REPOSITIONING THE MASS MEDIA FOR DEMOCRATIC SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
In the current democratic surge in Africa including Nigeria, the role of the mass media in articulating acceptable political standard, culture and values for sustainability of democratic dividends have increasingly become very important. Consequently, the media in discharging its orthodox functions of information sourcing, packaging and dissemination to the heterogeneous publics have been misconstrued and often times have come under cross fire as its practitioners are harassed and institutions bombed by insurgents and belligerent militias. These barbarisms against the mass media accentuate weak performance of the media amidst high level of insecurity in the country. Succinctly, this paper has focused on the intricacies of democratic transition processes cutting-across political parties participation, institutional arrangements, awareness stimulation and civil participation in entrenching democratic dividends in the country. These of course, must be anchored on the principles of democratic sustainability. The aim is to have free press that will be able to provide for the masses a true account of goings-on in government and the society at large and act as a watch dog of the people's rights against any abuse by those in authority. These of course, must be anchored on the principles of democratic sustainability.

Keywords: *Mass Media, Democratic Dividends, sustainability, Citizen's Participation, Social Order and Developments.*

Background to the Study
The historic antecedence of political developments highlighting democracy and constitutional governance reforms depicts that Nigeria has produced at least 10 written constitutions, but has yet to entrench constitutionalism. The concept of constitutional democracy requires that the elected government must be responsive to the needs of the people, their rights, social and economic well being, security and safety of lives and properties. It places citizenship participation above political selfish interest or aggrandizements, limits on government excessive use of power. More so, sustainable democracy evolves in a democratic context and is a way of life which is founded on democratic culture and values that entails press freedom and imbues issues of constructive criticisms.

One major challenge for Nigeria is to advance democracy in a way that is dynamic and sustainable. This means the democratization process must transit above elections and address issues of civil liberties, individual and community rights, fundamental freedom including press freedom and human dignity, rule of law and good governance. Above all, the impact of

social justice initiatives would reintegrate the people of Nigeria into political evolution and development is fundamental to the sustainability of democracy in country.

It is on these backdrop, this paper has focused to restructure the modus operandi of the Nigerian press which in the time past, has been characterized by undue influences and manipulations from the political clouts against the needs of the people amidst high breed of insecurity and insurgencies in the country. The repositioning of the mass media shall in no small measure, retract the decisions and policies of governance in the areas of human dignity preservation, political rights, equitable resource production and distribution, accountability and trust in government, peoples' participation, security and social order, including ownership of the political processes that galvanizes democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework
The major thrust of this article is predicated on the Agenda setting and information flow theories of the mass media. The Agenda Setting Theory (AST) was postulated to determine the relationship between news coverage and public perception on the importance of an issue for public consumption. The theories focus on the ability of the mass media to direct attention to certain issues and make them inevitable for public discussion (Aina, 2003:199). It posits that mass media attention to an issue will elevate such issue to high point of importance by the public.

The importance attached to certain issues in human society became a major concern for the mass media, and it stimulates critical examination into the roles performed by the mass media in the areas of events coverage and information dissemination. The first set of media pundits to conduct a study on the Agenda Setting Hypothesis of the mass media was McCombs and Shaw in 1972. The study opines that "in choosing and displaying news, editors, news room staff and broadcasters performs an important part in shaping political reality of event in the society and readers learn not only about any given issue, but are more concerned about how much importance people attach to those issues from the amount of information in a news story and its position.

Succinctly, it behooves on us to understand that the agenda setting theory of the mass media have been critically observed by some astute media scholars whose opinions tends to question the intention of the mass media in the area of information gate keeping in human society. To this regard, the heterogeneous publics have become critical about whether the mass media is setting its own agenda or public agenda?

In providing answers to the above, Aina (2003:200-201), opines that, in order to determine the real agenda setter is for the mass media, some situational factors must be considered. The reason is that in a democratically infused environment, politicians and political strategists are performers whose actions often place them and some issues on media and subsequently on public agenda. It therefore, dovetails that in some cases, the press sets agenda for the government based on happenings in the lend because they (the media) direct government attention to crises spots.

In determining who the real agenda-setter is for the media research suggests that situational factors must be considered. For example, in the USA, where the President is the leading newsmaker, his actions and speeches, set media agenda. But this depends on the personal style of the individual occupying the position. In Nigeria military rulers push certain issues like the June 12, 1993 presidential election crisis, and the assassination of pro-democracy activities to media agenda. Politicians and political strategists are performers whose actions often place them and some issues on media and, subsequently on public agenda. In some cases, the press sets agenda for the government based on happenings in the land. For example, they direct government attention to crises spots.

For agenda-setting to become agenda building, six steps have been identified by Gladys Lang and Kurt Lang. According to them:

1   The press should highlight some events or activities and make them stand out from others.
2   It should realize that different issues require different news coverage to gain attention.
3   The events must be framed or given a field of meanings for understanding. For example, some issues can be framed as partisan politics and others as in incidents of lack of political integrity.
4   Since media language effects perception, journalist should use language appropriate to the event and situation.
5   The media should link the issues being highlighted in a recognizable context. This will provide the public with a basis for judgment.
6   Agenda-building is facilitated when well-known and credible individuals contribute to the issues at hand.

The Information Flow Theory (IFT) became significantly important during the 1950s, when many surveys and field experiments were conducted to assess the flow of information from media to mass audiences.

According to Baran and Davis (2007:171), the information flow research addressed critical questions regarding the survival of democracy and strategies to regulate attacks. The classic theories of democracy assume that the public must be well informed so that people can make good political decisions. For instance, the flow of information from elites to the public was considered as an essential element for the United States of America to counter the communist threats during the cold war.

In a patterned arrangement, persuasion has been ascribed to be a necessary tool in achieving results for information flow. The overall objectives is to assess the effectiveness of messages that are transmitted   through the mass media apparatuses to the heterogeneous society (Funkhouser & McCombs, 1971) persuasion research had identified numerous barriers to information flow as news flow research focused on determining whether barriers exist which impede the flow of information (messages) from the mass media to a typical audience members.

According to Baran and Davis (2007:171-172), some of barriers identified that impedes information flow includes, the level of education, amount of media use to source information, individual's interest for news and so forth. It is on these backdrops, scholars have come to dissect in categorizing information flow into "soft and hard" news. The hard news consist of those new items that dovetails on politics, science, community organizations, world news amongst others, while soft news includes sports coverage, gossips for popular entertainers and home interest stories about people of average levels of living. Succinctly, information flow can be deduced from the backdrop that information moves from media to audiences to have specific intended effects which processes could also be referred as information innovation diffusion. This theory bedrocks on source dominated perspectives that examines the communication process from the point of view of some elite message source.

Functions of the Mass Media in a Democratic Society
The media is no substitute for institutions. It has the power to build as it functions in enhancing developmental projects of different kinds in the society. The mass media directs members of the public on direction to follow concerning public issues. This responsibility discharged by the media justifies the press as purveyors of peoples conscience, through their educative, informative and entertaining programmers, thus the mass media can bring about unprecedented changes in the democratic society (Ate, 2008:64).

It is succinct to note that the development of democratic culture is highly dependent on the existence of a modern state which activities are intended to protect the inalienable rights of its citizenry. It therefore entails that for democracy to strive, it must reflect norms and values that places premium on freedom of individuals to express their opinions without molestations and undue influence from any quarters – Freedom from abuse and infringement of the fundamental rights by other people (IDEA, 2001:46). The essence of democracy is that citizens must be able to ventilate their views through the mass media which provides the platform for unrestrained debates concerning burning issues of utmost public interest.

In articulating the role of the mass media in contributing to a political order in the society, Okolocha et al (1999:217) opines that, it is often used to bring about social change that is synonymous with development, progress, evolution or process leading to democratic sustainability. More so, the mass media are potent tools for social change and community journalism if well harnessed and effectively utilized by appropriate stakeholders would bring positive change for grass root transformation initiatives.

A research group led by an astute media scholar, Doris Graber in 1972 conducted an investigation to ascertain the power of the mess media in American Politics. The outcome of the study identified the ability of the press to source information and disseminates such information as news. Thus the responsibilities of the mass media in contributing to sustainable democracy are:
1   The influence and effects of the mass media during electioneering
2   Shaping of the political agenda
3   Affecting political actors and the balance of power

5   Guiding public policies
6   Regulating the electoral process through media programmers.

Similarly, some critical observers of the mass media have ascribed their opinions to further buttress on the fundamental responsibilities of the press to both traditional and conventional. In that regard, Ate (2008:19-23) uphold the view that the mass media perform some traditional or convention function which include the followings:

Education
In order to stimulate thinking about the processes for acquiring knowledge, the mass media has become a major force in articulating the transmission of knowledge so as to foster intellectual development, the formation of character and the acquisition of skills and capacities at all stages of life (Ugulah, 2010:13). Thus, the mass media functions entail teaching or imparting knowledge with a view to broaden individual horizon on issues of public importance in human society. Democratic sustainability requires a lot of political education and adequate understanding of the political climate and environment. Through the mass media, majority of people have been delivered from the bondage of ignorance and illiteracy and it is the power that brings about social freedom which in-turn promotes standards in democratic culture.

Information
Information dissemination is the foremost function of the mass media in the society. In a democratic setting, the people have an un-infringing right to be informed and access to information. According to Usman (1998:23), for Nigeria to enjoy sustainable democracy, the nation must find a way of making journalists (media practitioners) behave responsibly without restricting the people's right to know and without trampling on the rights of journalists themselves.

Entertainment
The mass media by its social functions make people laugh and forget their sorrows. In a democratic society, the media are agents of the social system and so, discharge this responsibility through diffusion of signs, symbols, sounds and images, of drama, motion pictures, short stories, cartoons, comedy, sports, literature, etc. These are for recreation and enjoyment, after all, there is the saying that all work without play, make jack a dull boy.

Transmission of Culture
The dissemination of cultural heritage and artistic products or the development of culture by widening the individual's knowledge in promoting social norms and values that reflects people's history of their heritage. The mass media thus conceptualizes democratic political culture. However, it is quite sadly to note that the language of politics is still militaristic in Nigeria, and as observed by observers of the trends of democracy in the country, the relationship between the executive and the legislative does not show proper appreciation of their political boundaries or the need for a symbiotic relationship (IDEA, 2001:47).

The existence of any democratic structure depends on the ability of its members to share common values and to agree on what constitute acceptable behaviour and the continued ability of the political class to transmit the values and norms of the democratic culture from one generation to another (Ate, 2008:21). This can be achieved through the mass media and the preservation of certain artifacts which in turn stimulate the democratic culture.

Integration and socialization
The ability of the mass media to facilitate the ability of the mass media to facilitate the provision to all manner of persons, groups and members of the various ethnicities to access variety of messages, which they need in order to know and understand each other and appreciate other's living conditions. More so, the socialization and integration of the citizenry is anchored or deliberation and opportunities conducive for them to participate in deciding the democratic structure and systems. According to Jega (2007:103), in a democratic dispensation, the citizens are motivated to act by ideas on what is good for the society. Such ideas define how public problems are resolved and understood. This again can be achieved through proper utilization of mass media apparatuses in Nigeria.

Surveillance/Watch Dog
The mass media based on its disposition as the 4th Estate of the realm, keeps close watch over the activities of politicians in a democratic system. In this regard, surveillance entails that the mass media provides information to the heterogeneous public by keeping watch on the goings-on in government. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) 1999 No. 24 and Fundamental Rights (Enforcement Procedure) rules with Amendment of 2011 prescribes that, "the press-radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives as contained in this chapter (i.e. Constitutional obligation) and uphold that responsibility and accountability of government to the people".

In solidarity of the above constitutional provision, Iji (2001:48), opines that among other roles performed by the mass media, especially in Nigeria, the media are charged to be the watch dog of democratic polity, concerned with national ethics of discipline, integrity, dignity of labour social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism. Accordingly, they – the media must guard and guide the citizenry to see openness, accountability and transiency as the guiding principles of governance which both the leaders and the led must adherently uphold, without hindrance.

Servicing the Political System
The interpretation and prescriptive role of the mass media is quite explicated in the coverage, packaging and dissemination of news regarding the political environment and democratic structures in Nigeria. As observed by Ate (2008:21) the media performs the function in the selection, evaluation and interpretation of news – focusing on what is most important in the environment. However Sambe (2004) as cited in Ate (2008) tends to prevent over stimulation and over mobilization of the citizenry in servicing the political and democratic system. The reason is that some of these activities may impede social change that would fast track positive results for the sustainability of democracy and social order in Nigeria.

Status Conferral

One important function or role of the mass media is the bestowal of prestige on people. The function of status conferral comes from being the subject of news reports. The mass media have the power to make instant celebrities of hitherto unknown persons either for good or bad. The media, especially the electronic media have status conferral effect on the audience. People or organizations that are featured in the media tend to acquire some level of importance above the ordinary. No wonder then media personalities are usually popular in the society, because the media create some special privileges for them within the society. It means that if the media report a person, then that person must be an important person. Thus, the media have a way of conferring celebrity status on people, even when they are not so qualified to be. People become popular or notorious depending on how they are reported by the media as regards their lifestyle and behaviour.

Conceptualizing Democratic Culture and Values in Nigeria

Democracy by its nature and design is a system of government which seeks to actualize a generally recognized common good through collective initiation and discussion of policy questions concerning public affairs and which delegates to agents to implement the broad based decisions made by people through majority vote (Oyovbaire 1987 as cited in Danfulani, 2010:24)

In contemporary times, democracy has remained the most preferred form of government all over the world. Perhaps, the reason is not farfetched as the major hallmarks of democratic value include: popular participation, supremacy of majority will but with respect for minority rights, constitution of the structures of government by popular choices through an equitable electoral system, fair competition to elective offices, individual freedom and press including respect for rule of law amongst others (Danfulani, 2010:25).

As already noted, the development and application of democratic culture and values is largely dependent on the existence of a modern state that is capable of protecting the rights of the citizenry and sustains the counting's norms and cultural values upon which the people's rights are founded. A great dis-service is that the language of politics is still militaristic in Nigeria. The with-immediate effect tendency still persist even after several years of independence and transition from military to civil democratic governance in Nigeria. May be as rightly observed in a study carried out by the International Institute For Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in 2001, Nigeria is characterized with authoritarianism due to the long stay of the military in government. More so, the transition processes have been galvanized by the ex-military men who have served in one capacity or the other under the janta regime.

It is well known that the main features of military rule were arbitrariness, command and obey syndrome, intemperate language, total absence of debate or dialogue, intidimidation of civil society, disregard for human rights, emasculation of the judiciary through obnoxious decrees and so forth (IDEA, 2001:46). These manifestations are sharply in contrast with the culture of democracy and democratic values in any modern society. Instead, these cultures have left imprints of in tolerant political environment.

One key aspect of Nigeria's democratic culture that has worsened sustainable development is the characterized frustrations of the structure imbued by the elitist approach. This is often prominent in pattern of appointments into designated offices and the manner of resources allocation. The reason according to Terhemba and Talla (2010:29) is that the key issue of Federalism has been the heart of the struggle for consensus. Getting this right has been the most difficult task in conceptualizing the culture of democratic values in order to foster national integration and unity. Sit-tight syndrome is mostly the rule rather than exception. Corruption accentuated with bad leadership and in fluxed with disregard to human rights occasioned with high level of disdained impurity becomes prevalently a culture of our democratic system and instrument of state policy system and instrument of state policy or power control. These according to Iji (2001:21), are the phenomenon which can be regarded as the root cause of bad governance and uninspired followership arguably so prevalent in the democratic culture and values in Nigeria. No wonder, there is no doubting of the assertion that good leadership attracts good followership.

The Need to Reposition the Nigerian Mass Media
A common assumption which underlies liberal democratic belief is that, a competitive party system, engendered by the presence of multiple and equally competing interest and pressure group which tendencies should promote virile democratic culture and values (Ugulah & Erebi, 2008:7). This implies that only a society that has imbibed the culture of electoral competition through multi-party system can be said to be democratic and in collaborating the views as expressed above, Ntete-Nna (2002), identified three basic elements in political culture which consists of participation, accountability and equality.

The mass media in the quest for these elements of political participation, accountability and equality have contributed significantly in developing or new consciousness for a sustainable democracy to strive in Nigeria. In order to achieve these elements, some astute scholars of mass communication and democracy in Nigeria critically observed the trend and submit that the first step is to de-militarize the characteristic nature of our nation's body polity. What is needed is total re-orientation of Nigerian Society from authoritarian culture to embrace the norms and values of democracy. According to IDEA, it entails a process which requires massive education of the citizenry by the mass media and civil society organizations at three levels: family, society and state respectively.

The Way Forward
1   The media should promote gender equality. Gender programmer should cut across other areas and go beyond certain issues, like child-rearing and domestic work, to address issues like violence against women, female genital mutilation and child and forced marriages.
2   The press should continue its agenda-setting role, investigative and political journalism should be continued in order to sanitize the system of fraudsters and people of questionable character. But the press also should see itself as a partner in the democratic project. It should be involved in public enlightenment to beam the tenets of democracy into homes and educational institutions.

3   The media should be a forum for vigorous debate on all issues of public concern.
4   The media are part of democratic institutions that need re-education and re-orientation. They should therefore practice internal democracy and gender equality in their staffing and management.
5   There is need to train journalists on the legislative processes and procedures.
6   Radio should continue with its programmers on Democracy and Governance. But it should be more participatory and include the rural dwellers. The scope of indigenous languages in which the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria broadcasts should be increased.
7   Radio should work to abolish the myths and prejudices against women and the vulgarization of Nigerian culture.
8   Radio should attempt to liberate Nigerians from all forms of phobia.
9   The television network should decentralize its programmer productions to include the rural dwellers. The living conditions and the views of the rural Nigerians should also be transmitted to the authorities.
10   Films and videos that falsify or vulgarize Nigerian culture should be discouraged. Efforts must at all times be made to help less literate viewers separate fiction from reality.
11   Government should adequately fund the FRCN and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), to overcome their equipment, logistic and manpower problems. Owners of independent media should fund their organizations well, to enhance the practice of journalism. The media organizations should also put measures in place for transparency and accountability in the management of resources.

Conclusion
Democracy makes sense when it is cherished or desired by all the citizenry in a country. Most especially, when quality leadership that promotes equality and regard for fundamental human rights, high standard of living and reasonable resources to diminish social unrest and so forth. In Nigeria, it would be correct that the sustenance of democracy is something all persons would be committed to uphold, but such responsibility can only be achieved in an enlightened political environment devoid of insecurity, maiming, killings and destruction of lives and properties. More so, a virile democracy can only strive through highly objective and healthy press. Thus the repositioning of the mass media apparatuses in the country would make government to re-orientate and sensitize the electorates on political participation, liberal institutionalization of democratic ideas of the political structures. In That regard, socio-cultural, economic and religious inclinations will be fostered for the unity and development of the country as indivisible, sovereign entity called Nigeria.

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