



AUDIENCE'S PERCEPTION OF BROADCAST MEDIA WATCHDOG ROLE ON FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S FOOD PALLIATIVE DISTRIBUTION IN TARABA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper major on audience perceptions of the watchdog role of broadcast media in Taraba State in reporting the distribution of food and other palliatives provided by federal government of Nigeria as succor to pacify the harrowing effect of hunger in the country that prone the Youths to embark on Nationwide protest against bad governance. The paper beams its searchlight on broadcast accountability role of the media three weeks before the ten days #EndBadGovernance agitation to know if broadcast media are creating awareness, monitoring and reporting efforts made by government officials in responding to the public demands with focus on residents within Jalingo metropolis Taraba state capital city. Using the Media Dependency and Social Responsibility Theories of the Press, findings reveals that even though awareness were created by broadcast media in the state about federal government food palliative, Broadcast media in Taraba state seldom feed the public with information on the movements and distribution of palliative items in the state, which indicates why some political officers in the state outrightly sale out what significantly meant for the public at exorbitant price for personal gain. conclusively, the study recommends that broadcast media in Taraba state should brace up in their reportorial approach by holding elected public officials responsible for the promises and actions as a tenet of democratic settings to prevents power abuse and corruption at all cost with the press positioned as independent overseer.

Keywords: Audience, Perception, Broadcast Media, Federal Government, Food Palliative

Introduction

The media primarily serves the public with information and create awareness about events within and outside its immediate environment. It is the extension of this information function of the media that birthed what is now known as the watchdog role of the press. The world is currently facing corruption infested system, and with the crops of leaders we have as public actors today, the hope of the common man relied on the mass media, especially the broadcast media which delivers information with immediacy and spontaneously across large audience (Aiyelabegan 2011).

Corruption is an evil global trend, but most trending a phenomenon in Africa and Nigeria spearhead it. Corruption has been identified as one key ailment that hampered growth and development despite the agenda outlined to lift over 100 million Nigerians out of abject poverty by the year 2030 (Ogbuehi, 2022).

Ogbuehi maintains that, for development to thrive in Nigeria, accountability is needed to ensure proper management of resource by powerful political actors (Ogbuehi, 2022 cited Koppel 2005, p.98) who clearly demystified that, accountability has five dimensions which include transparency, liability, controllability, responsibility and responsiveness. This is in line with Nsereka (2023) who says that “a leader who does not shows concern is an irresponsible and unresponsive one”. These are pivotal aid to an individual, organization or a nation for improve performances.

Nevertheless, today, the sting of corruption has made the government of Nigeria at different period to come up with different agencies to help hold public officers accountable while managing state resources.

The major anti-corruption institutions with prevention mandates include: The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), The Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), to mention but few, yet these agencies are only active at some point under a particular leadership or death on arrival (Nsude & Etumnu, 2023).

It is equally important to know and note that no accountability institution is as old as the mass media. Wilson and Onwubere (2023) said “accountability cut across media divide. The essence of the watchdog function in journalism practice is to hold relevant authorities, organizations and individuals in the course of their official functions as documented in section 22 of the 1999 constitution as 61kjamended accountable to the people.

Connectedly, the intent of this paper is to access the effectiveness of the watchdog role of the broadcast media in holding public officials accountable. Nsude & Etumnu (2023) revealed that the core factors of bad government is corruption, they duo went further to assert by supporting it with (Agbo & Chukwuma, 2017) who says “the threat of corruption entrenched in the country that it is now nearly the standard”. This causes the citizens to lose confidence in the entire system. It is presupposing that the last hope of the common man is the media where it successfully carried out its watchdog role.

More so, the broadcast media which has the ability to reach large audience simultaneously with immediacy is seen as critical stakeholder in exposing abuse of power, fact-checking of official statements, alteration in of figures and dates and equally point out illegal and immoral activities the powerful actor’s shield.

The watchdog role of the media imbedded in it what is now known as expository and investigative media practice. Having known that the mass media is girded by this function, this paper aimed to investigate audience perception of the watchdog role of the broadcast media in monitoring, and reporting the federal government food palliative to Taraba State with focus on Jalingo residence.

Statement of the Problem

Apart from the name and shame for prosecution mantra inherent in media functions, it is a cost-effective combative institution for exposing corrupt practices. There is a nexus between the public, media and governance. Similarly, there is a stronger bond between good governance and the media functions (Nsereka, 2023).

Today, media practitioners lowered themselves from the realm of the Fourth Estate to assume a role of lapdogs fondle by political leaders and top administrators in the country. This practice has not only muzzled the media and rendered it passive in committed to its watchdog role in ensuring accountability and transparency in the corridors of powers, but makes it seem the media are part of the corruption syndicate.

Government officials who are supposed to be responsible overtly divert public fund and food items mean for the public for their personal use. An instance of one official of Ibi local government area in Taraba state who divert food palliative mean for his constituency and sold to the public at exorbitant rate, after two weeks of national broadcast by Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) which announces federal government’s effort to distribute food (grains, wheat and noodles) to cushion the effect of hunger and food crisis in the country, it was not announced when and where this food palliative would be shared.

Only for Tarabans to wake on the 2nd of August 2024 to discover that social media platforms are filled with the video clip of the said local council officials diverting food items and selling them out for monetary gain. The goal of journalism is to fill the public space with vital information, educative contents and certainly create awareness, the watchdog role however is an extra goal in that it ensures any vital formation a public official is trying to keep away from the public domain must be fetch out, name, shame and prosecuted in the public altar.

There is other corruption cases swept under carpets that nobody is doing anything about. Journalists are watchdogs, whistle-blowers, keeping a close eye on government and government actions and exposing instance of misconduct, corruption and abuse of power (*The Nation*, n.d). It is on this

backdrop that this study intent to evaluate audience perception of broadcast media's watchdog role before the "end-bad –governance" nationwide protest in Taraba state with focus on Jalingo residence to know if broadcast media in Taraba has been on their toe to see that Tarabans are aware of when and where these foods are dispatched to, and if local broadcast media within the state monitored and blow whistle where necessary.

Objective of the Study

The fundamental objective of the study is to query into audience's perception of the watchdog role of broadcast media on Federal Government's food palliative with focus on Jalingo residence.

Other objectives are:

1. To examine if broadcast media creates awareness about Federal Government's food palliatives in Taraba state amidst tension to embark on nationwide protest.
2. To find out audience's perception about broadcast media watchdog role in relation to the corruption scandal surrounding palliative in Taraba state.
3. To find out from the audience if palliatives were distributed as announced by federal government.

Literature Review

Awareness and Watchdog role of the Broadcast Media

In a clime where people are not adequately informed, they perish, information is knowledge and the broadcast media (the radios and the televisions) are strong purveyor of information to the society on daily account. The broadcast media, however, is more timely in its reportage due to ease in production process (Iheanacho et al., 2024). The information function of the broadcast media embodied both awareness function and as well surveillance.

The media create awareness about events such as outbreak of pandemics, climate change, flood and myriad of human interest issues in the society. The surveillance function on the other hand ensures that the public are served adequately on information that seems obscure and blurred resulting from human effort (individual and group) to keep away from public light. This is not uncommon in societies riddled by corruption, irresponsible and unresponsive leaders.

In a study titled, "Audiences' Perception of the Media and Accountability of Public Officials in Imo State, Nigeria, Nsude & Etumnu (2023), investigate the role of the media in ensuring the accountability of public officials in Imo state from the audience perspective, the study which was pinned on media dependency theory, uses survey design method with a sample population of 384 using online sample size calculator.

The multistage sampling technique was used with questionnaire primarily to collect data. The findings showed that respondents perceived that media mass to extend, are low in holding public officials accountable; it also reveals that the media do not play enough role in promoting accountability of public officials with appropriate recommendation.

Nsereka (2023), conducted a study on governance media and accountability. The study pinpoints the major socio-political crisis bedeviling Nigeria to include unemployment, hunger, poverty, insecurity, insurgency, insurrection, drug trafficking- abuse, and addiction, oil bunkering, police brutality, ritual killing, rape, domestic violence, fraud and litany of others. All these vices are birthed out of indiscipline, greed, and corruption molded by political leaders to have enabling atmosphere to embezzled public funds, and obvious looting of national treasury with impunity.

The excruciating the study further underscore, is the reality that journalism profession has been entangled in the web of corruption by assuming the role of pet dog in lieu of watchdog for politician and this taste of the forbidden fruit of corruption brought about compromised in media watchdog role making them-the media constituent in corruption. Conclusively, the study recommended that peace in Nigeria milieu is non-negotiable, it pointed out that the watchdog versus pet dog role of the media be highly considered in the debate of accountability in governance.

In another study conducted by Taiwo et al (2023) investigates journalist's perception of Nigeria's media influence in entrenching good governance and accountability. The study took Qualitative study approach using purposive sampling methods where 10 journalists from Television Continental (TVC), Africa Independent Television (AIT), Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Radio Nigeria Ibadan and five print media (*The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Nigeria Tribune*, *The Sun* and *The Nation*) were selected and interviewed based on the study objectives.

After an in-depth interview with the 10 participants, the study exposed cruxes that needed to be addressed for effective journalistic practice in Nigeria to include Ownership structure, gate keeping and the threat of losing the job totally. Even though participant noted that journalists are reporting corruption and maladministration the way they could, if the aforementioned did not give way, it will always be cumbersome for media surveillance to function.

Based on the findings of the study, it recommends that, there should be intensification of investigative reporting approach to continue to unearth poor governance and promote good governance as well, that media independence, free from heavy interference will enable the media carry out its watchdog role, and that, Nigerian media should not relent on its social responsibility in setting agenda or discourse on topical issues bothering the citizens.

Wilson& Moses (2023) conducted a study on The Media and Accountability in Nigeria Judicial Sector that examined the effort of the media in holding the judicial system accountable with key interest in identifying some sensitive areas which the media have to center on. The judicial system according to the study is an indispensable arm of government that cannot be overlook, thus, the study used desk review approach to identify the key areas to include ethical decision, administration of justices, maintenance of significant distance from relatives, justices' delivery, et cetera.

The study's theoretical foundation was pinned on the social responsibility theory of the press, at the concluding part, the findings recommend that, the key areas earlier identified be adequately observe as ethical decision entails reporter's effort in making sure excesses of judges and legal practitioners are reported and checked, the media are also encouraged to investigate and expose a situation where possible, the judicial officers have interest due to their relationship with disputing parties to allow equal opportunities in hearing,

Amodu et al (2016) analyzed the media as The Fourth Estate of the Realm, the study explicitly revealed that the existence of free press within each nation or political system is essential to the process of democratization as their contribution to the freedom of expression, thought and conscience non negligible; it also argued that free press strengthen the responsiveness and accountability of government to all citizens which lead to good governance and development to humanity.

The study stated further that lack of independence and sufficient remuneration of the media and practitioners always makes the media to compromise on their part and gradually merge into become part of political gladiator and corruption syndicates. It recommends that, the media as the fourth estate of the realm should remain consistent in its watchdog role, setting pace in discussions (agenda setting), shape and reshape what the public should think about(framing) and be a firm custodian of public sphere.

In another research carried out by Obagwu & Idris (2019), they critique the application of social responsibility theory and its constraint. The duo argued that, accountability can be seen as liability or responsibility. Here, it can be understood that the social responsibility theory of the mass media carries alongside responsibility chain such that the media are responsible to the society just as the powerful actors are responsible to the media to ensure better and transparent governance.

Having reviewed different studies that centered on the mass media and its accountability roles, this study discovered gaps in the location of the previous studies to this findings, in this study however, apart from the design used by Nsude & Williams (2023), which quantitative approach was used, and Taiwo et al. (2023) whom studies were qualitatively incline, few or no finding has been carried out in regard to broadcast media accountability in Taraba before, during and after the end bad governance protest.

Thus, the paper established that there is a gap in the coverage of the palliative distribution in Taraba, therefore the study seeks to examine if broadcast media creates awareness about Federal Government's food palliatives in Taraba state amidst tension to embark on nationwide protest.

Theoretical Underpinning

Two juxtaposition application of theories were used in this paper, they are; social responsibility theory and media dependency theory simultaneously. The paper adopted these theories to effectively and explosively support and explain the foundation of the study better. The social responsibility theory is one of the first classical theories of mass communication.

It was as a result of the excesses of Libertarian theory (free press system) which led to the formation of Hutchin Commission of enquiry in 1947 that social responsibility theory was hatched (Okunna & Omenugha 2012). It happened that social responsibility theory is the third of the political theories of press. It finds its place in-between Authoritarian and Libertarian press operations. There are plenteous tenets of social responsibility theory but the ones relevant to this study according to Okunna & Omenugha (2012, p. 203) include:

1. The mass media have to accept and carry out certain obligations and be dutiful to the society.
2. Media practitioners should always work towards enhancing the society, by always accountable to the society, not only their employer and other powerful actors for economic gain.
3. That people have the right to expect the press perform creditably, and higher authorities are justified if it intervenes to make the press do this and to ensure that the media are serving the public good.

The above tenets are intertwined and self-explain. Deduced from above is a clear-cut that the mass media are accountable to the society(audience). The essence of the accountability or responsibility per se is to work toward bettering the society and toward corruption-free community. The critical question now is; if the media is expected to be answerable (accountable) to the society, who then, is expected to be accountable to the press? - The government (public officials).

The watchdog role of the media come to play when the media tend to be secretive, the media is constraint to become whistle-blower. Tenet point 3 justified that both the mass media and the government are accountable to the people. The media dependency theory on the other hand, was propounded by Melvin Defleur & Sandra Ball-Rokeach (1976).

According to the theorists, people depend on the media to fill their information need and depend more on media that meet number of needs than on the one that provides few. University of Twente (n.d) put thus, "Media dependency theory proposes an integral relationship among audiences, media and the larger social system".

The point here is, peoples' level of dependency on the media is central to the specific information need certified by the people and satisfied by the media. The theory sees the viewer as an active participant in the communication process (Nsude & Williams 2023). Connectedly, the meeting point of the two theories is the reality that, people heavily consume media content from a media outfit that tend to meet their information needs and be more consistent in carrying out its social responsibility to the society.

Methodology

This paper adopted survey design. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) (2018, P.90) posits that ‘*survey research is a study of a portion or sample of a specific population such as people of community, state etc.*’ It further explains that survey research hardly covers entire population but sample drawn from the population. In this study, descriptive survey research is used and Cluster sampling was applied with relevance to the area of study.

Data were primarily collected using questionnaire, and simple randomization was used afterward to allow elements within each cluster to have an equal chance of being selected without bias and for purpose of convenience, the following are the division of wards within Jalingo Local Government Area, they are: Abbare Yelwa ward, Barde ward, Kachalla Sembe ward, Kona ward, Majidadi ward, Mayo Goi ward, Sarkindawaki ward, Sintali ward, Turaki ‘A’ ward, Turaki ‘B’ ward. As at 2024, World Population Review (WPR, 2024) evidenced that the population of Jalingo city stands at 117,157 people.

However, for the purpose of convenience and control, the researchers distributed 440 close ended questionnaires across the ten (10) wards where respondents in each ward received 44 questionnaires each, 431 were returned correct while the remaining 9 was mishandled from improper shading to misplacement. Data were calculated using simple percentage and presented in frequency table to ease comprehension and appreciate observed variables of the research outcomes.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section displays the data collected, processed and analyzed. From the 440 questionnaires distributed, 431 were found usable and 9 were not able to be processed and used due to double response from the respondents, torn out parts, and some could not even return theirs. The questionnaires were divided into two sub-parts. The first part deals solely with respondents’ information while the second part dwells on the essence of the study.

Demographics

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	209	48.5
Female	222	51.5
Total	431	100
Age Brackets		
15-25	71	16.5
26-35	121	28.1
36- 45	206	47.8
46 Above	33	7.6
Total	431	100

Occupation		
Students	27	6.3
Civil Servants	170	39.4
Entrepreneur/Artisan	174	40.4
Farmers	60	13.9
Total	431	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

From table 1-3 above, finding revealed that women are the major respondents with (51.5%) while the male counterparts stood at (48.1%). Secondly, the study also revealed that the highest respondents come from people within the age bracket of 36-45 which stood at (47.8%) followed by age brackets within 26-35 of age at (21.1%).

It implies that adults who are directly at the receiving end of tough economy in Nigeria dearly anticipated for the federal government palliative. The third table shows that in occupational aspects, the highest respondents are entrepreneur/artisans which stood at (40.4%), followed by civil servants (39.4%) and farmers (13.9%) and eventually students which stood at (6.3%).

Other feasible study questions

Data collection on this study depends on primary source-questionnaires. The Likert scale were used to determine the degree of relevance of questions to the study

KEYS

SA= Strongly Agreed

A = Agreed

DA= Disagree

SDA= strongly disagree

Table 2: Whether the broadcast media create awareness about federal government's food palliative distribution in Taraba State.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	122	28.3
A	176	40.8
D	55	12.8
SD	78	18.1
TOTAL	431	100

Source: Field survey 2024

Table 2 above revealed that 40.8% which is (176) of respondents confirmed that there was awareness created by broadcast media in Taraba State about federal government's palliative distribution, 28.3% of the respondents at (122) which are lesser in number strongly agreed that broadcast media in Taraba create

awareness on food palliatives while the remaining 30.9% disagree that there was no such awareness on food palliative distribution in the state.

With these reasonable (majority) numbers of resident in Jalingo metropolis affirmed awareness that federal government released food palliative to Taraba state government for the benefit of citizenry. It implies that the broadcast media in Taraba live up to its awareness function by ensuring the publics were updated on government plan to assuage the economy hardship faced by the people.

Table 3: Knowledge of audience's perception about broadcast media watchdog role in relation to the corruption scandal surrounding palliative distribution in Taraba State

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	140	32.5
A	13	3
D	212	49.2
SD	66	15.3
Total	431	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 3 above shows that 35.5% of the respondents agreed that broadcast media in Taraba are playing their watchdog role in exposing corrupt practices in the state while 52.2% disagreed that media outfit in Taraba state especially the broadcast media are not playing active role in ensuring accountability of public officials in the state.

By implication, it means that the intersection in the surveillance and watchdog functions of the broadcast media as crusaded by Harold Lasswell is poorly uphold by Journalists in Taraba state to expose corruption scandals surrounding the downstream distribution of the food palliatives.

Table 4: Responses on whether food and other palliatives were distributed in Taraba State as announced by federal government

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	0	0
A	0	0
D	33	7.7
SD	398	92.2
Total	431	100

Source: Field survey 2024.

Table 4 above revealed 92.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed that no palliative of any sort was distributed in Taraba State prior to federal government's announcement on the end bad governance nationwide protest. The implication is that broadcast media in the state did not carry out intensive investigation on why there was no palliative distribution in Taraba state.

Discussion of Findings

This paper investigates audience's perception of broadcast media watchdog role on federal government's food palliative distribution in Taraba state, in line with objectives of the study, the revealed findings are thus:

In line with the first study objective, 40.8% majority of the respondents agreed to the fact that, broadcast media in the study area created awareness about food palliative distribution by federal government of Nigeria with lesser numbers as 28.3% strongly agreed to that knowledge which is a testament to the fact that broadcast media in Taraba state still operate below average in their awareness (information) function and this is in line with Asemah (2012, p.119) who says *'the media are popularly acclaimed to be agent of information dissemination in every modern society. They disseminate information about the happenings in the society so as to make people to be aware of such things.*

It is also in conformity with Tsegyu, et al (2022) who posits that the mass media serves as a dais where information of public relevance are disseminated. This is also in tandem with a study conducted by Obagwu & Idris (2019) which revealed that, surveillance and information dissemination is a basic social responsibility of the mass media to the society in similar manner as the powerful actors are to the mass media to instill good governance. It implies that majority of the citizenry was not properly informed ahead of time that palliative will be distributed to cushion the effect of hunger in the study area.

Findings in regard to the second objective revealed that, reasonable percentage of the numbers of respondents disagreed that broadcast media are not playing their watchdog role in holding public officials accountable. Highest percent (49.2%) disagree that broadcast media in Taraba state are not doing their best when it comes to holding political actors in power accountable.

This is in discord with the findings in Peterson & Schramms (2020), Taiwo et al, (2023) that, the media and journalists played integral function in a democratic society to ensure leaders at all levels are hold accountable to the public. They further posit that the principle of accountability involved holding elected public officials responsible for their promises and actions as the tenets of democratic setting prevents power abuse and corruption at all cost with the press positioned as independent overseer. This means that the media practice in the study area failed to meet the required standard.

The result of this finding is also incongruent with other studies (Liberties.edu, 2022; Lewis, 2021) which says that, watchdog journalism employs investigative reporting approach which seeks to expose misconduct and increase transparency and accountability of our politicians, public figures and institutions. In climes where the media appear to be slackened in its watchdog role, it is tacitly compromising, either on the altar of financial gains or accepts the function of sycophants in order not to be seen as eye opener to the public.

Significantly, Nyongesa (2021) argued that, the media provide information which the society need to make an informed decision on the one hand, and perform a checking function on the other by ensuring elected officials uphold their oath of offices and campaign promises that carry along the will of the electorates.

Yet, the study also contradict what was obtained in Amodu et al, (2016) in their analysis of the media as the Fourth Estate of the realm, while the findings in the study encourage consistency on the side of the press in carrying out their social responsibility, this is only possible when the mass media did not just give mere report (information/knowledge) on issues bothering the society but set also agenda (public debate and discussion) which is key in media responsibility to the society.

This constitutes what quite a reasonable number of the member of the society think about a particular issue of public importance. What the media makes the society think it is, (frame/boundary sets for knowledge) project its relevance to the society, a close example is the prominence accorded to Tax Reform Bill by the media outfits in Nigeria in December 2024 which resulted to outright rejection of the bill by some regions of the country

Thirdly on the question of whether palliative items were distributed in Taraba state, (92%) of the respondents denied there was no palliative distributed in the state. This confirm the video clip that has been on circulation that some political actors in Taraba state divert food items provided by federal government as succor for the devastating effect of hunger in the state to their Warehouse and sold out to the public for personal gain with impunity. It is not surprising that the audience's perception on broadcast media watchdog role during and after the palliative distribution is rated low in the state.

Conclusion

Findings indicate that there was partial awareness on palliative distribution by the broadcast media in the study area, there was no follow up to ensure accountability and transparency to further communicate the date and place of distribution, thus, respondents denied receiving any such succor from government in spite of their admission that information were earlier made that it was released for public use.

Media professionals have failed in their responsibility to make available information to public space on shady deals of public officers to ensure they are accountable to the citizens in all their doings as large numbers of the citizenry depends on the mass media for their information needs (Ehegiator et al, 2023). The reason is that the media as the watchdog of the society serves as the last hope of the common man in a democratic dispensation, and this is achievable where the media resort to opinion formation (agenda setting), thereby making the media an indispensable institution in the fight for good governance.

Anything short of the accountability and transparency role of the media makes the media outfit a mere lapdog of the powerful actors as it operates below the touchstone. Having questioned and elicited what the public perceived, seen and know about the broadcast media in Taraba state in regard to Federal Government palliatives distribution in the state, it is expedient to recommend that:

1. Broadcast media professionals should brace up in their reportorial approach by holding public officials accountable to be relevant and reliable.
2. Broadcast media should not overlook the golden principle of public debate and opinion formation as platform where the public participate and air their pleasure and displeasure on topical issue within their environment.
3. Investigative reportorial approach should be encouraged by the various media outfits especially broadcast media to bring to justice corrupt entities that robbed the public of the dividends of democracy and good governance.

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