

DEREGULATION OF BROADCAST MEDIA IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL

Rauf Adegoke Akeem

Head Of Department, Mass Communication, Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Ojo Titiloye Oyeyinka

Department Of Mass Communication, Tai Solarin University Of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu- Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Akinreti Olalere Qasim

Head, Foreign Desk, Voice Of Nigeria And Part-time Lecturer, Nigerian Institute Of Journalism, Ogba, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Odegbenle Lateef

A Broadcast Journalist, lectures at Nigerian Institute Of Journalism, Ogba, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Jegede Omolayo

Department Of Mass Communication, Babcock University, Ilisan, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Nwaolikpe Onyinyechi

Department Of Mass Communication, Babcock University, Ilisan, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Abstract

The study examined the turbulent journey of the media practice in Nigeria for the past two decades before and after deregulation. It reflects the media as an agent of development that cannot be dissipated because of their pervasiveness but rather be seen as an impeccable tool of social order which made commendable impacts in the nation's social-economic development. The paper employs both the primary and secondary data sources in its methodology. The primary source utilized interpersonal interview of media experts, scholars, seasoned Journalists, public analysts and policy makers while the secondary is sourced from Libraries, Archives, Newspapers, Magazines and other Desk studies.

The theoretical perspective is on the Agenda Setting Theory which established the media as an inevitable vehicle of policy formulation and dissemination. The study found that lackadaisical attitude of the Regulatory and professional bodies particularly on the issues of ethical conducts and practitioners' welfare poses a serious concern for the media industry in Nigeria. The paper concludes by advocating for a more robust media practice and effective monitoring by media regulatory agencies as well as the professional groups towards sustaining the fourth Estate role of the media in Nigeria. It equally recommends media training, acquisition of management skills and sound ethical practices for a virile future for media practice in Nigeria.

Introduction

Broadcasting started in Nigeria with the radio broadcasting in 1936. It started as a relay of the British Empire services (Williams A. Hachten 1971). Raufu, (2011:56) observes that, "before the fourth decade of the 20th century, the British colonialists had depended on the print media for publicity and propaganda and they later added radio to their arsenal of information dissemination".

The pattern of operation was not indigenous, and on this Raufu (ibid) continues, that the station began operations with “the establishment of a relay station in Victoria Island, Lagos which disseminated broadcast information to major Towns in Nigeria via the wired wireless otherwise known as Rediffusion”.

In 1956 with the establishment of what came to be known as Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), broadcasting was incorporated under law and operated under the policies of the Federal Ministry of information. The provisions of this law, called 1956 Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation Ordinance -, stated that “the corporation could carry on all such activities as may appear “requisite, advantageous or convenient” and could erect, maintain wire distribution services”.

This law thus became the first in the nation’s history to provide the legal platform for the establishment of broadcast media in Nigeria. It was not until a hundred years after the first newspaper- “Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Egba “ was read on the streets of Abeokuta, that Nigerians began to view motion pictures on tube with the establishment of the first Television station in Nigeria, and black Africa Known as Western Nigeria Television (NNTV). This station beamed the first signals on the 31st of October 1959; thereby buttressing the allusion of Otunba et al (2005) that print media is a century older than Nigerian TV, just as it is 70 years ahead of Radio. Since Western government of Obafemi Awolowo established the WNTV in 1959, television has continued to grow in leaps and bounds. However, the growth of television has not been unassociated with the growth of the nation and the development associated with such growths. Primarily the multiplicity of broadcast stations is linked to the balkanization of the nation into smaller units by successful governments over the years.

From the regional government in 1966, Nigeria now has 36 states in 1994. Each of the state has its own radio and television stations. All these are in addition to over 36 Federal governments-owned NTA Stations and about same number of Radio Nigeria stations operating across the states of the federation. It would be recalled that the military government had acquired all the TV Stations in Nigeria in April 1976. The government had then directed that “Nigerian Television Authority” should “elaborate, analyse and package” government’s development programme, believing that a federally ‘controlled’ television network would fulfill national needs rather than partisan or sectional interests to foster unity and assist in general education.

A major boost for the growth and development of broadcasting in Nigeria was the deregulation of broadcast media landscape, via the promulgation of Decree no 38 Of 1992 (now act of parliament) establishing the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC). Hitherto, broadcast media ownership had remained an exclusive preserve of the state, as prescribed by the constitution. Section 39 (2) of 1999 Nigerian constitution explains and stipulates who can own the different media in Nigeria. It reads in parts: “Without prejudice to the generality of sub-section (1)b of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinion”.

However, there is a provision to this sub-section which provides that no person other than the government of the federation or of a state or any other person or body authorized by the President (with the approval of the National Assembly) shall own establish or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever.

The 1992 deregulation programme therefore opened the broadcast media landscape to private ownership, a step that had brought tremendous improvement to the growth and development of broadcast media in Nigeria. Before the deregulation, Oyebola (2003) observes that,

the nearly forty government-owned electronic media have all virtually become government megaphones. Some were barely surviving with serious dearth of infrastructure and even personnel who have gone for greener pastures (sic) after months and months of unpaid salaries. The few staffers (sic) remaining were just hanging on under serious censorship (either self-imposed or directed from above). morale is at its lowest ebb and creativity neither allowed nor encouraged.

The situation as painted by Oyebola is a very apt reflection of the actual state of things in the broadcast industry before the advent of private ownership of broadcast media in Nigeria.

To a large extent, broadcasting has fared better since 1992 especially in the areas of production quality, use of new technologies, coverage and reach as well as accessibility to wider segments of the society. Though programming has been expanded, it is however to the detriment of local programme contents. The implication of this development is the unwitting abandonment of the valuable media function of “transmitting the socio-cultural heritage of the people across generations (McQuail: 1978).

Television broadcasting particularly has thus assisted greatly in the erosion of the nation’s culture through unguarded beaming of foreign cultures and tradition into the nation’s different homes, a situation that is worsened by the cable networks in the names of DSTV, HITV etc. Newspapers and magazines are however facing a peculiar challenge as circulation keeps dropping even against rising population and increasing literacy level among Nigerians.

Methodology

The data of the study was sourced from both the primary and secondary sources. The primary source employs interpersonal interview with seasoned Journalists, Media Experts, Policy Makers, and Public Analysts while the secondary is sourced from Libraries, Archives, Newspapers, Magazines and other Desk studies.

Theoretical Framework

The study relates with the Agenda setting function of the Media which sees the media as determining what the public discourse will be. The role of the media cannot be underestimated in terms of shaping the thinking pattern of the public. Okunna (1994) noted that even when the media do not tell the electorate what to think, the media inevitably tell what to think about.

On the influence of the media in shaping public discourse, McCombs and Shaw (1977) write,:

this impact of the mass media ability to effect cognitive change among individual to structure their thinking has been labeled the agenda setting function of mass communication. Here lies the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us.

It is worth mentioning here that the public rely on the media to be acquainted with whatever is going on in their environment and limiting them to the line of thinking and focus that suit the media's intention.

Language, Culture and Mass Media

Sowemimo (2012) observes that:

The cultural and political rivalry among the ethnic groups in Nigeria has played a significant part in complicating the task of selecting at least one tribal language to cater for inter-tribal communication. Some ethnic groups feel discriminated against if their languages are not used in broadcasting and we all know the cost of such a big venture if all the languages in Nigeria will have to be used. It has been noted that since independence, more languages have been introduced on the radio. It is evident that the trend has wetted the appetite of an increasing number of ethnic groups to demand that their languages be used in radio programmes.

But, unfortunately, the reverse is becoming the situation with present crop of media Radio & Television in the country. Most Presenters, now find difficult in pronouncing names of even their tribes men in the nations languages especially Igbo and Yoruba are dwindling at an alarming rate.

In the same vein, national values, culture and social heritage are becoming subjugated as today's media content project foreign social cultural values at the period of the nation's social interest. Yet the National Broadcasting Commission NBC has put the ratio of media contents at 70-30 in favour of local programme, against foreign programmes. That this deterioration began to set in the middle of 1990s is incontestable particularly that Private broadcast media of T.V and Radio are the most guilty of these anomalies. The implication is that a huge portion of the blame may be attributed to the broadcast media deregulation that began in 1992.

It then could be argued that the 1992 Broadcast Media Deregulation Decree now Act of Parliament brought with it a mix-grill of good bad and ugly. Sowemimo continues

Ordinarily, if nation is described as a distinct race or people having common descent, language, history or political institutions, then the need for a native lingua franca is established.

But the situation with Nigeria is complex for the upgrading of any of the three major language to a national or official status. As such, he concluded,

the existence of many small ethnic groups (usually referred to as tribes) which speak different languages complicates communication which is turn increases the difficulties of political and cultural integration".

This lack of unity coupled with constant and un-hindered exposure of the youth especially to foreign media has thus put the nation's media at the mercy of the combination of audience and the foreign values which the target audience are now used to. The last two decades of media practice in Nigeria could not therefore be said to have favoured Nigeria own culture, value and languages.

News Gathering and Distribution

So many things have happened to News gathering and distribution in Nigeria in the last two decades. For the broadcast media, Private individuals keep securing licenses to establish T.V and Radio stations even as we already have close to “proliferation of broadcast media” in the land. How has the broadcast media landscape fared in the last two decades? is a relevant question at this point. As a reaction, the position of Sobowale (1996) is worth re-appraising. In line with his thinking, it has been discovered over the last two decades that broadcast deregulation has actually engendered: enhanced competition, employment opportunities, improved occupational/mobility and increased specialization among practitioners.

The above, are in addition to the problems of low productivity and reduced quality of media products; movement of accounts of advertisers; credibility problem with financial institution such as was experienced in the case involving Daar Communications and some banks a few years ago; among other issues.

To a large extent, the news contents of the broadcast media have been greatly affected. The last two decades have witnessed what Nwosu (2007) described as BMCC: Broadcast Media Content Commercialization, as most of the Broadcast media stations have lost sense of their social responsibility to the public. This news commercialization syndrome is not peculiar to privately owned media, government owned broadcast media have been taken over by their respective government owners, especially in the states. The new-found concentration of interest by people on the electronic media does not help matters for the electronic media owned by government. Today, the media in Nigeria are the agents of the powerful elites, submitted Oso (2012). His submission derives from the argument that

as far as media organisations are articulated to the structure of power and constrained by economic and commercial imperatives, the channels of communication will largely express the voices and interest of dominant social groups in the society.

And to a large extent that is what the Media in Nigeria has been subjected to in that last two decades.

The Media and Politicians

The debate has not totally seized over who actually sets the agenda between the media and the Politicians. In a society like Nigeria and with the tendencies of the Politicians, it may not be too difficult to conclude in favour of the Politician the pattern of media practice and the disposition, attitude and preponderances of media practitioners around give the then Politicians the edge.

Since “event quality” actually qualifies it to enter into news net, says Oso (2012), Politicians have also devised means of packaging politicians and events for “media publicity and audience applause”. Thus

“PR specialist as Spin doctors write the scripts, Politicians perform the Script as actors, the media provide the stage and journalists report the drama for the entertainment of us, the audience”.

Politicians and the elites have therefore, over the last two decades, dominated and manipulated the media to their own advantage and to the detriment of the generality of the populace. The

media are thereby put in the position of structured subordination to the powerful social groups in Nigeria.

Ownership and Control of the Media

Media Ownership is a constitutional issue in Nigeria as Section 39 sub Section 2 stipulated who can own what media and in what condition. The Section provides that every Nigerian is entitled to own, establish and operate a medium for the purpose of dissemination of information except that for broadcast media ownership by private concerns, the consent of the President of the nation is mandatory. Fortunately, as against what obtained in the past, the Decree no 38 of 1992 (now on Act of the Parliament has liberalized the broadcast media landscape and this has actually provided opportunity for private ownership of quite a large number of radio and television in the last two decades.

Government ownership still persists though, the Print media are more privately owned as most of the know government newspapers have gone to sleep within the last twenty years or thereabout. The existing ones are still embattled because as observed by Hachten(n.d) cited in Raufu (2003)

unquestioningly, government papers are doing important job of a sort unavailable before. They tell the government story, explain government policies.

Whereas, Hachten continues,

the press must be independent of government, able to supply the people unbiased and objective information about their nation and the world in line with the diction "He who pays the piper, dictate the tune" but to time a large extent, private media still sometimes endeavor to perform in their own little ways the function of "upholding the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people" as enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria.

However, governments still own the larger percentage of broadcast media with the pervasive ownership influence still visible State governments. Particularly, manipulate their radio and television with impunity. The situation is almost the same with the Federal government. Control of the media is not, restricted to government, however, private owners also manage their media. Generally, the clutches of media owners on media practitioners have been tight though, Nigeria journalist have often devised various means of circumventing the controls in the interest of the people, albeit to their personal detriment and discomfort. For instance the Nigerian media have been at the forefront in the war against corruption as they have kept exposing cases of corruption involving leaders, politicians and business people in the country particularly since the current democracy began in 1999.

The "Toronto" Forgery of Salisu Buhari, the Farouk Lawan Vs. Otedola oil subsidy saga are some of such cases. In fact standing stoutly against the Presidents of the nation when they take steps that indicate they want to take the citizenry for granted has been a regular feature of the Nigerian media in the last two decades. No doubt, this is a legacy inherited from the Nationalist Press which was rated as the most ebullient in Africa.

For Hachten, “The best example of Libertarian press in Africa has been the ebullient and iconoclastic newspapers of Nigeria before 1965”

But in a sense, this description may not be restricted to Pre-1965 for the experiences of the Nigerian Media during the days of Abacha, and indeed, during the last three successive Military regimes before 1999 in Nigeria, could only put the media at a very high rating in terms of resilience and social responsibility in the interest of National development.

Nigerian Media and Censorship

Various attempts have been made by successive Nigerian governments and elites to repress the media sometimes practitioners have been killed while media are proscribed or shutdown. Editions of publications were sometimes seized to ensure that the citizenry did not have access to them.

It was travail for the media, a season of suffering for the practitioners when pre-publication censorship became the order of the day for government owned media particularly. The situation still features under the current democratic rule. For example, at Gateway Television (2007-2011), a board member of the TV station edit the news after the News Editor had passed it for broadcast. He was fond of saying “*Oga o nii like eleyi o*” (the boss-Governor would not like this) and consequently removing stories or re-writing them. (Interview with News Staff, OGTV). Cases of media censorship in the last two decades in Nigeria are inexhaustible, some of which led to death of practitioners.

Media Education and Ethical Practice

Nigerian Universities and Colleges have established departments for training media practitioners across the nation. Media organizations too are contributing to the process in their own ways- the T.V College Jos, the Radio Nigeria Training School Lagos, the Nigerian Institute of Journalism, the Daily Times Training Institute and the Tell Journalism School are all owned by various media organizations.

While the National Universities Commission, and National Board of Technical Education regulate Universities and Polytechnics respectively, the regulations of institutions owned by professional organizations are still suspect.

Recommendation And Conclusion

The importance of mass media as agents of development cannot be over-emphasized and a robust media practice is the only way out for playing the role effectively. In view of this reality, the study concludes that the fourth estate functions of the media is inevitable in as much that we wish to live in a virile and information oriented society. Based on the foregoing, the paper recommends that the Practitioners should endeavor to embrace the use of Information Communication Technology tools for news production. The regulatory and professional bodies, such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria, Nigeria Institute of Public Relations, Nigerian Press Council and the National Broadcasting Commission, must take up the gauntlet and begin to perform their statutory functions in the interest of the future of media practice in Nigeria. It is also imperative to remind media owners to cater for workers welfare satisfactorily. These to a great extent will enhance a promising future for media practice in Nigeria.

REFERENCES.

Mccombs and Shaw D., (1977), *The Emergence of America Political Issues*. New York. West Publishing Coy.

- McQuail, D (2005) **McQuails Mass Communication Theory** 5th Edition; London, Sage Publications
- Okunna C.S., (1994) Introduction to Mass Communication. New Generation Books Ltd., Enugu, Nigeria.
- Omu F. (1996) “*Journalism in Nigeria-Historical Perspectives*” in **Journalism in Nigeria issues and Perspectives**; compiled by Lagos NUJ, Lagos, Cargo Compas Nig. Ltd
- Oso, L. (2003) **Community media: Voices of the Oppressed**, Abeokuta, Jedidah Publishers
- Oso, L (2012) **Press and Politics in Nigeria: On whose side**; Lagos, Lagos State University Publication
- Oyebola O (2003): “Deregulated Broadcasting as a catalyst for media Creativity – A study of OGBC”, an unpublished HND Final Year Project submitted to the Department of Mass Communication, Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta.
- Raufu, G (2011) **Mass Media and the Society: Issues and Perspectives**: Lagos, Kagor International.
- Sowemimo, O S (2012): **Issues in the History of Nigerian Mass Media – Perspectives of a Veteran Journalist**; Abeokuta, Crescent University Press
- William A. Hachten (1971). *Muffled Drums: The News Media in Africa*. The Iowa State University Press.
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999.