

IS THE MEDIA A FRIEND OR ENEMY OF THE STATE?

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Abstract

The mass media have always been huge blessings to any society they are found. They are agents of socialisation and education as well as development. The important roles of the media earned them the title of the 'Fourth Estate of the realm' which implies that after the three arms of government; executive, legislature and the judiciary, the media are the next. The media socialise the people, get them informed of happenings around them, analyse issues of national importance to them and help them to take right decisions and at the same time, help to transmit the norms of values of the society from one generation to another. Mass media is the vehicle through which government developmental messages and ideas get to the people and on the other hand, the people use it to express their feelings, motives, dissatisfactions and needs to the governments or representing bodies. It is used by the government or people to set agenda on important issues relating to the public for either the government to be aware and take actions or for the people to know and be informed. The mass media surveys the environment for news, interprets issues to the people, provide entertainment and also help the propagation of the societal cultural norms and values. The media not only transmit cultural values and norms from one generation to another, they help to enforce such values and norms through the mental pictures they establish in our minds. This study however seeks to find out how the media can be use to propagate developmental course, be more effective in playing the watchdog role as well as serving as agents of cultural transmission. This study also will reveal ways on how the media can keep to it social responsibility functions by putting honesty, truthfulness, fairness and balance up above any personal interest and also adhere to the ethics of the profession in their performance. The media should establish high trust level with the people for smooth interactions and collaborations for effective outputs.

Keywords: Watchdog, Cultural transmission, Social responsibility

1. INTRODUCTION

For many years, the mass media have been vital tools of information dissemination, source of education and entertainment to the people. With many of their functions that they perform in the society, the mass media are vital partners to the government in national development. Mass media refer to the collection of all media technologies that are used to send information to a large and heterogeneous audience; they are television, radio, newspapers, magazine and in the contemporary world internet. According to (Dominick, 2009), the mass media are the channels through which a message travels from the source to the receiver through an institution that uses these media which are television, radio, newspapers and magazines to transmit and

send information to a large audience. This implies that the messages from the media are not meant for one person but for a large diversified audience that are scattered in different places. One good thing about the messages from the media, especially the broadcast media is that the messages are received by the audience simultaneously (immediately and at the same time).

The important roles of the media earned them the title of the 'Fourth Estate of the realm' which implies that after the three arms of government (executive, legislature and the judiciary), the media are the next. The media socialise the people, get them informed of happenings around them, analyse issues of national importance to them and help them to take right decisions and at the same time, help to transmit the norms of values of the society from one generation to another.

The media are the vehicles through which the developmental plans and messages of the government get to the people. (Libert, 1972) confirmed this and said that the media are the mainstream of The society which serve as the link between the government and the people, as the media report whatever that happens with the government directly to its electorates. As Daramola (2003, p.195) has rightly said, "there is hardly any society or sovereign state that can function properly today without the mass media".

However, one cannot but mention that the media are not perfect; they have their own shortcomings. Many scholars and researchers have conducted many researches write-ups that were geared at analysing the positive roles of the media in nation building and how the media can help the government and the people in developing the society. It is no gain saying that the media are very important in the society and their functions cannot be disregarded. But the mass media also perform some destructive roles that can endanger the development and growth of any nation. Hence, this paper examines the positive roles of the media as well as its negative roles in growth and development of a nation with a call back to order for the mass media.

The shift of the mass media from performing its christen roles is an issue of concern and which needs an urgent interventions so as to prevent it from becoming toys in the hand of the power that be. However, it is important to constantly remind the media of its roles and ensure it stays on track at all times which is the essence of this paper.

The mass media is somehow becoming a toothless dog, in Nigeria for example, the television and radio are largely owned by the state (Government) with the few private television and radio stations having affiliations with political office holders.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The two theory adopted by this study to drive its points are the dependency theory and the development media theory. Melrin and Ball-Rokeach, (1976) offered a viewpoint of potentially powerful mass media, tying that power to audience members' dependency on media contents. The theory assumes that audience depend on the mass media for some of the functions they perform. The mass media are vehicles by which our cultural heritages are transmitted from one generation to another through the dressing of the artistes, drama, songs etc. We also depend on the media for news, reports, updates, entertainment, information and education among others. We depend on the media at a great degree for the promotion and preservation of our cultural beliefs and values. In our modern society, people depend on the media increasingly in order to understand our social world and to act meaningfully in our society through proper media education.

The mass media are vehicle of social change. They reflect the changes and development that surfaces everyday in our society. If a new product or idea springs up in our community today, it is through the media that such information will be got. As the society depends on the mass media, so also the media depend on the society. The media is influenced by the culture of the society in which they operate. The media must therefore be conscious of the kinds of programmes they air, so that the culture of our societies will not be disregarded.

Also, the development media theory according to Daramola (2003) developed as a means of checking the imbalance in the development and flow of information in the third world countries and the solution to the technological problem facing them. It developed as a result of the super imposition of the foreign culture on our indigenous culture. The theory as part of its aims and objectives upholds the needs for the media for the media to give first class priority to the national culture and languages in their contents. The media contents should be cultural oriented and give adequate concern about promoting our cultural heritage and values.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Strengths

The mass media of communication are very important to the development of any nation. Their presence in any society is regarded as a blessing due to the many advantages they have in the society. The media perform their major functions in the society as instruments of information dissemination, education correlation of the society, entertainment of audiences, mobilization as well as the promotion and transmission of cultural heritage of the people from generation to generation. The mass media are extremely influential as each of them is presumed to affect perception and behaviour in a distinctive way (Daramola, 2005). This was supported by (Alero, 1999) when she noted that the media can be said to be the most effective means of reaching the people to promote social and national development.

The media throughout the world have been an important organ of national development. The social responsibility theory of the media stipulates that the media owe the society some responsibilities, in which national development is one of them. It has given life and meaning to society as a whole, making them alive with every available information which is central to human existence.

3.2 Media as Watchdog

The media are responsible for laying surveillance on the society and serve as “watch dog” to the government in order to bring news and information to the people. They analyse current issues to the public to understand, and also shape the people’s behaviour towards such issues. In addition, the mass media help to promote customs and traditions and pass them from generation to generation. The media is known as a detector and revealers of secrets and evil deeds by political office holders. We have witnessed the media expose several political office holders through investigations.

This was buttressed by Daramola (2003) when he said that there is hardly any society or sovereign state that can function properly today without the mass media. The media, while performing their watch dog function in the society, have been able to expose some corrupt acts. A typical example is the exposure of Salisu Buhari, the then speaker of the House of Representatives by the press. Buhari was discovered to have forged a University certificate from the University of Toronto. In addition, the media played a huge role in the exposure of Fashola’s N72million website scam. The media questioned why Fashola will develop a website (www.fashola.com) with N72million.

3.3 As Agents of Cultural Transmission

Lasswell (1948) pointed out that the mass media transmit cultural heritage from generation to generation by communicating the norms, rules and values of the society. This is done through relay of programmes geared towards promoting the societal norms and value, dressing of the media experts to showcase the identities of the different tribes in the country. Some of these programmes are A.M Express on NTA, Goge Africa, Heritage and other programmes that focus on the promotion of societal culture and norms. While growing up, the use of oral media in communicating societal norms and values cannot be over emphasized. I learnt through this process that someone crossing over your legs could prevent you from growing tall which is a way of teaching morals and values.

The media also give support to event that promote African culture such as African Arts and Culture exhibition, Argungun Fishing Festival and other festivals in different parts of the country. In addition, some dramas and soap operas are didactic: they teach morals.

3.4 Agent of Political Orientation

Over the years, the media have been agents of political socialization to the people. The mass media through various advertorials, public service announcements, programmes and media campaigns give give orientation to the people and sensitize them to take active role in the political activities of their country. This is always vivid during election as the media educates the people to register and vote for the candidates of their choice and also shun electoral violence. ‘Occupy Nigeria’, Nigeria: great people, great nation, and ‘Change begins with me’ are some of the media campaign that are used to sensitize the people. The mass media are also the channels through which the government reaches out to the people. The plans and programmes of the government are relayed through the media to the people.

4. THE WEAKNESSES

Despite the huge contributions and important functions of the mass media in the society, they have certain

roles in the society that make the receive 'knocks'.

4.1 Mass Media as Attack Dogs

Information is describes as 'Power' and the way it is controlled in the society determines the nature of affairs in that society. The mass media have been used as weapon of attack by the elite in the society. Politicians see the mass media as channels through which they attack one another. Politicians throw jabs at one another via the media and these 'jabs' are always given coverage by the media in the society.

This was exemplified when AIT and NTA relayed a documentary on General Muhammadu Buhari and Chief Bola Tinubu during the 2015 elections campaign. AIT, on March 1st aired the documentary titled 'Lion of Bourdillon'. The documentary showcased various properties and companies across Lagos purportedly owned by Mr. Tinubu, a top leader of the APC describing him as "Nigeria's biggest landlord". It also alleged that the APC chieftain was "charged for narcotics" in 1993.

4.2 Agents of Cultural Decadence

Despite the role of the media in promoting norms and culture and sensitization of the people on positive behaviours that bring development to the society, the media have contributed to cultural decadence in the society. Musical videos and movies are laced with nakedness and immoral acts. The internet has been a huge source of pornography to the youths. Little wonder rape, teenage sex, prostitution, indecent dressing, violent acts, indiscipline and social vices are very high in the society. (Siddhartha 2009) noted that:

The vulgarity displayed in the advertisements, the serials and the music videos should be checked because they reach the audience directly in home. The perverse depiction of women as glamorous props and objects of titillation and portrayal of rape as an exciting and adventurous act is considered in no small way to be responsible for the increasing atrocities against women. The present day goondaism, falling in love affairs by college and school boys and girls, opting revealing dress by the girls are some of the perverse effects of the present day movies. These are something which the media has to guard against.

Most Nigerian youths now stick to the television sets to watch programmes like Big Brother Africa and Big Brother Nigeria; which allow sexual intercourse among the participants of the shows. In addition, it is vivid that most of our television programmes contents are foreign oriented and this at great extent is influencing the audience to adopt Westernised way of life in disrespect of their own culture. Uche (1986) observation of the broadcasting system made him conclude that "there is a total rejection of the music of the Nigerian musician and an overwhelming preference for foreign music by Nigerian youth".

Uche (1986) also added that when you talk of endangering our local culture, we should as well be equally concerned the structure, programme priorities, and orientation of the local electronic media establishments. The words of Uche are true as the media give more priorities to foreign contents at the expense of local ones. Little wonder why the youths of today prefer foreign clothes, shoes, musicals, books, programmes and lifestyles to the Nigerian culture.

4.3 Promotion of Hate speeches

Adibe (2014) states that, "Hate speech employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership. It is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Hate speeches are more noticeable during elections in the country. The media feel no remorse in airing many of the hate speeches that are used on daily basis by the politicians and their supporters. There is little care to what are the implications theses hates speeches will have on the people. Abiodun (2016) while noting the effects of hate speeches on the people concluded that hates speeches on the media incite people into violence. Ezeibe (2015) supported Abiodun and posited thus:

Hate speeches directed at gaining political power lead to electoral violence. Nigeria's background of intolerance provides ample grounds for the use of hate speech. Directly, it was hate speech and indirectly it was ethnic and religious intolerance that led to the surge in electoral violence in Nigeria from 2011 to 2015.

During the 2015 general election campaign, Governor Fayose of Ekiti state sponsored a news paper

adventorial to attack the current president (Buhari) that he would die in office just like Musa Yar'adua and Sanni Abacha died in office.

Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari during the election campaign said on a live programme on Channels Television that blood will flow if Dr. Ebele Jonathan loses the election then. He also said, '2015 is more than do-or-die. You are a man and I am a man, we are going to meet at the battlefield'.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study hereby concluded that the media have been contributing immensely to nation building and but also destructively to the society. Even though they help in nation building by promoting business, culture, education and also check the activities of the government, they have promoted violence, hate speeches, immorality, bias report and having more of foreign contents over the local programmes. These negative impacts of the media can be traced to ownership influence and government interference in the operations of the mass media in the society.

This paper reveals the new roles the media have adopted neglecting its major roles of surveillance, correlation and transmission of social and cultural heritage from one generation to another amongst other functions of entertainment, Education and Information sharing.

The study here recommended that the media should live up to their social responsibilities in the society and always keep to the ethics of the profession. The media should give more priority to local contents rather than the foreign ones as this will really help in promoting the culture of the nation. This will enable them to greatly contribute to nation building and development in all spheres possible.

The media should take into cognisance that it has great influence on the people and could make believe to some extent what it wants the people to believe and as such should optimize this role by championing development course, promote the people's culture and norms as well as check the activities of the government as only through these processes can a true development be achieved.

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