



## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the indispensable role of mass media in sustaining Nigeria's democracy. The role played by the mass media on sustaining Nigeria's democracy cannot be over-emphasized. The primary responsibilities of the mass media are to entertain, enlighten, and inform based on accurate facts and to educate on meaningful issues. All these can be sub-zoomed to sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. The paper briefly traced the origin of media, its major roles, issues of control and major challenges. Secondary and qualitative sources of

# THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA: A STUDY OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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## Introduction

The mass media is generally regarded and accepted as an instrument of and the voice of the peoples, nations and the world at large. The mass media is not only relevant, but critical and indispensable to the globe, and especially in the evolution, growth and development, as well as the sustenance of democracy. The roles played by the mass media forms the backbone of Nigeria's democracy, especially in consideration of the nature and character of Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition. This paper sets to understand the contribution of the mass media to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. The Mass Media is a given tool to political parties to reach large numbers of people and inform, educate, guide, protect and cohere them ideologically on key issues ranging from public policies, governance, to elections and other related matters. The Mass Media can be seen as enabler for democracy: having been providing education and information, education to the voters which among others lead to formation and sustenance of legitimate government. The Mass Media plays a very important role in sustenance of democracy through providing good news and discussing the events taking place in the country and beyond. It is on the basis of this information that citizens learn how the operations of government are carried out. The media act as a mirror of society and is used as a tool to understand its functioning. The media reflect societal realities, norms and values. The media in democracy building process, is very critical through its goals of conveying specific messages.



data were used. Mass media is an indispensable element of democratic sustenance in Nigeria. It is however, greatly undermined by incessant government intervention in operations, non-adherence with laws and policies, amateur operatives, fake news, ethno-religious and geo-regional feelings, among others. The paper makes some recommendations as: extensive civil education, development of national values, stiff control on amateur media operations, stiff penalties fake news production and its spread.

**Keywords:** Democracy, education, mass media, Nigeria, sustenance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand, how mass media plays a meaningful role in the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria requires theoretical explanation. The new media distinctively associated with the 19th and 20th century, the press, radio and television, the cinema and the record industry, have traditionally been grouped together under the heading mass media (Bennett, 1982). The modernization theorist has advocated the importance of Mass Media in the development process of a nation, and the mass media is expected to explain, inform and educate the society on crucial issues affecting the society's well-being and progress. Hence, the mass media should be an agency for the mobilization of the society, educating, consolidating independence, among others. However, the starting point for modern theorist of democracy is consent, it is the idea that government is an artifice, legitimated only by the agreement of subject who are naturally within the democratic tradition. This interrogation is anchored an agenda setting theory. The agenda setting basically states that the media through frequent coverage of issues determines what the dominant discussion would be. The theory according to Mc Quail (2008) as quoted by Pate (2012) in Chinenye and Emelda (2013) says media may not tell us what to think, but they open our minds to what to think about.

### **Background.**

The Mass Media is comprised of radio, television, newspaper, magazines and the internet which also been described by Edmund Burke in the late of the 18th century in England as the fourth branch of government (Mc Quail 2006). This assertion supports the popular statement of Thomas Jefferson, the 3rd American President (1801-1809) which states categorically that 'were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without a newspaper or a newspaper without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter'. However, Kwame Nkrumah, the first African president of Ghana, has reiterated the role of the Mass Media in the development of the society when he articulated that the Mass Media should be used as a revolutionary tool of African liberation. He believed that the mass media is as an extension of government and its policies of social, economic and cultural development.

Hence, the Mass Media immensely contributed during the period of colonial struggles, for example, as the main opposition to the rule of the Royal Niger Company when it introduced taxes which African traders could not afford to pay and which consequently forced them out of Business. The Lagos observer, a newspaper published in Lagos, commented on how the company 'exacted



exorbitant dues'. The Mass Media is the main instrument of criticism against the Military and any unpopular and or dictatorial system of government. The media criticized British colonial and political rule up to attainment of the independence in Nigeria. It has reiterated that for the media, the attention was focused on the following: to educate Nigerians and Africa about ills of colonialism system; criticize the excessiveness and short comings of colonial authorities.

Generally, it is believed that the Mass Media is responsible for the people's knowledge and perception of the political realities of sustenance democracy in Nigeria and the need for self-rule which were capable of changing and enhancing the development and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a large, heterogenous and complex nation. Its democracy has since October 1954 been also complex, delicate and slippery. At the initial stage, government exercised substantial control over the Nigerian media. Likewise, most of the initial media outfits were the traditional print and electronic – newspapers, radio and television. New Nigerian, Daily Times, Gaskiya Tafi Kobo, NTA were among the few and state-owned media outfits that shaped both the democracy and nations polity at the very beginning. Later came the others including the News watch, Tell, which were privately owned by mostly southern Nigeria based. During the last 20-30 years however, there has been a significant proliferation of the mass media establishments with both sophistication, coverage and ease of access. However, as the number and level of professionalism increases, the political economy of establishing media houses become more visible within the industry. Information and communication technology has in the recent years also greatly aided the development of the media industry in all parts of the globe. Nigeria has also not been left behind in that direction. Both the oldest and the new and fast developing media have made some significant contributions to the evolution, development and sustenance of the Nigerian democracy. It is however, from different angles and perspectives that the contributions can be seen and or assessed.

#### **Statement of the Research Problem**

There is need for increased understanding of the role of the mass media in sustaining Nigeria's democracy, especially at this time of increased threats to the democratic polity by the forces of fake news, military coups in neighboring states, increased disunity and affection among Nigerians; and high levels of poverty, unemployment and political apathy. On the other hand, the indispensability of the media as not only a watchdog and guaranteeing freedom, but and articulate of the society. There is high level of political, economic, social and moral corruption in Nigeria. The mass media, if effectively used, can curb all these menaces. However, the breaking ground is to first understand the indispensability of the mass media in the democracy itself.

#### **Materials and Method**

The research used secondary sources of data collection, and especially journal articles, text books, newspapers and magazines, among others. Qualitative study is flexible, wordy, extensive and explorative (Cresswell, 2012; Leavy, 2017; Saris & Gallhofer, 2007; Bernard, 2006). It (qualitative) is thus, suitable for this paper. It focused on the roles of Mass Media plays and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria; and problems facing the Nigerian Mass Media in a bid to sustain its



democratic institutions and practice. The paper seeks to answer questions as: the importance of the mass media in Nigeria, the extent of media's role in sustenance of Nigeria's democracy, the challenges face by the Nigerian mass media. The paper also aims to: identify issues and factors in the sustenance of Nigeria's democracy viz-a-viz the media, explore the indispensable role of the mass media, proffer recommendations on mass media and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

The mass-media can be very broadly divided into two types: Print and Electronic media. Print media includes: magazines, and newspapers among others, while electronic media covers radio, television and the internet. Other media are not quite as easily categorized. Thus, others such as outdoor billboards are also generally categorised as part of the print media (Singhal, 2014). The 21st century journalism in India is a path-breaking book that examined the practices and theorists of journalism. Collection of data (writing) by practicing journalist is perhaps unique in that they have turned the spotlight on their own profession (Rajan, 2007). Telecommunication and computing the information system commonly referred to as information and communication technology (ICT) have long been associated with economic development and socio-cultural change. Perhaps the most complex consequences of the transition from mass to new media has arisen as media industries sought to preserve and extend the market model and regulatory framework of the past.

The media is a significant force to reckon with, especially in this era of globalization. Steven (2005) emphasises the diversity of local media production and audience and their responses around the world. The Overview of electronic media and its system involve many issues such as management information system and electronic mail messaging system. After the introductory overview, focus shifts to radio, radio news, radio-commentary and other associated feature just as an attempt has been made to create of comprehensive understanding of the inherent powers of news media in modern day society. A compilation of informative articles on mass media in general and its status provide basic information on the topic in historical perspective. These include print media, evolution and development, news coverage for masses, newspaper as mass media, the print media in an information age, television and other social changes (Datta, 2005). Some scholars associate mass media with the expansion of the political horizons of people in different ages, environment and culture (Mc Quail 2005). This association is underpinned by the supposition that people are affected by the ability of the mass media in social reality and in relation to the various and diverse views. For McQuail (2000), a topic that is often recurrent in media literature involves the view that the media institution deals primarily with production and distribution of knowledge. This knowledge produced by the media allows us to provide our experience of the social world with particular meaning. All the information offered by the media, including images and sounds, are what help individual learn about both the past history, present social factors and identity. For O' Shaughness and Stadler (2008), the media makes sense of the world for everyone and then identify three process that the media carry out: representation - representing the primary source through which we become aware of the world; interpretation - in their representation they provide an understanding of the current events; evaluation – valuing and devaluing issues and identities, and offering an evaluative framework.

### **Concept of Mass Media and Democracy**

The concept of mass media has been given varying meaning and interpretation by various scholars because of its dynamic in nature in the society. There are, thus, multiple definitions and types of mass media. Generally, however, it is a channel of communication by which people send and receive information. There are two types of mass media - the print (newspapers, magazines,



periodicals, etc.); and electronic (television, radio, telephone, etc.). the mass media entails many and multiple means of transmitting, sending and receiving such information for the largest possible audience. Hence, mass media refers to channels of communication that involve deliberate transmission of information in some form to large numbers of people. The mass media play a crucial role in the modern political process of democracy in Nigeria. The polity requires some mediated communication with the populace to ensure participation, gain popular consent, enforce freedoms, protecting the right of the individual from political tyranny a government (Keane, 1991; Koss, 1984). However, this mediation is not neutral and affect how political processes are communicated. In general election it is clear that talk is endlessly circulated around all these site (media, politics, public relation, press confidence) in practices of commentary, quotation and polemical reformation. Statements are thus re-presented in different discursive domains. The development mass media, particularly broadcasting in its institutional form has had major consequences for modern democratic politics. It became a forum for debate and discussion on current matters of general concern and thus a new site for the formation of public opinion. The mass media is medium of talk of communication of potential consensus today, just as newspapers and magazines, radio and television operate as media spheres of the public.

#### **Importance of the Mass Media**

In Nigeria, the media industry has witnessed a striding expansion and development over the last two decades. This is owing to expanding democratic space as well as the fast developing and changing information and communication technology trends. There are hundreds of media outfits all over Nigeria, and despite the existing hurdles, the democratic space largely accommodates the media industry and its output.

Therefore, and like many other states, Nigeria is an active participant in the spread, internalisation and internationalisation of political information. More people have access to local, national and the international media, and are influenced by such in dealing with both local, national and international issues. issues in the domestic political environment in new fashion. Every act of listening and or watching the media in Nigeria results in strengthening the country's democracy as more and more people get the kind of exposure to information which leads them to question and challenge the actions, policies and programmes of the government, thus exercising influence on how the government acts, reacts and how those governed respond and in the end, the gain for democracy is better informed and more exposed citizenry. It is rightly argued that within a political communication system, a symbiotic relationship exists between political and media organization, which are separately and jointly engaged in disseminating and processing information and ideas to and from the mass citizenry. There is also specific application of the media, such as in political campaign. news media are most likely to facilitate civil society and democratic culture when they represent a plural community opinion while remaining, in practice and reputation, independent from the influence of established government and political organizations.

#### **The Indispensable Role of Mass Media**

The role being played by the mass media in political processes and participation, establishing and maintaining relationship between the citizens and the leaders, as well as the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. This is despite the debate in the academia and media industry over the way in which the media not only disseminates information, enlightens, criticises opinion, but also influences the formation, expression and consumption of public opinion (Halloran, 1970; Long & Lang, 1968). Access to information is essential to sustenance of democracy for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens think and act responsibly, make informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves as a





'checking function' by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oath of office and carry out the wishes of those who elect them. In some societies and circumstances, there can be an antagonistic relationship between media and state authorities, but that is sometimes a vital instrument for establishing and sustenance democracy. In both conflict and post-conflict, homogeneous and or heterogeneous societies, the role of the media to disseminate information is vital.

Hence, it is noted that the media functions as a self-instituted watchdog of government and that the role of the media which is independent of government is to keep an eye on the ruling government and make known to the public what the media owned by government will not. In other words, a free media serves as the public eye in watching over the bureaucracy and makes sure nepotism is reduced to the barest minimum if not removed entirely. This makes officials of government as well as administrators careful in taking decision and when decision are taken, they are made available to the public (Keane, 1991). Therefore, the media is necessary for freedom to operate the democratic system which is very significant to serve as a check on government that could be dictatorial. Given the fact that, those who only form a small fraction of the population of a state it will serve as a good opportunity for public official to conduct themselves in a manner that will be accepted by many. This makes a long way to make a media that has the freedom to operate and becomes a catalyst for good governance and also regulate their conducts where those in government seek their own interest to the disadvantages of the majority who are being ruled and bring to light all what is hidden from public knowledge and create a situation where governed behave positively.

More so, the media is considered to be a part of the civil society and it is well-known that media overlaps other functional areas of democracy, political participation and governance, i.e., support for media may yield positive results, especially in governance activities and those related to decentralization of information and powers, anti-corruption and citizen participation in the policy making and implementation processes. The rule of law may be further institutionalized by support for independent mass media that keeps a check on the judiciary and reports on the court and promotes constitutionalism thereby enabling the environment to be conducive for press freedom, democracy, free and fair elections conducted through transparent process which indispensably requires a media that provides candidates with equal access to and balanced reporting of the the relevant issues in timely and objective manners.

However, the topic selected by the media for their agenda progressively became part of the audience agenda too, thus creating an agenda for the public itself. However, as McQuail (2000) rightly argues, the process of mediation of reality offered by the media involves different routes: first, it involves the reporting of events and conditions may or not be directly observed and therefore, come to us through the version offered by a third party; second, it refers to the attempts that other actors and institutions in society make to contact us for their own purposes. This shows how agenda setting is yet another method used by the media to define our reality. Therefore, the version of reality offered to us by the media may substantially contain cultural bias from its very beginning, and is conditioned by the specifics of the situation. However, the liberal perspective importantly recognises that the news we receive is the result of several factors which revolve around organizational processes and requirement, journalist's sources and methods of news and other information gathering, and public relations management.

Furthermore, the media system should operate on the basis of same principles governing the rest of society, in particular with references to justice, fairness, cultural values and democracy (McQuail, 2000). The media diversity in a society is fundamental for it allows citizens to make more informed decisions and gives the opportunity to heterogeneous groups to maintain their distinctive identities in a larger society. This can be regarded as a further contribution that the media make



towards the successful functioning of a liberal democracy as they work to facilitate mutual understanding of differing stand points.

One major, means by which communication flow is the mass communication media which operates to among others, sustain a democracy. The media, through the information it conveys to general public serve as a key guarantor of elite accountability and popular control of government in democratic, since a broadly and equitably informed citizenry help assure democracy with responsive and responsible characters.

However, two features of a democratic media come together to ensure information made available to the public goes a long way to restricting the power and authority of government instead of enlarging it. The most vital issue is the constitutional assurance to the citizens liberty to access public information. That is a free media which brings about varieties of citizens' vies expressions Citizens are then able to criticise government policies and periodically change government through contested election when not satisfied with their actions and inactions; and democracy is made stronger as honesty is made with free flow of information when the media enjoys protection from unfair exercise of government power through institutionalized legalities to create a long-standing variety of media forms and outlets.

It is imperative on the media to sustain a certain tempo in the democratic discussion in order to help put in place the agenda for the gradual development of the democratic dispensation. The media responsibly protects protect democracy from backsliding with respect to corruption of individual in office or gradual destruction of the democratic institution. This is important, especially in situations where other political parties do not live up to expectation by way of providing effective opposition to the ruling party due to probably to division within the opposition parties, or that they do not have enough experience to provide that effective opposition. In that respect, such opposition would have to emanate from the media. The expansion of the media, especially the electronic media has improved roles in the process of democratization. Both national and international media have made significant contributions to the democratization movement at every phase of it the culture and direct political effect of the international media created the initial condition with the national media playing their part to preserve critical tradition. The national and international media have crucial roles to play at the initial stages of democratization. In general, the media is important in opening up a democracy and the accompanying opportunities it offers. The media provide news and information required by the people; media educate and enlighten the public; media helps democracy function effectively; the media informs the public about government policies and programmes and how these programmes can be useful to them. All these help the people to voice their feelings and helps the government to make necessary changes in its policies or programmes. The media also ignites, relays and lubricates positive social change.

#### **Problems of the Nigerian Mass Media and Sustenance of its Democracy**

The Nigerian mass media is very indispensable to the country democracy, its development and sustenance. However, numerous challenges abound the democratic practice and sustenance viz-a-viz the media industry and its operations. These include among others: poor finances; corruption and material tendencies which relate brown envelopes, PR, etc.; poor working conditions – salary and remunerations, logistics, equipment, power; imbalanced/bias nature of some media outfits; lack of true independence, especially for the state-owned media; poor or non-implementation of Freedom of Information Bill (FIB); spread of fake news; amateur journalism.

The media may be considered as an institution that makes up the backbone of democracy. This consideration is because, they have the ability to convey the voters political information needed to formulated their decision. They are able to figure out those problems confronting society in order to serve as a way of communicating within a society to foster deliberation. The media



perform very well, the important democratic function including surveillance of socio-political development.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The mass media is the base for evolution, development and sustenance of democracy in any and every state and society, including the Nigerian state. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state with groups, regions, religions, and other particularistic identifications. Similarly, while there are substantial number media outfits across the country and they perform the same functions, there are basic political-economies of their establishments. In the recent, the media outfits have been witnessing both fast development and dynamism in their operations. The extent to which the mass media succeeds or otherwise in Nigeria has to a large extent been, and will continue to be determined by a number of factors including: its receptiveness to the ever-dynamic space of operations, extent of constitutionalism in Nigeria, adherence with professional ethics, political and economic determinants of media establishment and operations, political will and commitment of the Nigerian state authorities to guard and advance the democratic polity viz-a-viz a free, professional and independent mass media.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the submissions and findings from this paper, the following recommendations are made as: enforcement of the Freedom of Information Bill; proper regulation of media outfits and their operations as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution; proper check on the excesses of amateur journalism; effective and realistic laws on fake news and other related negativities; extensive and enlightened citizenship and political education to all Nigerians; development of standard national values; and all ethno-religious, geo-regional and other particularistic tendencies in the country's political system should be de-emphasised and or subordinated to national value and integration

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