

A Discourse on the Nigerian Media And Democratic Practices

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Abstract: Promoting democracy is one of the media's most important jobs. This is because democracy cannot flourish and prosper unless information management and distribution are likewise democratized and liberated from excessive governmental control. Over the years, the Nigerian media has responded to the developing political, economic, and social concerns effectively. However, in the democratic movement in Nigeria, journalists were frequently seen as adversaries of the state. They are frequently intimidated, muzzled, and imprisoned because of this. This essay examines the role of the media in the practice and growth of democracy in Nigeria using data from documentary sources. The Libertarian, Communist, and Social Responsibility Theories are all in the essay. These theories were chosen on purpose since one theory cannot solve the difficulties being examined separately, necessitating many theories. The paper makes the case that issues with the complete application and enforcement of press freedom, noncompliance with the Freedom of Information Act, the welfare and well-being of journalists, and proprietorial influences, as well as the belief on the part of some politicians and political office holders that the media is their enemy because it exposes them, are the main obstacles preventing the media from playing an influential role in Nigeria's democratic practice. This article urges governments at all levels to cultivate a culture of moderation toward the media to support and defend press freedom. Furthermore, if there is no interference with the press by the government, there would be transparency and responsiveness in governance since the media will constantly check the government's actions. This will aid in the growth and strengthening of democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Media, Press, Journalism, Democracy, Election, Democratization, Development

Introduction

The degree to which media independence is protected is one of the global indicators used to assess the degree of democratic practice in a nation. This is required since the media is believed to be one of the most important vehicles for teaching and enlightening the public about democratic institutions and government. In addition, it is essential to note that the media fulfills both conventional and constitutional duties by acting as a watchdog for the three branches of government. This guarantees a better democratic practice defined by accountability, openness, probity, and responsiveness in government (Zainawa, 2018).

Citizens can only understand government goals, acts, and inactions regarding democratic processes and governance when they are sufficiently informed and educated. The media serves as a bridge between the governed and the government, serving as a means for information dissemination between the two groups. For instance, although the government communicates its choices, policies, and actions to the public through the media, the media also educates the authorities on the public's views and reactions to these decisions, policies, and acts (Ojo, 2005). Similarly, the media sets the agenda for discussions on critical national problems, compiles public viewpoints on those topics, and informs the relevant authorities of whether or not such issues have received support. Along the same line, investigative journalism may reveal and expose scandals and scams, waste, corruption, inefficiency, antisocial behavior, and authorities' carelessness, especially in a democratic system (Sawanti, 2000). It is essential to reiterate that the media in a democratic and civilized society plays three fundamental roles, namely informing the public about issues of public policy and politics by representing and debating alternatives, serving as a watchdog by exposing political, economic, and corporate corruption as well as other types of abuse of power or ineffective policies, and assisting in the education of the public about their civic and political rights and how to exercise them. As a result, the media contributes to developing and maintaining democratic governance open to participation and accountability.

It is significant to mention that Nigerian journalism has faced difficulties throughout its history. This is because journalists have experienced much intimidation and harassment throughout the years, particularly during military control periods, including arrest, incarceration, and tool confiscation. For instance, the Decree 35 of 1993 gave the government the authority to seize and forbid the distribution of any publication that impacted the press's ability to carry out its duties and compromised security. Furthermore, it was nearly impossible for the press to function as a result of the Public Prohibition Decree 48 of 1993, which outlawed all publications in the Concord Press, as well as the Newspaper Registration Decree No. 43 of 1993, which canceled the prior norms and imposed new, strict standards. At the same time, copying or publishing any material considered treasonous under the Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree was unlawful. At various times, the police and other security services have imprisoned journalists without charges being brought against them, while government officials have seized over 100,000 copies of newspapers and magazines (Zainawa, 2018). As a result, the history of the media's fight for democratization and democratic practice is replete with tales of brave journalists

and social critics who chose to risk their lives in prison rather than accept undemocratic, autocratic governments in order to ensure democratic practice and good governance. This patriotic outlook made a significant contribution to democratic governance and effective administration. In order to illustrate the difficulties facing the media in furthering democratic principles in Nigeria, the primary goal of this essay is to ascertain how the media and democratic practices are related.

Conceptual Framework

It is essential to examine the philosophical and political foundations of media and politics in general when considering the mutually beneficial relationship between the media and democratic practice. The printed press, along with radio and television transmissions, are all considered to be part of the media. However, the concept has expanded recently to include social media, new media, and internet journalism. Scholars have given the media several different definitions. It is described as a collective mode of communication by which the general public or populace is informed and educated about developments in government, particularly under democratic practice, as well as in the community at large. The media is sometimes described as a collection of all communication methods extensively using direct, one-on-one interactions between communicators and the audience. The term “media” can also refer to all organizations and authorities that disseminate information to the general populace. Making information widely known or promoting efficient communication between the government and the governed are the media’s roles in democracies (Udeala, 2020).

What is often referred to as “Social Media” is not included in the working definition of the media approved in this. Dissemination of information comes to mind whenever the word media is spoken. This is true since one of the media’s fundamental roles is disseminating information. The anticipation that Nigerian media will enlighten society usefully has mostly been met. Indeed, there is enough evidence of the media’s role in Nigeria’s democratic practice at various points during the nation’s political evolution (Pate, 2012). In a similar vein, Section 22 of The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that “The Press, Radio, Television and other agencies of the media shall at all times be free to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people,” was drafted in recognition of the sacred role of the media in both democratic practice and the overall development of the nation. Because it serves as the nation’s watchdog, the fourth estate, conscience, the media, and democratic practice go hand in hand. In this regard, the media’s responsibility, as stated in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, endows it with the duty not only to discharge its traditional watchdog role in all aspects of governance and in advancing the frontiers of the people’s liberties and freedoms but also the duty to regard itself as the policing institution over the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy as well as the citizen’s Fundamental Rights. Because the constitution requires the media to monitor governance, it follows that it should keep watch on how the government interacts with the populace in a democratic setting to promote openness, accountability, probity, fairness, and responsiveness (Udeala, 2020)

The philosophical and analytical foundations for comprehending the social functions of the media are explained by many ideas. Although the concepts specifically mention the press, it is important to clarify that they pertain to the media generally. The Authoritarian Theory is the first. According to Siebert et al. (1956), “reality was thought to be the work of few intelligent persons that were in a position to guide and steer their followers rather than the huge bulk of people.” As a result, the truth was considered to be near the center. As a result, the press served as a tool for a very long time to enlighten the populace about the policies and information the rulers believed they should support. According to this view, the monarch’s administration had the authority to modify the content of the press and use it for mass communication. Furthermore, as the political apparatus was primarily in place to promote and advance the goals of the monarch and, consequently, the government, no journalist dared to criticize the monarch, a government official, or any political figure.

The Libertarian Hypothesis is the second theory that explains press freedom. According to this theory’s proponents, man is a free, logical entity capable of making moral judgments. According to Siebert et al. (1956), when presented with contradictory information and options, man is no longer thought of as a helpless creature that has to be “guided and directed, but rather as a rational being able to identify better and worse alternatives.” Furthermore, truth is no longer considered to be a power-related attribute. Instead, the press was established as a collaborator in the pursuit of truth, and the right to truth-seeking is one of man’s inherent rights. Three important components of journalistic freedom under libertarianism were recognized by Oloyede (1996). One is the presumption that different perspectives exist on public matters. According to the Laissez Faire private enterprise philosophy or intellectual basis of capitalism, the second element is the absence of state control in press activities. The media’s financial independence is the third factor at the same time. McQuail (1987) enumerates the critical elements of press freedom under the libertarian view as follows:

1. Any third party should not have previously censored publications; anybody can publish and distribute content without a license or permit; There should be no requirement to publicize anything; this includes assaults on any political party or government person (as opposed to attacks on private citizens, treasons, or security breaches).
2. Publication of “error” should be protected equally with the publication of the truth in matters of opinion and belief. There should also be no restrictions on the legal gathering of information for publication or the export or import of “messages”

across national borders. Journalists should also be able to assert a high level of professional autonomy within their organizations.

The Soviet Communist Theory of the Press is the third theory. The soviet press functioned as a tool of the governing authority, similar to the authoritarian philosophy, under the label of Marxist Determinism and the complicated political necessity of preserving the dominance of a party that represented less than ten percent of the nation's population. Contrary to the earlier trend, it is state-owned instead of privately held. Soviet spokespeople believed their press was free since it was allowed to speak the "truth" even under strict censorship. The Soviets, on the other hand, countered that the American Press was out of reach because it was dominated by business and hence unable to convey the Marxist truth. Thus, while using words like "freedom" and "responsibility" to describe their acts, the two systems are fundamentally incompatible. The important characteristics of press freedom under the Soviet Communist Theory of the Press are: the press is used instrumentally, i.e., as a tool of the state and party; the media are closely incorporated with other tools of state power and party influence; they are used as instruments of unity within the state and party; and they are almost exclusively used as instruments of propaganda and agitation (Ravitch, 2015).

The fourth theory, the Social Responsibility Theory, was created since, at one time, the libertarian perspective could not provide freedom of the press and freedom of speech. This occurred due to the media becoming concentrated in the hands of a select few following the fall of the autocratic regime, particularly in the United States of America. As a result, the press's role as a free marketplace of ideas was no longer possible. Instead, it was the role of media owners and managers to choose which individual, piece of information, and interpretation of the issues the public should be exposed to. This circumstance served as the impetus for creating the Social Responsibility Theory. According to this view, the press should serve the political system, inform the public, protect individual liberty, serve the economic system, and offer amusement without necessarily compromising the growth and development of democracy. According to the theory, the media's influence and near monopolistic position force them to shoulder social responsibility for ensuring that all viewpoints are fairly represented and that the public can access sufficient information to make informed decisions. If the media chooses not to shoulder this responsibility, other public agencies, such as the government and the audience, may be required to do so. The idea holds that freedom entails responsibility and that the press, which is in a privileged position, has a duty to the community to carry out some crucial mass communication duties (Ojo, 2006)

The Nigerian Media and Electoral Politics

It is impossible to overstate the importance of elections and the electoral process, in which parties and individuals vie for elective seats. Moreover, the media is crucial for teaching and enlightening the populace about all aspects of democracy, particularly electoral politics, and free elections. A credible election involves more than just having the right to vote and understanding how to cast a ballot; it also entails a participatory process in which voters and candidates engage in open discussion and citizens have sufficient knowledge of the parties, candidates, and their platforms, as well as the electoral process itself, to make informed decisions. The Nigerian voter benefits from the media's access to information about the personalities of candidates for political office and their platforms. Additionally, the media works to maintain electoral integrity in democratic elections since, without it, leaders and officials would not have the confidence, legitimacy, and support of the general people. The electorate's right to comprehensive and accurate information, discussion and discourse on policy matters, and interaction with politicians extend to media coverage of elections and the electoral process. The right of candidates and parties to use the media as a forum for communication with the public is inherent to this job. Similarly, it is necessary for the Election Management Body (EMB) to notify the electorate and other entities, including political parties and candidates.

The media, sometimes referred to as a "watchdog" in modern politics and society, is essential to preserving the openness, transparency, and fairness of the democratic process in Nigeria. This includes public discussions by candidates, political parties, or supporters. Clarity is required for access to information, defined as providing essential and complete information to an electorate to enable them to make educated decisions and hold institutions and authorities responsible. Access to judicial and administrative processes, as well as details on people and institutions, are included. In addition, the media serves as a means to stop and look into claims of wrongdoing or malpractice. This watchdog duty encompasses the whole governance process and officials' accountability and activities while in office. For instance, given that the media can operate impartially and independently, their presence during voting and tallying election results is crucial in reducing electoral fraud (Udeala, 2020). The Nigerian media assisted the electorate in defining the agenda by giving them information about the personalities and goals of the political officeholders. Between 1998 and 1999, as Nigeria was transitioning from a military to a democratic civil government, the media did an excellent job of informing the people about what was happening in the country's political arena. In essence, media activities are strongly related to the growth of the democratic practice. It will be challenging to have a strong democracy without a helpful media system or a thriving mass media system without a democratic system offering helpful facilitation. According to Boyd-Barret (2001), a responsible democratic system necessitates comprehensive media that can generate conversation on topics of public interest without favoring partisan interests like those of political parties or media owners and professionals. This suggests that in their interactions, the media should uphold

democratic principles or a democratic spirit to prioritize public interest problems and treat them objectively, professionally, and independently. Soola (2009) asserted that a democratic environment that is shaped by a legal and ideological framework, a political system and structures, an economic system and social arrangements, a pattern of media ownership and control, and a standard of professionalism among media practitioners is necessary for a functioning media system.

Media companies want to turn a profit. Therefore, it is typical for content that would improve democratic practice to be retained in favor of commercials or other revenue-generating materials. Another consideration is the journalist's well-being, as many media companies do not provide regular income. Contrarily, some people owe to pay for weeks or even the entire year, making it impossible to guarantee high-quality performance. Another difficulty is the atmosphere in which the media functions. There are still many laws that limit media, and some of them, like the Sedition Law, which the court has declared dead, are nonetheless applied to journalists. In addition, several government entities, including the National Assembly that approved the Freedom of Information (FOI) Law, are still dragging their feet on compliance more than nine years after it was passed. As a result, if the media does not have unrestricted access to information, it is frequently challenging to inform, educate, advocate for, and keep watch over society about the actions of all levels of government (Pate & Akingbulu, 2020).

Democratic Practices and the Nigerian Media

In Nigeria, the media is essential to the practice of democracy. The media first assumes the role of the informant. By giving Nigerians factual information from domestic and international sources, the media serves as an informant. As a result, a wire-service reporter claimed that "the reporter is the ears and eyes of the public" and that "the reportorial process is lost" if he is unable to put what he sees and learns into the understandable language (Cohen, 1963). For citizens to judge matters of public concern and ensure that public policies, initiatives, and decisions are based on popular demand, the media must tell them factually about democratic activities. A U.S. publication emphasized the significance of the media in informing the public, asserting that the press plays a transcendently important role in informing the world and that every media outlet is an encyclopedia of the local history of the world as well as knowledgeable about democracy and democratic practice (Rucker & Williams, 1965). In order to initiate and implement the policies and programs in a democratic environment, the public must be well informed.

Additionally, the media represents the Nigerian populace. It certainly has a role in influencing public opinion. People are encouraged to express themselves on topics of general interest via newspapers, magazines, radio programs, and television. Government officials or policymakers are aware that they would be severely hindered in enacting their policies without favorable public opinion, which is why the media assists in protecting people's interests. In a democracy, the media serves as the people's voice. By posing the kinds of inquiries that hold public servants accountable for abusing their position of trust, it stands in for them. As a result, the media is impartial in preserving democracy (Ibgboli, 1994). Most elected officials pay close attention to what the public reads in newspapers and magazines, hear on the radio, and sees on television since those are some of the most important sources of public opinion (Siebert, 1956). In essence, the media reflect popular opinion since they are the public.

Thirdly, in a democracy, the media acts as a critic of the ruling elite. No other institution offers the necessary checks on the government as it does. Only a few journalists make an effort to separate News from Views rigidly. Mechanically, they claimed that editorial pages should be used for critique rather than news columns. Others countered that since a reporter may interpret his critical duty directly, the criticism would constitute news. In a nutshell, monitoring government activities and reporting results as honestly and objectively as feasible are essential media tasks in a democratic country like Nigeria (Okpoko, 2003).

Finally, the media serves as a policy advocate. The press has a well-recognized and accepted role in policy advocacy. The editorial page is where this is centered. The editorial page is where reporters typically place advocacy when they refer to it as a function of the newspaper rather than as something they do. For some, the editorial page of newspapers plays a crucial role in lobbying. The First Republic's experiences with the termination of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact and the Fourth Republic's pro- and anti-Sharia attitudes have shown that policy advocacy or crusading journalism has had a prominent position within the media since Nigeria struggled for independence (Okpoko, 2003).

Nigerian media outlets were relieved when democracy was restored on May 29, 1999. The spirit of vitality in the media is reignited since it is no longer the subject of state persecution and intimidation. Before the Fourth Republic, as was highlighted in the portion of this article before it, the media had been subjected to the arbitrary use of authority, particularly during periods of military dictatorship. Prior to 1999, the military served as a shared enemy. Thus, several unprofessional tactics were used to overthrow the military. It follows that if the media is to fulfill its moral responsibility to uphold democratic government in the Fourth Republic, it must abstain from sensationalism and fact-checking. In its editorial on June 7, 1999, the Newswatch magazine used this as the basis for its argument that the media should abandon sensationalism and allow maturity and sound judgment to guide its reporting on important national problems (James, 2017).

Despite these obstacles, Nigeria's fourth republic's democracy has significantly benefited from the media's contributions to its practice and growth. However, the bad status of the economy, which has left many media organizations permanently destitute, is one of the biggest challenges to the operation and freedom of the media in Nigeria today. Conversely, this has caused some media professionals to forgo ethics and devise dishonest ways to supplement their meager and irregular remuneration. At the corporate level, media organizations have also bowed to commercial and political interests that profit from ads. These interests frequently insist on controlling the media's editorial stance.

Unfortunately, although many professionals would not publicly acknowledge it, much of what is broadcast or written in the media (or what is not reported) reflects what some cunning advertisers want to see or hear. Additionally, it makes the results of elections, whenever they are held, public. For instance, the Obasanjo administration was generally pleased with how the Nigerian media covered the elections in 1999, 2003, and 2007. The media typically recommended prudence so that democratic practice might flourish in the nation rather than rocking the boat of democracy by highlighting the bad parts of elections (Harald, 2015).

The media promoted the Nigerian democracy process. Indeed, the country has a thriving media that has served as the forerunner of democracy. A testament to the media's status as a bulwark of democracy is its participation in establishing and maintaining democracy since 1999. Ensuring effective administration and upholding democratic values have been issues brought on by the return of democracy. The media professionals are aware of the constraints put forward by the political environment. They have thus started many initiatives to encourage the media to support democratic practice properly. As a result, the Nigerian media has taken some positive steps to enhance political communication during elections, and the majority of parties and candidates were able to share their perspectives with the voters. However, journalists must support ethics, respect opposing viewpoints, ensure the democratization of information flow, and ensure that the public interest serves as the guiding principle in all media coverage and publications for the media to live up to its constitutional role of promoting and sustaining democratic practice.

Additionally, there is a need to stop the rising prevalence of media corruption by forbidding journalists from giving in to any pressure that would lead them to violate their ethical standards. Additionally, media owners are exhorted to provide journalists' well-being and the care they deserve so they will not be vulnerable to corruption. This guarantees an independent, impartial, unbiased media that would significantly advance Nigeria's democratic growth (Omula & Johnson, 2016).

Conclusion

In Nigeria's democratic practice and process, the media is a crucial institution. Without the media's assistance, democratic government is challenging. The media is thought of as operating and orienting in a Nigerian manner. It highlights the flaws and defects of developing democracy and the character of Nigeria as a democracy. There is no question that the media has the potential to improve democracy and democratic practice. We have seen that the diversity of the media does not permit a monolithic perception of issues and events affecting democracy and governance, notwithstanding the concerns with ownership constraints and other outside influences. The media is always aware of its responsibility to uphold the country's democratic tradition. Although the media has sometimes been supportive of the existing quo, as the fight for democratic practice gains pace and engages more people, it gives individuals the courage to challenge the status quo and support the democratic forces and demands of society. To put it briefly, the media is crucial to Nigeria's democratic process. This is especially evident when teaching, informing, and enlightening voters on how to conduct their political activities, such as voter registration and election. Therefore, democracy struggles to survive when people are not informed and taught about the need to actively engage in political activities and exercise their civil rights and freedoms since these activities are essential to democratic procedure and practice. In essence, establishing and maintaining a reasonable democratic practice depends on the presence of the media.

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