

## THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

*In any nation, the media plays a vital role in creating, moulding and reflecting public opinion. Over the years, the media became so popular that it earned the status “Fourth Estate of the Realm”. The media's crucial role in national development is not in doubt. The positive role of media in national development has been recognized in developing countries because information dissemination plays a key role in bringing social change among the receivers. Over the years, development communication has been engaged in finding a niche in the efforts to tackle the formidable problems of underdevelopment and marginalization of millions of people and thousands of communities worldwide through a process of directed social change. The media's role in national development was explored in this paper from the political, national security, educational, economic and social perspectives and hinged on the development media theory. Using the desk research method, the study concluded that the role of the media cannot be divorced from the essence of government itself which is for the betterment of the lives of the people or a given nation. The media performs the role of not only being the fourth estate of the realm but acts as a bridge between the government and the people it governs and represent.*

**Keywords:** Role, Mass Media, National Development, Development

### Introduction

The mass media, which include the whole entity of newspapers, radio, television and the Internet, are important in shaping the development process of a country. National development involves changes or advancement in a nation aimed at improving the political, economic and social lives of the people (Khalid, Ahmed & Mufti 2015). It is a holistic process of action, organization and communication and involves economic, political, social and cultural factors. Development means change that is beneficial to man. Development refers to a change process geared at improving or making better, the life and environment of man. Dudley (1985) cited in Khalid et al posited that development involves the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentialities. Development is neither a simple nor straightforward linear process. It is a multidimensional exercise that seeks to transform society by addressing the entire complex interwoven strands, living in pulses which are a part of an organic whole (Haqqani & Abdul, 2003). Where the media comes in development process is through what is called “development communication”.

Development communication is the type of communication which is consciously packaged by the sender such that the message content or the information sent could persuade, encourage or convince the receiver or target audience to adopt an attitude and participate in actualizing a development plan or goal. More specifically, development communication refers to the practice of systematically applying the processes, strategies and principles of communication to bring about positive social change (Quebral, 1972). At certain instances, the message sent aims at making the target audience adopt a positive attitudinal change towards a development purpose. Over the years, development communication has been engaged in finding a niche in the efforts to tackle the formidable problems of underdevelopment and marginalisation of millions of people and thousands of communities worldwide through a process of directed social change.

More than three decades ago, Omu (1978) cited in Okoro (2013) emphasized that the press in Nigeria should be an effective and vibrant independent entity that could be instrumental to achieving sustainable developmental goals. The real influence of the media in national development can be said to be peculiar to the media themselves, the societies in which they operate, and the audience they reach. None of these factors are the same everywhere, at all times, or all conditions. The media in dictatorships or traditional monarchies for example, are not likely to exercise the same influence as those in democratic societies. The Media's crucial role in national development is not in doubt. The role covers the political, national security, health sector, economic and social spheres, to mention but a few. The media set the public agenda and act as the gatekeeper of public issues. They perform the watchdog role especially in political transparency and fight against corruption. As the fourth estate, the media provide the checks and balances in relation to the three branches of government, as created by the constitution. Media are particularly important in facilitating nation building especially of post-colonial societies and those experiencing ethnic and religious diversities. In the context of a nation, Eapen projected that three major factors must be considered in any discussion on development. These factors are economic growth, self-reliance, and social factors. Development is a qualitative change, which entails changes in the structure of the economy, social environment, educational system and political disposition. The overall object of national development is human development, the purpose of which is to enlarge people's choices for-- greater access to knowledge; better nutrition and health services; more secure livelihoods; security against crime and physical violence; political and cultural freedoms; and a sense of participation in community activities. The media have been variously described as the fourth estate, agenda setter, watchdog, force multiplier, and gate-keeper, all in an effort to demonstrate their influence on society (Khalid, Ahmed & Mufti 2015). Alternatively, the media have been perceived as a venue for sensationalism, propaganda, and bias, factors hostile to national development. Given these perceptions about the media, the extent to which they contribute to national development wherein the targets of national development are the people have been the object of empirical inquiries. Media's role in national development are analysed in this paper from political, national security, educational, economic and social perspectives.

#### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The media is crucial in national development since it influences and shapes public opinion, behaviour and attitudes of the public. Despite the constraints confronting the various mediums of the press in the discharge of its functions as the fourth estate of the realm, the role

of the mass media in the national development process is enormous. The need to examine the specific roles which the media play in supporting development agenda at sectorial levels of government therefore becomes imperative. Accordingly, the study is set to examine and possibly establish the relationship between the mass media and national security, political, educational and economic development.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This paper explored the role the mass media plays in a nation's development with emphasis on selected developmental sectors.

Specifically, this paper therefore sought to answer the following questions:

- (a) To what extent do the media contribute to national security development?
- (b) How do the media influence the national economic development?
- © In what ways do the media influence educational development in the society?
- (d) What are the key roles of the media in the political development in a nation?

### **THE MASS MEDIA**

Media is a truncation of the term media of communication, referring to those organized means of dissemination of fact, opinion, entertainment and other information, such as newspapers, magazines, books, films, radio, television, the World Wide Web, billboards, CDs, DVDs, videocassettes, computer games and other forms of publishing (Ndolo 2011). Ojo (1999) says the mass media is grouped along three other main estates viz: the executives, judiciary and the legislative while the agents of mass media are regarded as the fourth estate of the realm in any nation. The mass media have been grouped into two classes: the print media which includes newspaper, magazines, circulars, pamphlet, direct mail, bill boards, sky writing and technical device that carries a message to the masses by appealing to their sense of sight. The second category is the electronic media, under this we have radio, television, motion pictures and video recording (that appeal to both the sense of sound and vision); indeed mass media are said to be modern principle papers, magazines and the internet media (Uyo 1987, Blank and Harolsen 1975 cited in Ojo 1999 and Ajibade, 2010).

The mass media, according to C. Wright Mills in the power elite (1956) have two important sociological characteristics: first, very few people can communicate to a great number; and second, the audience has no effective way of answering back. Media output is regulated by governments everywhere, but the restrictions vary from very light advisory regulation (for example no cigarette advertising or nudity on TV) to the most comprehensive forms of censorship in totalitarian societies (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology 2005). The mass media are crucial in nation building. Governments can hardly survive without effective use of the mass media. The press are so powerful in any society that Edmund Burke, an 18<sup>th</sup> century politician first described it as the Fourth Estate of the realm, referring to the three major powers in Medieval times in European society which are the Lords, the Clergy and the Commons (Nwabueze 2014). Today, the mass media are still called the fourth estate of the realm, the other estates being the executive, legislature and the judiciary. The traditional roles of the mass media in any society which are to inform, educate and entertain are so crucial that societies can hardly progress meaningfully without these channels of mass

communication.

### **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Ali A. D (2013) examined The Role of Media in National Security in Nigeria 1960-1999. The study focused on the role of the media in national security in Nigeria in the period 1960 and 1999. The study stated that The Nigerian mass media since independence has faced the greatest challenge of how to make itself relevant to the Nigerian society. The study argued that newspaper orientation in Nigeria shifted towards reinforcing tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to national unity and integration. This in itself is a threat to security. Media reports greatly heightened tension since Nigeria's independence. On the whole, the media contributed more than any other sector to restoring the current democracy in Nigeria. The study recommended that security operatives should work with media practitioners as watch dogs. The media should rise to their expectation and use their power judiciously or else national security will continue to be threatened. Newsmen are expected to feed the public with information capable of promoting peace and development.

Similarly, Nwaolikpe O.N focused on The case of 'Baby Factory' Activities in Nigeria while studying The Mass Media and National Development. The paper argued that though the mass media have the power to easily propagate ideas on social change, they do not perform their functions and objectivities fully in Nigeria due to political, economic and social conditions in the country and in the mass media organizations. The paper concluded that the media should be allowed to promote national identity of Nigeria through the in-depth coverage of societal issues that may be detrimental to the country's growth.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is hinged on the development media theory. The role of the mass media in national development process is hinged on what Denis McQuail called 'Development Media Theory'. It was propounded in 1987. This theory is quite influential because it sees the media as a pivot for national development especially for developing countries of which Nigeria is one. McQuail (1983:131) stated that the central thesis of the theory is that the mass media in developing nations should be used for 'the primacy of the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy; support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries'. He outlined six main principles/tenets of the theory; they are as follows:-

- Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.
- Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development need of the society.
- Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and languages.
- Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically.
- Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.
- In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in or restrict

media operation and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.

Primarily, development media theory is rooted in modernization/functionalist paradigm of mass media's role in development. It presupposes the use of mass media in achieving development in developing countries. The assumption is that the mass media are part of the instruments for achieving development in developing nations like Nigeria. According to Domatob and Hall (1983:10), the late Kenyan nationalist of repute, Jomo Kenyatta urged the press to "...positively promote national development and growing self-respect since in Africa, it can have a tremendous influence on nation-building. It may constantly inspire or could set out to frustrate the spirit of national unity which every young country needs as the fundamental of its progress."

The Media Development Theory is critiqued on the basis of being an updated version of authoritarian theory as it allows that media should never surrender its powers to criticize government policies even if it risks causing the policies to fail. Media is no doubt given power but there is no check kept upon it and instead of being led by the government it may be led by another ideology that may be business minded which would have nothing to do with the betterment of the society as for the sake of business it would always be in favour of keeping the business profitable rather than paying attention to the duties and accountability issues of the media (Rahib Raza, 2013). This can only prevail in a society with a weaker judiciary as the shift of power from government goes into the hands of the bureaucrats and the rich. For this reason it is more vulnerable for the third world countries rather than the more developed ones yet they were introduced and created by the developed countries. Despite the critics' opinion about this theory, the underlying fact behind the genesis of this theory was that there can be no development without communication. The weakness of this theory is that "development" is often equated with government propaganda.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The desk research method was used for this study. The desk research method otherwise known as the secondary source of information is the method where the researcher obtains information from the data that has already been collected by other sources such as data disseminated in a scientific journal, books, internet, scholarly works (Mesly, 2015) in (Ajayi 2017).

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **THE MASS MEDIA AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria's national security means the protection of its resources, territory, sovereignty and lawful institutions of the country. The aim of national security is to secure the just and equitable living conditions of the country (Danladi, 2013). The mass media is a principal player in the arena of national security. Nigeria's National security has been greatly threatened since independence. When Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the mass media orientation shifted towards reinforcing tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to national unity, identity and integration. The media became parochial in their content. They dedicated themselves to the articulation of particular ethnic interest (Udoudo & Asak 2008:4). Press reports during this period greatly heightened tension, which created suspicion



among the citizenry and almost led to the disintegration of the corporate existence of the country. Security is part of public interest and media professionals must have genuine interest in people. The primary focus of any mass media should be on issues that benefit the general public and uphold fairness, justice, national unity and international co-operation (Gambo in Akinfeleye, 2003:12). The function of the press in any given society includes surveillance of the environment, correlation of the component of society in responding to the environment and transmission of the social heritage (Wali, 2003: 17).

The media functions as a watchdog capable of blowing the whistle to call attention to serious national issues. This implies a clear recognition of the fact that the media plays an important role on issues of national security. The power of the media to decide what the people should read, see or hear has never been in doubt. What has been in the centre of controversy is the capacity of those in whose hands reside such enormous powers to use that power judiciously and in public interest. Media professionals have the options to use the power of media instruments in their hands either to serve the nation or indulge in self-propelled interest. The media ought to be objective as it carries out its functions. Mainly because of its social role in informing and educating the masses the Nigerian press is always made to be seen at the centre of any national crisis. This has caused the Nigerian media to be reduced overtime to mere tools in the hands of the governing class to legitimize and perpetuate their illegitimate rule. The political class has found it easy to impose its will on the media because of the challenges that media practitioners had to face in the course of discharging their duties. Such challenges include poor remunerations, poor conditions of service, job insecurity, nepotism, exposure to hazards, inadequate facilities for research and development and so on (Ofuafor 2008:1).

It is in the enlightened self-interest of media practitioners to contribute, as well as protect National Security. Although as members of the fourth estate of the realm, the performance of the Nigerian press has been commendable overall; the activities of some journalists, particularly in the so called new or social media, have undermined National Security, in the reckless way and manner they go about their duties by sometimes openly seeking to bring down a government, whether they are legal or not, elected or unelected. National Security in the true sense is of utmost importance and editors must carefully scrutinize what they put out in their newspapers and or newscasts, as the case may be, in order not to jeopardize the peace and tranquillity of the nation. Complex conflicts are full of pitfalls for journalists, but the more one understands what is really going on in a conflict, and the role of the conflict journalist, the better coverage one can do. In other words understanding what is going on in a conflict zone is critical in managing this often-complicated relationship. Many difficult and intractable conflicts involve whole communities or nations. People get their information about what is going on in these conflicts through the mass media, so the media plays a critical role in either the escalation of the conflict or dousing the tension.

#### **THE MASS MEDIA AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The mass media, whether public or private, plays an important role in any economy by garnering support or opposition for those who govern, by highlighting or failing to highlight the views and/or sins of industry, by providing a voice for the people or not doing so, and by simply spreading economic information. For their ultimate survival the media depend on the state that regulates them, on the firms that pay to advertise through them, and on the

consumers they serve. Balancing these different interest groups is a difficult task and how the media industry does so, determines not just its ability to survive, but its effect on economic performance (Roumeen Islam 2002 WBI). Clearly as important providers of information, the media are more likely to promote better economic performance when they are more likely to satisfy three conditions: the media are independent, provide good-quality information, and have a broad reach. That is, when they reduce the natural asymmetry of information between those who govern and those whom they are supposed to serve, and when they reduce information asymmetries between private agents. Such a media industry can increase the accountability of both businesses and government through monitoring and reputational penalties while also allowing consumers to make more informed decisions. The media can pressure corporate managers and directors to behave in ways that are socially acceptable, thereby avoiding actions that will result in censure and consumer boycotts. A recent survey in Malaysia of institutional investors and equity analysts asked which factors were most important to them in considering corporate governance and the decision to invest in publicly listed corporations. Those surveyed gave more importance to the frequency and nature of public and press comments about companies than to a host of other factors considered key in the academic debate. However, the dissemination of credible information in a timely manner depends critically on how the media business is managed and regulated (World Bank 2001).

As has been aptly demonstrated around the world, the media influence economic, political, and social outcomes. The information industry, in which the media play a key role, tends to develop faster in democratic societies that generally foster freer information flows. However, the media industry can also promote greater degrees of freedom and stronger democracies over time. While each affects the other, the important question for those who are involved in designing policy is what types of discreet steps might be taken to establish and maintain free and independent media. This is a concern for all countries, rich and poor. Arbitrary actions by government are always to be feared. If there is to be a bias in the quantity of information that is released, then erring on the side of more freedom rather than less would appear to cause less harm. Even nascent media in countries with non-democratic and arbitrary governments stand a chance. Progress may occur in small steps, and may even be reversed temporarily, but if the people fight for a free press, there is hope. At some point the media reach and sustain what one might call a critical or threshold level of freedom when the people have become accustomed to this freedom, and constraints on this freedom are no longer possible.

In essence, the mass media and its professionals are crucial in addressing the economic challenges currently bedeviling developing economies like Nigeria. However, the mass media do not hold the key to satisfying the economic yearnings of Nigerians but are facilitators of the process and are teachers of socioeconomic actions (Umaru & Sharafa 2013).

#### **MASS MEDIA AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Education is a very integral part of our society, a social institution that shapes individuals and teaches them how to act and behave in certain situations. Education, for a very large part, can be credited with the advent of technology and technological boom that allowed human beings to speed up their discoveries and innovations, in a manner that has left no field untouched by technology. The role of the media in the development of education has been

imperative. It has played an important part in influencing the underprivileged and the socio-economic backward sections of the society in recognizing the significance of education (Kapur 2018). In today's advanced world where everything keeps changing at a lightning speed, mass media plays an important role in education which is also advancing day by day. The media has the power of educating people, the good and the bad. Since it affects the eyes, the ears and the mind simultaneously, nothing can overcome the influence of the media. Education is no longer confined to the four walls of the classroom anymore with the mass media being responsible for it. The technological innovation in the mass media of educational communication can now be transmitted to far off places without geographical hindrances. Somebody sitting in Abuja can for instance benefit from a lecture being delivered in the United States and this saves a lot of time and money. This means that education can now be transmitted in real time over computer supported media solutions from faraway places. Media technologies according to Moerdyk (2012) have made real inroad into education as mobile phone and internet applications has made it easy for students, teachers, parents and authorities to communicate almost instantly thereby increasing the efficiency of education.

The use of mass media in educational development in Nigeria has contributed a lot in the widening of the people's knowledge in the society and also the scope of mass media in the society, media equipment are things like the television, radio and other electronic sets which are meant to give out information objectively through their effective usage to educate the poor masses. Even the role of social media in education has become undeniable. Many students use social media and the information they gain from it as their primary source of knowledge. Random facts and news headlines designed to give away the most information in the shortest amount of time is how the newer generation is programmed to take in bits of information. Social media is a tool that organizations use to ensure communication with their stakeholders. Today, social media has become a terrifying force, being used to correct social ills. So many public officials resign when their scandals get leaked on social media. Mass media has the following specific roles which it has played towards the growth of education and they are Universal Reach, organised influence, fruitful results and storage of information. Mass media has made the world smaller and connected people like never before. Since the target of education is universal coverage, media helped tremendously bridge the gap.

#### **THE MASS MEDIA AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Over the past decades, the relationship between the mass media and governments in Nigeria has been a highly contentious issue, drawing attention from a wide range of communication scholars, political scientists, and independent research institutions. While perspectives and findings differ on the role of the press in the country as well as its relationship with governments, there is a consensus that the concept of sustainable development and governance will be an unrealistic proposition without effective and uncontrolled participation of news sources in disseminating national and political issues (Okoro 2013). Stakeholders in urban and rural communities are not fully and actively engaged in development needs and planning. The citizens of Nigeria to the grassroots, in particular, must be made to appreciate the importance of participating in the political process and challenging unpopular government decisions and actions. The national press and other news sources should play the crucial function of advocating for citizens' understanding of government



activities, public policies, and development plans. More than three decades ago, Omu (1978) cited by Okoro emphasized that the press in Nigeria should be an effective and vibrant independent entity that could be instrumental to achieving sustainable political development goals. For much of the twenty century, news sources in Nigeria was involved in promoting political awareness, encouraging civic engagement, sensitizing citizens to national issues, and shaping public opinions on a variety of political issues. But it was noted that this role was played under a controlled, confrontational, controversial atmosphere which compromised the effectiveness of news sources and made objectivity of the press exceedingly difficult.

The limited functional scope of communication channels in the country's development efforts through many government administrations was attributed to the censorship and intimidation that were used to curb and control political coverage and the independence of news sources. As discussions on Nigeria's development crisis continue to take an expanded dimension, recent studies clearly reinforce the position of previous researchers that a robust and free press is quite capable of dismantling negative images and stereotypes which the country has faced over a number of years both at home and abroad (Bennett, 2003; Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Diamond, 2004; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). In a comprehensive report, The World Bank (2009) explained that early development efforts in Nigeria and other emerging African nations were grossly unsuccessful and unattainable largely because of the inadequate role which the news sources were relegated to play, and which resulted in the widespread criticism of the national media as ineffective to gather and analyse salient issues. Furthermore, Okoro (1993) stressed that the establishment of government newspapers in the country weakened the credibility and competitiveness of communication channels, demoralizing the citizens from depending on national news and information. For one thing, government newspapers were better funded, strategically positioned, and adequately staffed to cover news and events. While in recent years there has been a proliferation of news sources in the country, it remains to be seen whether their journalistic political content, analysis of government programs, and political actions and policies will be objectively and critically explained to the citizens.

Several studies have substantiated the contributions of news sources in national development, and stressed why the mass media cannot be divorced from the implementation of development objectives and initiatives. Further, with the advent of new media technology in the twenty-first century, there has been a strong speculation that this advancement in communication network, especially the Internet, will be used to sustain public interest in politics and current affairs, and to increase participation of stakeholders in political strategies as well as foster their commitments to democratic values. The new media technology will have a tremendous impact on democratic communication in increasing the diffusion of knowledge as well as fostering political consciousness.

## **CONCLUSION**

The positive role of media in national development has been recognized in developing countries because information dissemination plays a key role in bringing social change among the receivers. Besides being a powerful news gathering and news disseminating platform, media is an institution with a deep social foundation. A relationship of reciprocity between media and society lends it the strength it enjoys. Whether print or electronic, media in its appeal is massive and profound. From individual behaviour to social norms, the gamut

of media is vast and deep. The role of the media in the development of any nation is very vital and cannot be over emphasized and so they must strive to fulfil their obligations with respect to satisfying both the people and the government without bias. As the Fourth Estate of the Realm, they must be ready to perceive news worthy events with due considerations to their environment and developmental needs of the people.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The media play a vital role in the area of setting agenda for the public to see, read and talk about therefore they must at all times ensure that they discharge their duties objectively, in all fairness and unbiased.
- The government should understand that the media is part and parcel of them, and therefore give the media the sole right to carry out their activities without fear of having their heads on the line.
- The government must understand that the safety and total well-being of media practitioners are important and as such, should be treated with all sense of responsibility
- There are other areas that pertain to national development which this study did not cover; subsequent studies are encouraged to look at those areas.

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