and of which political leaders, majority of who subscribe to the ideas of garrison democracy, are bent on either co-opting the media to their side or muffling them.

In Nigeria, media have "historically functioned as a veritable arena for the robust articulation, ventilation, and circulation of transformative and politically consequential national discourse, and for the instigation of momentous social changes" (Kperooji, 2011). Beginning with its fierce anti-colonialists campaign down to its ferocious anti-military regime stance, the Nigerian media can be said to have its imprint on major political development in the country. However, all these historical ante-cedences do not suggest that it is 'uhuru' with the contemporary Nigerian media; they are still locked in a myriad of issues calling to question one of their democratic rôles of forum for, and purveyor of public opinion. In this chapter, attempt is made to appraise media as institution of public opinion and one of the key elements in the triangle of political communication linking the government and the people in Nigeria.

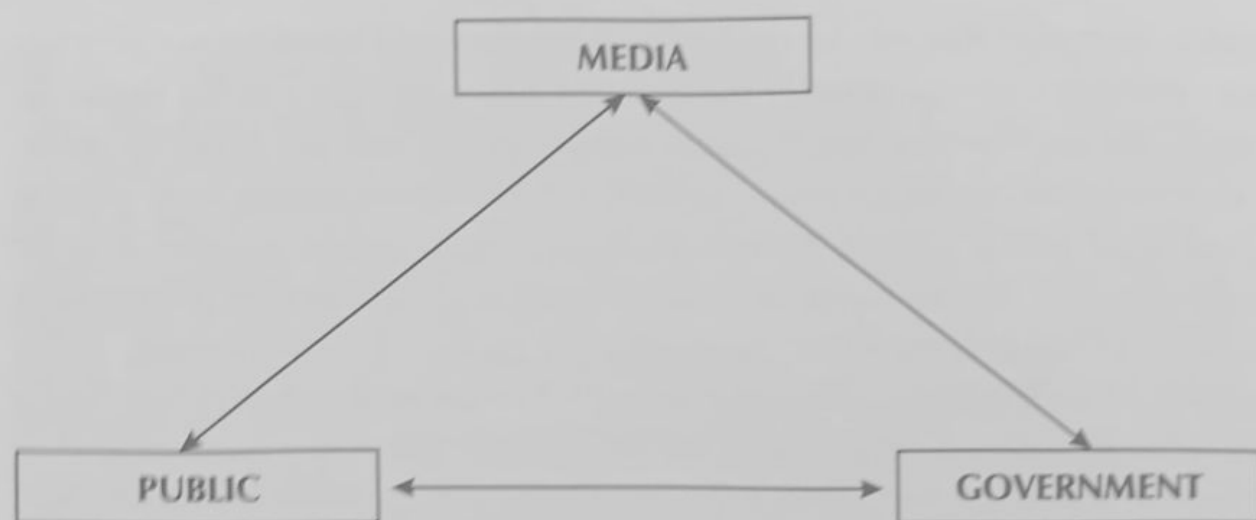


Fig. 1: Triangle of Political Communication (source, 2002: 12)

The Notion of Public Sphere: An Elucidation

The idea of 'public sphere' as an arena where citizens come together to exchange ideas regarding public affairs en route formation and crystallization of public opinion has been one of the tacit prerequisites and defining features of democracy since time immemorial. However, it was the systematic treatise of the concept by German sociologist Jürgen Habermas in his seminal work titled *'The structural transformation of the public sphere: An Inquiry into a category of bourgeois society'* that really popularized the concepts among media and democracy researchers (Kperogbi, 2011). Habermas (1961/1989) provided a comprehensive analysis of the nature of the public sphere and its historical transformations. According to him:

By 'public sphere' we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We speak of a political public sphere when the public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of the state (1991, p.398)

Within this all-encapsulating and simplified dissection of the notion of public sphere, it is discernible that the concept revolves around the idea of critical rational discourse in an open political system. That is, what Habermas conceived as public sphere represent modern day 'Athenian agora' where free and equal citizens come together to share information to debate, to discuss, or to deliberate on common concern. This arena can be a specific place where citizens gather (for example, a town hall meeting), however, the increasing complexity of the society is transforming the public sphere from a physical sphere (to 'notional' or virtual sphere being provided by communication technologies. The public sphere is a central aspect of good governance (Curran, 1997; Dahlgren, 2009). Without a functioning and a democratic public sphere, government official cannot be held accountable for their actions, and citizens will not be able to assert any influence over political decisions. Hence, the public sphere is, for the state, what the market is, for the economy. In it, goods that are exchanged and the currency that is traded are not of the economy, but of political nature. The main product of the public sphere is *public opinion*, and ideas are goods that are exchanged. This view equates the public sphere with free market place of ideas, a libertarian ideal where everyone is able to propose ideas and where best ideas champion the contest (Folarin, 1998). And as such, individual opinions are expressed, adjusted, compromised, and aggregated to form public opinion on topical issues en route a collective determination of a course of action on such issues. Consequentially, some have accorded the public sphere as a solution centre without which the government will not function effectively. All in all, the public sphere theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding how the media serve as 'notional' space for discussion, debate, and circulation of information ultimately toward formation of public opinion.

A thorough interrogation of literatures (Habermas, 1989; 1991) reveals that a functioning democratic public sphere hinges on the following:

1. Constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties: freedom of expression, opinion and assembly. Most countries today accept basic civil liberties as agreed upon in the universal declaration of human rights.
2. Free, plural and dependent media system not under state control. The media system is not often seen as the main institution of the public sphere. As, such, it can only guarantee equal access and information to citizens if

it is independent of political and corporate interest.

3. Access to public information: this include freedom of information legislation and a culture of transparency and openness, a large number of countries have adapted freedom of information laws. However, such laws need to be complemented by a culture that is conducive to openness and inquiry.
4. Civil society: A broad spectrum of civil societies which support citizen's demand for accountability and participation in the public sphere. An ideal civil society organization organizes and promotes the citizens agenda.
5. Sites of every day talk on the public affairs: every day talk is an important factor in the formation of public opinion. Sites of every day talk are all places where people come together to discuss politics, social problems and economic issues(such as work place, coffee shops and schools)

Availability of these prerequisites determines the extent to which a democratic country will boast of a robust and all-inclusive public sphere in which ideas on public issues are cross fertilized en route an “open interplay of opinion and policy” (key in Shapiro, 2011) which then form a distinguishing feature of a popular rule.

Media, Interests, & the Public in Nigeria: A Political Economic Analysis

Though the Nigerian media reflect the political and socio-economic reality of the country to its fullest details, its ideological foundation has always been rooted in the Anglo-American's libertarian/social responsibility tenets. Hence, the media are expected to be free from influences and interests but with responsibilities to raise conflicts to the plane of discussion, preserve democracy and responding to society's need and interest (Folarin, 1998; McQuail, 2010). While it is arguable that the Nigerian media in the past were vanguard of the people going by their role in the anti-colonialist protests and anti-military regime, researchers have raised scathing questions as to how well the contemporary Nigerian media are discharging their democratic duties to the Nigerian society in contemporary time (Kperoogi, 2011; Olukotun, 2004; Media Right agenda, 2000; Iredia, 2005). Concerns about the Nigerian media centres on how the so-called 'fuel of democracy' has been reneging on its democratic role; increasingly politicization of the Media (Oso, 2012; Olukotun, 2004); diminishing objectivity on controversial national

issues (Olukotun, 2004; Media right Agenda, 2000); increasing trend of tabloidization/ Sensationalism; and disappearance of the “brand of investigative and advocacy journalism that characterized the anti-colonial and anti-military eras” (Kperoogi, 2011); as well as the “near- absence of a virile, uncompromised domestic watchdog media system that is committed to comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable in the face of the enormous corruption that has accompanied Nigeria's return to democratic rule” (Kperoogi, 2011). While all these concerns abound among the Nigerian press and are likely to short-circuit its 'its fourth estate of the realm' imperatives, it is pertinent to note that many of these issues are not intrinsic or inherent make-up of the Nigerian press; rather, they are levied on them by the larger political economy of the country as “the press always takes the form and colouration of the milieu in which it operate” (Siebert et al, 1955). Though the political economists hold that economy is the base on which other superstructures of the society is anchored on, media theorists often ignore the economy base in analysing operation and outputs of the media (Oso, 2012). However, political economy approach provides a holistic framework to study the media as the approach takes it as “axiomatic that the media must be studied in relation to their place within the broader economic and social context” (Winseck, 2011). According to McQuail (2010),

the media institution has to be considered as part of the economic system, with close links to the political system. The consequences are to be observed in the reduction of independent media sources, concentration on the largest markets, avoidance of risks, and reduced investment in less profitable media tasks (such as investigative reporting and documentary film-making). We also find neglect of smaller and poorer sectors of the potential audience and often a politically unbalanced range of news media (p.85)

Oso (2012), agrees with McQuail's assertion as he observes that :

The Nigerian mass media system has developed within the dynamics of the country's political economy... the political/

radical orientation of either the early press or later day successor was largely motivated by the economic and political interests of their owners and the market imperatives for survival...(hence) Any analysis of the media must take on board the way market imperatives determine the range and forms of media production and the resulting outputs (Oso, 2012, p.9-11)

Within these two submissions, it is plausible to say that assessing the political economy of the contemporary Nigerian media may shed light on and clarify the centripetal and centrifugal forces moderating media roles within the nascent democracy in the Country.

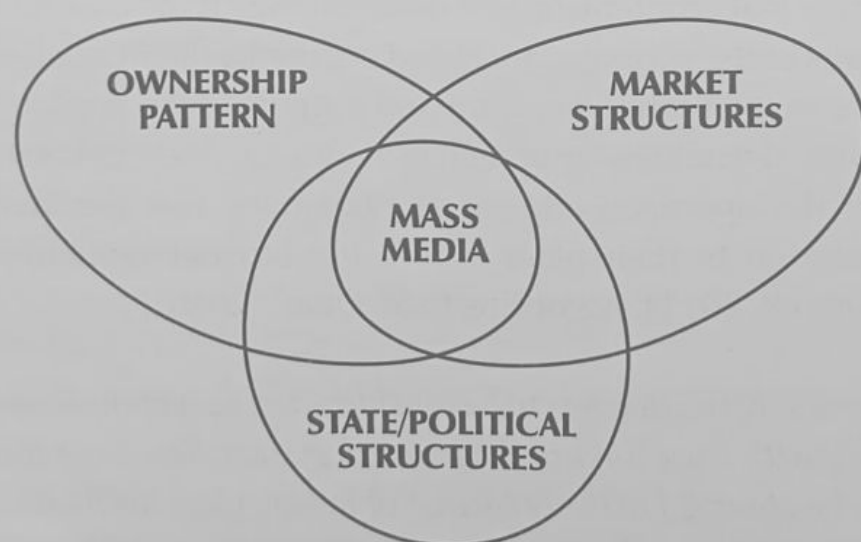


Fig. 2 Analytical model of political economy of the media.
Adapted from Mcchesney, (2008)

Since it is widely accepted that political economy approach connects how media and communication system are shaped by ownership, market structures, technologies, labour practices, and government policies (McChesney, 2000), it is imperative to analyze the Nigeria media within their ownership pattern, market structure, and their relationship with government structures.

Ownership Structure of the Nigerian Media

Ownership pattern has a considerable influence on the content and general performance of mass media institutions. Basically, ownership is defined or characterized by the ability to exercise control or exert influence in the running of the newspapers having provided resources that facilitated their publication and their continued existence (Adesoji & Hahn, 2011). Ownership of media in the country is open to private entities and government. However the last 20 years, the federal government has divested heavily in owning National Dailies but some state governments still owns and run what we can call 'state or regional newspapers (e.g Herald Newspapers owned by Kwara state government). Hence majority of the national newspapers, if not all, in the country are privately owned. As for the broadcast media, major television networks, aside federal Government owned Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) and clusters of State Government owned Televisions stations, are privately owned. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note that basic driving force for majority of these private entities in establishing national media revolves is more of political rather than commercial imperatives (Oso, 2012). Just like the owners of the pre- and post-independence nationalist press, majority of the proprietors of the contemporary media in the country are either active politicians or have political interest (Oso, 2012). This implies that the long tradition of the use of the press as a political tool that started during the colonial period continued in the contemporary time even with greater vitality (Adesoji and Hahn, 2011). Among some wealthy politicians in the country, their belief is that media ownership is a way of promoting their political agenda and this explains the greater investment in it. Hence, Adesoji and Hahn (2011) added that this line of reasoning justifies why such media outfits are not run as pure business ventures but are rather sustained through the continued funding of the politician owners. News media outfit such as the Nation owned by Bola Tinubu, Leadership own by Nda Isaiah, Daily Sun own by Orji Uzor Kalu, AIT owned by Raymond Dokpesi, TVC also owned by Bola Tinubu to mention but a few exemplified this feature of 'politicians as owner of the press'.

Among media such as Daily Trust, Punch, and Channels whose known owners are not politicians per se, it has been noted that there may be some politicians- moneybags who are actual owners but who want their identity to

be shrouded in secrecy (Adisa, 2015) through the use of 'fronting'. In this regard, real owner and investors, suspected to be politicians operate from the background while another person openly front for them. There is no doubt that the current pattern of ownership of newspapers in the country poses danger to the media as forum for ranges of voices and not that of the elite and ruling class alone. More so, through its ownership pattern and other factors, the media have become so politicize that the political affiliations are discernible from their content (Oso, 2012). Hence, their political leanings most of the time cloud their objective appraisal of a national issue. More so, ethnic affiliation of the owner tends to get better of these media outfit thereby plunging them deep into sectionalism, which is an integral trait of the Nigerian politics.

By and large, the current pattern of media ownership in the country largely forces one to see media as "veritable tools in the hands of their owners to promote and defend their political careers, who also enrich themselves where possible" (Adesoji & Hahn, 2011).

Nigerian Media and the Market

Apart from the few Televisions and Radio stations in the country modelled on the Public service broadcasting framework, the bulk of the media in the country operates as businesses driven by profit motive. However, the profit maximization motive has continued to be a mirage for most Nigerian Newspapers (Dare, 1997) and broadcast houses. The harsh economic reality in the country as well as the internalization of the internet by the technologically savvy youth as the source of news (Adisa, 2014) has resulted in sharp drop in the readership of newspapers and as well as broadcast audience. Though reliable data as to broadcast stations audience base is not available, a study done in 2011 by the Advertising Association of Nigeria, (ADVAN) across the country on 15 newspapers put the daily sales figure of all the newspapers as less than 300, 000, (see fig. 2) meaning that only one in every 470 Nigerians buy newspapers daily (Ukonu, 2012). The pertinent question is how will the media survive under such condition and still be an unbiased forum in democratic setting? It is sacrosanct that media organization highly insulated against economic activities via steady and sufficient stream of income is better equipped for discharge of its

societal function than those widely expose to unfavourable market forces(Hulteng in Owolabi & O'Neill, 2013: Omu (1976).

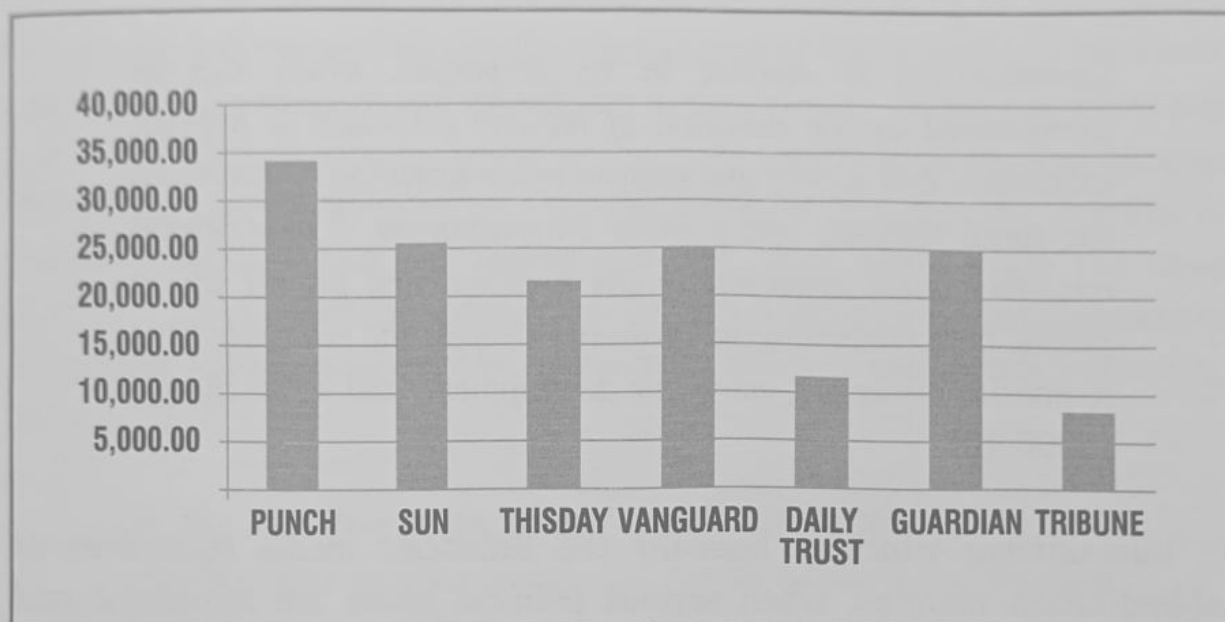


Fig 3 Circulation figure of major newspapers in Nigeria as at 2011.
Source: Ukonu, 2012

Essentially, the market imperatives according to Dare (1997) have opened up media to influences capable of undermining its role as unbiased umpire. In contemporary time, media in the country are desperate for advertising and other commercial patronage. According to Aliagan (2015) newspapers in the country now engages in retainership agreement as a way of getting the desire/needed adverts. Retainership here “refers to a situation where the newspaper enters into a signed or non-signed agreement with a certain level of government (federal, state or local) or an agency of government, or a business interest to run regular news coverage on them in exchange for advertisement placement or payment of money at the end of a certain period. It must be noted that, in this case, the news reporting style is promotional and therefore, must portray the client in good light” (Aliagan, 2015). Within this same market influence, media is now tilting toward tabloidization/infortainment as part of keeping their readers/audience. Tabloidization, sometimes more colloquially referred to as 'dumping down', “refers to a number of characteristics of contemporary journalism linked to a particular

kind of journalism that does appear, or at least assumed to be a successful strategy for keeping audience" (Campbell, 2004). Collin sparks (2000) explains tabloidization thus:

Tabloidization is distinct in its emphases, which can be summarized as the devotion of relative attention to politics, economics, and society and relative much attention to diversions like sport, scandals and popular entertainment. It also devotes relatively much attention to the personal and private life of people, both celebrities and ordinary people, and relatively little to political processes, economic development, and social change (2000:10)

Infotainment which is basically the Broadcast media equivalent of tabloidization manifest when serious political issues are trivialized and packaged as entertainment programmes as a way of keeping the audience. The problem here is that the Nigerian media are fast dumping their roles as purveyor of public information necessary for the sustenance of democracy for scandals and diversions reporting.

The Media and the State/Government

Okoye (2003) holds the relationship between government and the mass media is of utmost importance in any given society. In a liberal democracy, media are seen as the fourth estate of the realm, saddled with the watchdog function. The Nigerian 1999 Constitution even succinctly ascribe this role to the media by specifying 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 to the people (cited in Akinfeleye, 2003)

In carrying out this constitutional role, what is the relationship that exists between the press and the government and other state apparatuses? The

government basic posture to the press in recent times revolves around hegemonic co-optation through any means available (Oso, 2012, Kperoogi, 2011). With its weak economic footing and its pattern of ownership, newspapers in the country are even more vulnerable to government hegemonic influences. One specific mechanisms of this influence is the media reliance on government and its officials as the primary definers of issues and event and their continuous usage as the main source in news. And because these voices enjoy extensive and unrepresentative access to the chamber of public debating which the media provides, they often shape the news discourse and its agenda. Another mechanism is through the appointment of influential journalist to serve as government officials' media aide. According to Oso (2012):

In the last few years, many journalists have also gained appointments as press secretaries, media advisers and political consultants to governments and prominent politicians. Many state governments maintain media consultants made up of prominent journalists who meet regularly to advise them on their publicity and public communication activities. Such individuals act as a form of informal channel of influence flow to media organisations (p.34)

During Goodluck Jonathan regime, Reuben Abati, a newspaper columnist and the chairman of the Guardian editorial board, was appointed Special Adviser on Media and Publicity. Garba Shehu and Femi Adesina, both who are veteran editors and former Presidents of the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), were also appointed by Muhammadu Buhari as his Senior Special Adviser (SSA) and Special Adviser (SA) on Media and Publicity respectively.

Another mechanism of influence is through the dangling of 'carrots and stick' before the press. As a result of shortfall in the revenue of newspapers, government has always used financial gifts to 'buy' influence among media. Any media event of government comes with already packaged brown envelope for onward distribution to journalist as a way of 'psychologically' spinning the angle from which they report such event. The stick component of this mechanism reflects in how government structures hide under national

security reasons to coerce the press. Sometimes, it could be through the blacklisting of some newspapers for government advertisements and so on.

Within this posture of government, can the press operate on the tenets mainly dictated by the public interest? It has been noted that the relationship the state and the press should be akin to that of cat -and -dog and not the current courtship and romance that exist between Nigerian media and the state. The implication of the close affinity between the media and the government is that media in the country have become hypnopompic fourth estate of the realm as typified by "the disappearance of the brand of investigative and advocacy journalism that characterized the anti-colonial and anti-military eras thereby engendering the near- absence of a virile, uncompromised domestic watchdog media system that is committed to comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable in the face of the enormous corruption that has accompanied Nigeria's return to democratic rule" (Kperoogi, 2011).

New Media, New Hope?

The advent of internet has redefined and re-patterns human communication and society at large. Starting from the twilight of the 20th century down to the dawn of the 21st century, Internet has become part of everyday communication media and it has constituted itself on every pedestal of being and becoming in the contemporary 'information age and network society (Castell, 2002). Over the years, the internet and more specifically, the World Wide Web has undoubtedly become the largest available repository of information, it has become part and parcel of humanity as its application permeates every strata of human society so much that one cannot imagine a world without it. The web-based social media also are now powerful tools of information dissemination and reception. Hence, life without the internet would be tortuous, disconnected and disoriented to people who are familiar with it. As Curran observed:

The internet promises and delivers a lot. It can empower, it can widen our worlds, it can offer us seemingly endless amounts of information, and it can help us get in touch with people who share our interests. It can entertain, it can tantalize, it can tempt.

It can also absorb and engulf us, drenching us in more information than we can ever use (2005:385)

Moreover, the rate at which this new technology has begun to reach audiences is unprecedented thereby further fuelling its fusion with every aspect of life. Yelvington in Campbell(2004)notes that “it took 38 years for radio to amass 50 million users. It took 13 years for television to do it. The internet has done it in just 4”.

While the new media powered by the internet is having great impact across diverse areas, it can be said that the same new media is having greater and wider impact in political communication and democracy generally. Within the view that modern day democracy is not working (Dahlgren, 2009) and that Citizenry are increasingly disengaging from civic life and political participation (Coleman & Blumler, 2009), internet and its entourage popularly grouped together as new media, offer hopes, lifelines and prospects to democracy. According to Baek et al (2011) internet has pro-democratic potentials as “would provide an improved forum for debate, one that involves geographically disparate citizens, where issue relevance matters, social status is less important, and arguments are evaluated based on their strength”(p.364). Despite the inclusive notion of cyper-space inherent in this medium, some scholars are cynical about its utilitarian value in democracy as they see internet “as capable of enhancing digital divide, causing atomization of the masses, erosion of social capital and promotion of feel-good usage, derogatively referred to as Slacktivism” (Mustapha & Wok, 2014, p.75).

In Nigeria, New media, especially its social media element, have seamlessly blended into the matrix of political communication media in the country mainly as a result of the increasing numbers of citizens hooking up to the information superhighway. Over the last decade, Nigerians, especially the technological-savvy ones, have migrated online via varieties of social media platforms. As at December 2017 statistics had it that ninety eight million Nigerians are online (www.Internetworldstats.com). This then means that as at this period, 54% of Nigerians (if we estimate Nigerian population to be 180 million) had access to the internet, making the country the largest internet using country in Africa.

Owing to this burgeoning online presence of Nigerians and their virtual networking via varieties of social media, it is only natural that tweets, posts, comments, pictures, videos and online discussions will cover diverse issues including those bothering on socio-political developments in the country (Dare, 2011). This upsurge in social media usage and users generated content no doubts summons politicians and political actors to the cyberspace. On 28th of June 2010, former President, Goodluck Jonathan, opened a Facebook fans page to reach out to Nigerian youths (Dare, 2011). Consequently, other political office holders and public figure also foray to the social media as way of reaching out to online Nigerians. In the build up to 2011 general election in the country, political office aspirants greatly explored the use of social media in reaching out to the Nigerian 'netizens' (Dare, 2011). Fast forward to 2015 general election, new media became a major battle theatre for the heart of Nigerians by competing political candidates. Apart from Facebook, Twitter, and youtube, social media platforms such as nairaland.com, Sahara reporters, lindaikejiblog.com, naij.com and other have created a virtually community for discussions, deliberation and formation of public opinion and public judgement.

If we operate beyond the view that less than half of the Nigerian population is online and that many are deprived of joining the online community due to illiteracy and lack of access to the internet, it is arguable that new media have empowered Nigerians to cross fertilized wide range of views on public issues en route a common stand and public opinion crystallization on such issues. With information, leaks and expose travelling at a speed of light on this information superhighway and generating substantial discussions, extrapolations and inferences among Nigerians, Politicians and Political office holders are increasingly on their toes as to their actions or inactions. In recent time, political office holders have come under intense e-bashings from Nigerians. Nonetheless, since new media have opened up another battle-front of political communication, politicians have since invaded this cyber-sphere with army of paid publicists or spin doctors with mandate to "work on the 'newsagenda and develop and place stories in the media for political advantage" (Stockwell, 2007). In 2011, former president Goodluck Jonathan became the first president in the country to appoint special adviser on new media in person of Reno Omokri. Though not explicitly

stated, it is arguable that the job description of this strategic office include promotion of President's image and policies on new media, counter-attacking e-bashings and possibly manipulating public opinion to favour the Presidency. Following the same tradition, President Muhammadu Buhari also appointed nothing less than two new media aides who may also have similar job description like that of their predecessor. Invariably, flow of propaganda, smear campaign, and deliberate false information are now substantial part of the online user generated contents and information meant to generate critical-rational discourse en route formation and crystallization of public opinion. While all these are strategic interference and manipulations of the cyber public, tactical means, such as advertisement, direct-financial inducement and cyber-terrorisim, (Dare, 2011; Kperogi, 2011) have also been deployed by political actors in ebbing the flow of unfavourable information that may emanate from the this medium.

New media offers hope to democracy in Nigeria and anywhere in the world especially via its deliberative and discursive forums in which people engage issues; look at it from all sides, understand the various choices and options along with their consequences en route formation of public opinion (Yankolovich in Merritts and McCombs, 2004). However, it will be a great disservice to democracy for people to presume the purity of information, viewpoints and ideas on these platforms. Since the all inclusiveness and 'publicness' (Habermas, 1989) of the new media could be a double edged spear which allows for wide range of views as well as views from paid publicists and spin doctors, it is pertinent for people to develop a critical-rational way of filtering information and ideas as a way not to be swayed by deliberate misinformation or manipulation of opinion. Though the new media is still a minuscule compared to mainstream media in terms of political communication in Nigeria, it is pertinent for Nigerians to resist influences and control that is gradually creeping to this notional space less it becomes another elite sphere.

Public Opinion and Policy Making in Nigeria: The Triumph of the Trustee Model?

Within the view that "open interplay of opinion and policy is the distinguishing mark of popular rule" (Key 1961), are there indicators

highlighting the influences of public opinion on policy agenda and policy making in Nigeria? Answering this question will require empirical studies, though the near-absence of reliable opinion poll to picture climate of opinion on issues of public concern in the country may hamper such studies. Nevertheless, whether public opinion will have a place in policy making or not can still be, to some extent, linked to the functionality or otherwise of the media. Media as the most visible institution of public communication have a democratic duty to provide forum in which can partake in serious deliberations and engagement of issues of common concern en route collective stand and public opinion on such issues. Proper reflection of such public concerns/opinion on public affairs issues in the media may then help kick-start the process by which public opinion becomes important factors in policymaking. This particular power of mass media to set agenda on public opinion as way of transforming them to policy agenda assumes importance going by the generally accepted process of policymaking which presumes that the first stage is the formation of policy agenda mainly emanating from public. Hence, failure of media to stand aloft; provide a level playing ground for all views; and crystallizes public concerns of issues in form of public opinion will definitely impede the extents to which 'mass views have some place in the shaping of policy' (key in Shapiro, 2011). In Nigeria where it is arguable that the media, through their ownership and other socio-economic factors, are fast becoming goads of the elites, public opinion on issues of common concern are mainly guarded by elite rhetoric and such opinion may not necessarily reflect the wish of the people. This will then translate to a situation whereby policies ultimately enacted may consequently be related to opinions that policymakers have helped shape through their primary definition of issues and the offering of such definition to the media (Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000).

This the failure of the media to be free from all controlling interests and the systematic hijacking of the public sphere by the ruling elite in the country have ultimately transmuted to the triumph of 'trustee model' of political representation over the delegate model. In trustee model, political office holders considers themselves as sage and expert elected to decide for their constituency irrespective of the view of such consti-tuency. As such, public opinion may not really have a place in shaping policymaking. This form of

political representation contradicts the 'delegate model' which political office holders relies mainly on the public view for his/her input in the policy formulation process. In Nigeria, policies are likely to be enacted without recourse to mass view about such policy since media have been co-opted to see things from mainly from a similar point of view to that of the policymaking elites (Oso, 2012).

Towards Bold Decisions and New Directions

The extent to which democracy and democratic ideals will be become entrenched in Nigerian political culture will depend to how well media in the country are able to rise up to their democratic and constitutional roles. With the ongoing globalization and liberalization of trade, tendencies for media to holistically immerse in the economic system will continue to soar higher. In the same view, elites battle for control and manipulation both in mainstream media and new media is likely to get hotter. Hence, the onus is on the media as institution of public trust to shield themselves adequately from various influences that may cloud their ideal positioning as unbiased umpire. In Nigeria, tone of the current crises of democracy revolves around the continuous distancing between the electorates and the political office holders. This is a huge problem considering the fact that such cleavage will engender zero synchronization between the real aspirations of the people and policies ultimately enacted. Hence, until the media in the country constitute themselves to a formidable bridge builder between the citizens and the ruling elites through the provision of all-inclusive public sphere, more of policies that are not people-centric will continue surface in the country's political terrain.

It is also pertinent for people to leverage on the democracy-facilitating tendencies of the new media as way of infusing their views in political decision makings and tensions. The rich information environment of the new media along with its tendencies for instantaneous and deliberative communication may actually be the one of the turning points for the much needed good governance in Nigeria. however, the growing 'netizen' in the country will have to develop system of filtering online political communication contents so as not to be swayed by the rising trend of misinformation and disinformation as tactics for image management and

laundering of public opinions about political figures in the country. A synergy between of mainstream media and new media towards enlarging the available political public sphere as well as setting agenda on public concerns about issues in the country will provide a necessary ground on which mass views may actually shape and modify public policy. All these require bold decisions and new directions by the citizens, media, and the ruling elites.

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