ARE NIGERIA'S MEDIA POSITIONED FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

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ABSTRACT

This paper poses a vital question: "Are Nigeria's media Industry positioned for sustainable development?" While admitting that media in themselves may not generate development perse, it is also germane to suggest that sustainable development may not occur without the media passing across such issues to different segments of the society that need the information and also encourage them to buy into it. In developing this theme, the author depended largely on secondary sources obtained through library research. From all indications, media, by their very nature, deal with information unearthing and dissemination. To that extent they are purveyors of new developments but are not necessarily the sources or origins of those developments. Therefore, the development media theory provides theoretical anchor for this study. The notes suggests that Nigerian governments have not made much effort along the lines of achieving sustainable development in the country as a result of political ineptitude and lack of continuity of policies from one government to another. A high level of lack of political commitment to the people has made many governments in Nigeria clearly ineffectual and of no impact on the people. To achieve a fair level of sustainable development in Nigeria, government must take the lead in providing good governance and ensure that programmes of previous governments are not abandoned on the altar of political egoism.

INTRODUCTION

A former American President, Thomas Jefferson, is often credited with a significant statement about the relationship between the mass media and society. According to him, he would prefer a society with the mass media but without a government. This must rank, perhaps, as the greatest vote of confidence on the mass media as an important institution of society. It even takes on additional significance going by the stature of the speaker – the President of a Superpower in World Politics, the United States of America. This is not totally surprising, though, coming from an environment where the press is highly respected and appreciated. Thus its status is corporately established with the First Amendment to the American Constitution which states, unequivocally that "Congress (read National Assembly in Nigeria) shall make no laws abridging the freedom of the press". That means that no matter how angry a Congressman is, he or she cannot contemplate, let alone, move a motion to circumvent the freedom of the press in that country.

This sharply contrasts with the situation in Nigeria where those in authority often view the activities of the press as a distraction except when they are being praised. Even the constitution of Nigeria 1999 as amended does not give the press any exclusive freedom, even though it gives if the responsibility to hold government accountable to the people. Even when there is a semblance of freedom to the press, this is quickly repudiated with the expression "provided that…". This is like giving something with one hand and retrieving it with another.

Given this situation, the press appears to be merely being tolerated with the occasional arrest of journalists carrying out their legitimate activities. It was even scary during the military era when media houses were shutdown and their journalists arrested without even as much as an explanation. Newswatch, the most important newsmagazine at the time was proscribed for six months in 1987 by the Babangida administration. Other media houses such as **The Guardian**, **The Punch** (both Lagos publications) and the **Daily sketch** were similarly shut without even prescript order.

Mass Media operations in Nigeria since May 29, 1999 has been characterized by the professional zeal and strength of character of the publishers and their journalists. The relationship between government and the media remains that of cat and mouse, depending on the disposition of the President and other senior government functionaries at any point in time.

Defining of Terms

At this point it is necessary to define some terms for conceptual and operational clarity. The terms of interest for this presentation are Mass Media and Sustainable Development.

Mass Media: Imhonopi and Urin (2004, p. 22) being sociologists, understandably, take a sociological position by stating that "the mass media play a major role the promotion and sustenance of the norms and values of society". That suggests that the mass media represent the conscience of society, ensuring that citizens do what is right knowing the media could expose anti-social or criminal behaviours. This description is not very different from Defleurs (1971) position that the "mass media constitute a social institution or a social system…"

Besides the sociological perspectives already provided, it is also useful to see mass media as all the tools, gadgets tools, instruments of mass communication professionally deployed to reach heterogeneous audiences spread across disparate geographical areas. They include newspapers magazines, television, radio, outdoor and the recent wonder of out times, Internet, among others" (Nwanne, 2013 p.58).

Sustainable development: The word 'development' is exciting to the ear. It is even more so when it is preceded by the word 'sustainable'. This suggests that not only will there be improvement it would continue for a reasonable period; not a short-lived occurrence. Not unexpectedly, many scholars and practitioners have attempted a definition of sustainable development. In his immensely popular work: **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa**, the Guyanese scholar Rodney (1972) Defines development from a suitably sustainability perspective. According to him: development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, Self discipline, responsibility and material well-being. (p.9)

He went further to link personal development with societal advancement, arguing strongly and convincingly, that: "the achievement of any of those personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole" (p. 9)

Indeed, the development of a society is usually reflected in the circumstances of its citizens. This explains in part, why citizens of developed countries or economies enjoy greater freedom, have high skill and capacity in addition to enjoying high creativity self discipline and higher responsibility. In developed countries, governments and citizens accept responsibility for their actions and are usually not involved in blame games. For instance, the Former British Prime Minister, David Cameron resigned following his defeat at the polls when the United Kingdom voted in a simple majority to leave the European Union. Cameron had urged his country men and women to remain in the European Union, arguing that the

consequences of a pull out were too much to handle. But when the votes did not favour his position, he quietly bowed out. This applies to many citizens of the developed world who accept responsibility for whatever they do or fail to do. The reverse is the case in many developing countries like Nigeria where people are not ready to accept responsibility for their actions or inactions. They usually blame the other person. This is an obvious indication of underdevelopment.

Taken together, sustainable development would suggest advancement and improvements in different aspects of life which can be continuous even without the support of a third party. That is the dilemma of development among developing, countries which perpetually seek outside help even for seemingly simple problems of everyday living.

THEORETICAL ANCHOR

It is perhaps germane to articulate a theoretical anchor for this presentation. In this situation, the development media theory seems to be appropriate for this paper as it "seeks to explain the normative behavior of the press is countries that are conventionally classified together as 'developing' or 'third world countries'. Part of the argument of scholars in the field is that there are certain situations that make the applicability of other normative theories quite difficult, if not herculean, in the so called developing countries. Some of these factors include, according to Folarin (2002, p. 35):
1. Absence of adequate supply of requisite infrastructure;
2. Relatively limited supply of requisite professional skills;
3. Relative lack of cultural production resources;
4. Relatively limited availability of media literate audiences;
5. Dependence on the developed world for technology, skill and cultural products.

Articulating the major tenets of the development media theory, Folarin (2002, pp. 35-36) sums them up, citing McQuail (1987, p. 12) as follows:
i)   Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.
ii)   Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.
iii)   Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and languages.
iv)   Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically, cultural and politically
v)   Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.
vi)   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.

The above suggests the overpowering influence of government in the affairs of the independent press. For instance, in Nigeria, the private media are not subsidized in any way by the government but depending on the attitude of those in power, media freedoms have been frequently tampered with. This was worse during the military era when media tolerance was low. The legendary Decree No. 4 of 1984 remains green in 'journalistic memory' in the country. Two journalists, Nduka Irabor and Tunde Thompson were arrested, tried and convicted by a tribunal for refusing to disclose the source of their information on a story

published in **The Guardian** which speculated that a retired army general, Hannaniya, was billed to be appointed Nigeria's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom (Nwanne, 2008).

Media and Development
There is no doubt that there is a link between media and development. This is because the media are carriers of development information ie. Information that leads to better behaivour, healthier eating, a better attitude towards politics and government and other issues of development. Ekwelie (1999) makes a clear link between communication (media) and development. In his words:

> We have proof that development and communication can be complementary. We know that communication may fail to generate development. But after making all the allowances for accident in nature and society, we are still left with a paradigm that links communication with development. Indeed, it is safe to state that without communication, development may be slow in coming or non-existent altogether.

Ekwelie's philosophical and cautious approach is understandable, given the unpredictability of media effects which have different effects on different people. The media, formal or informal, traditional or modern, written or spoken, must in some way interfere or intervene for development to take place. From the moment of child is born, the mother through communication – winking of the eyes, tenderly touching of the checks, smiling, laughing, kissing, etc. gradually commences socialization, leading to language acquisition and other survival skills.

No matter from which perspective one looks at it, there must be a form of communication for development to coagulate. Quite often, the mass media play this role to different extent in different socio-political contexts. For instance, the role the media would play in a developing country might be quite different from its impact in a developed economy with a vibrant economy, infrastructural contentment, high literacy and other indices of high level of development.

Being a social system or an institution the mass media perform roles that relate to societal advancement, despite the fact that many scholars have had cause to attack or excoriate the media for sundry reasons. In his work on process and effects of mass communication, Defleur (1971) analyses media as systems and makes a case for its continued survival, by posing the following questions. According to him:

> When we say that the mass media constitute a social institution or a social system, precisely what kind of system are we talking about? How does it work? And why has the system been able to resist, as well as it has, continuing attacks and criticisms (p.63).

As if trying to propose a solution to the stated issue, Defleur 'advances the provocative idea that the 'low taste' content of the media is the key element in their social system because it caters to the taste of persons who make up the largest segment of the market and thus

maintains the financial equilibrium and stability of the media system. This is one reason why mass media have been so secure in the face of attack" (1971).

Indeed, the mass media necessarily pander to the taste of the lowest cadre of society because it offers a free market place of ideas where high academic achievement is not necessary for its consumers. This does not suggest that there are no high brow newspapers, magazines and other publications. Media must necessarily communicate to mass, heterogeneous and disparate audiences. Herein lies their unique selling point.

Given the often precarious positions occupied in indifferent countries by the media, McQuail (2000) draws attention to "the macro-theories concerning the relations between media and other social institutions which bear on the extent to which media are autonomous".
 Besides, McQuail (2000) is concerned about how media organization cope under conditions of changing technology and stiff competition for resources and support as well as issues of perspective and needs of the audience and the consequences of using the media to gain social experience.

Indeed, the idea of media as an institution is suggestive of a power model which can be underestimated only to our peril. That explains partly why many powerful persons will feel hollow business, if they no control or influence over the media in any way. In Nigeria, many businesses and politicians have had forays into media ownership with different levels of success. The *Guardian*, which prides itself as the 'flagship of Nigerian press' is owned by the Ibru family; The Politically vigorous **The Punch** was founded by Olu Aboderin; **The Nation** was founded and sponsored by the highly political and visible, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, the floundering **Champion** newspaper was founded by Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, a top politician from the East and of course **The Sun** and **The Telegraph** were founded by businessman and politician, Uzor Orji Kalu. On the electronic media side Chief Raymond Dokpesi is the Mogue at African Independent Television (AIT) and RayPower, Chief Gabriel Igbinedion owns and runs Independent Television Benin City while the Silverbird Group comprising Rhythm FM and Silverbird Television and others, is owned by Ben Bruce, an entertainment impresario and currently Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. None of these owners can deny economic or even political interests, no matter how subtle. Some of such interests have been loud and even vociferous!

On the part of government in Nigeria the need to own and run media houses have never been in doubt, an indication of its appreciation of the place of the media in societal life. In Nigeria, print media have always been owned and run by both government and private investors. In 1992 the industry was deregulated, thus came into being **RayPower**, the first private radio station in Nigeria. No doubt, ownership and access to the media have been quite beneficial to the owners politically, economically and even socially because this has led to the issue of dominance and pluralism as lucidly illustrated by McQuail (2005 p:88):

Opposing models of media power

	Dominance	**Pluralism**
Societal source	Ruling class or dominant class	Competing political social, cultural interests and groups
Media	Under concentrated ownership and of uniform type	Many and independent of each other
Production	Standardized, reutilized controlled	Creative, free, Original
Content and world view	Selective and decided, from 'above'	Divers and competing views, responsive to audience demand
Audience	Dependent, passive, organized on large scale	Fragmented, selective, reactive and active
Effects	Strong and confirmative of established social order	Numerous without consistency or predictability of direction, but often no effect

Source: McQuail, D. (2005). McQuails Mass Communication Theory, London: Sage.

Indeed, one of the areas Nigeria's media have made an impact is in the political arena right from the colonial era. Although the first newspaper in Nigeria *Iwe Irohin* was published by a Briton, Reverend Henry Townsend in 1859, who explained his project as being designed to inculcate in the people the habit of reading' (Biobaku, 2000). Even till this day the need to read in search of knowledge has remained an important objective, although there is said to be a decline in the reading culture in Nigeria. This might not be all the truth. It is likely that there is a shift in the kind of materials people expose themselves to. Add the emergence of the internet and the problem of poor readership or non-readership of newspapers, magazines and even books take on a different dimension.

No matter the situation, reading cannot be discountenanced from human culture, hence the promotion of literacy all over the world. The next section deals in specific terms on how the media exert their power in society.

Media and Politics: Man is known to be a political animal. In every country, there is struggle for political ascendency because those who control the polity, control the resources, determine who gets what, when and how. The struggle is vicious in developing countries especially Nigeria because political control gives undue advantages to its possessors. This is so because there are no effective institutional controls on those who wield power. The National Assembly, for instance, which is vested with oversight functions, has been clearly unable to confront executive impunity and clear lawlessness. Alayode (2006) has attributed this situation to decades of military rule which weakened all institutions and subordinated them to absolute military power. During the military era, individual rights were brutally abused to the extent that it would take decades to recover from the psychological trauma of that dark era.

The power of the media is often brought to the fore when they are able to unravel serious misdemeanor of those in power. This is usually through investigative journalism. In the United States where society is developed, journalism is also advanced because it has constitutional protection through the first amendment to the American Constitution which declares that Congress shall make no laws abridging the freedom of the press. Nwanne (2008, p. 70) recalls a piece of investigative journalism in the United States of America which led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, thus:

> Tagged The Watergate Scandal, Bob Woodward
> and Carl Bernstein both reporters of ***The
> Washington Post***, did the earth shaking story
> about some unbecoming activities of the Richard
> Nixon administration. After months of sniffing
> around poring through documents and
> interviewing sources, the report was published in
> 1972. The impact of the story was immediate and
> devastating. All the damage control measures of
> President Nixon failed. He just had to resign.

This is a case of direct power of the media against executive lawlessness. Perhaps the President would have survived in countries with weaker institutions. But not in the United States where political office holders are expected to be about board, just like cassar's wife!
 Coming to Nigeria, the country has had a history of a vibrant press which was a thorn in the flesh of British imperialism. Nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu, Aminu Kano and others used the power of the media. Again, Nwanne (2008, pp.70-71) recalls two outstanding incidents of investigative stories by ***The News*** magazine and the great impact they had.

The magazine had published a story of false declarations by the then Youthful Speaker of the House of Representatives, youthful Salisu Buhari. In a cover story entitled "The Face of A Liar", the magazine reported that Buhari had falsified his academic qualifications and 'padded' his age to make him eligible for the position of speaker of the House of Representatives. He was forced to resign since he was unable to offer a credible defence.
 Similarly, the magazine had published a scope in its July 23, 2003 edition entitled "The Greedy Police Boss: Many Deals of Tafa Balogun. His Role in the Anambra Coup". According to Nwanne, (2008, p. 71):

> The story detailed many scandals associated
> with the then Police Chief, Mr. Tafa Balogun
> Naturally, the Police authorities fought back to
> no avail. Soon after the report was published,
> Balogun was arrested for corrupt enrichment,
> running into billions of Naira. He was removed
> as inspector General of Police, tried, convicted
> and jailed on charges of corrupt enrichment.

These are clear cases of the mass media being the conscience of a society and making the place more habitable and calling corrupt people to account for their actions. If such activities had continued it is doubtful if the level of is corruption would have reached such 'fantastic' profile. The political leadership at the time should be commended for allowing the courts do their jobs because part of the problem is that political bigwigs often protect their friends and colleagues from being prosecuted, in a bid to avoid what some persons have referred to as 'class harakiri'.

Constraints to Media of Development

From the above so far it can be safely inferred that there is an undeniable link between communication (media) and development in different areas of human activities. However, certain factors or situations tend to vitiate the developmental potentials of the mass media

especially in a developing country like Nigeria. This section attempts to unravel some of such factors.

1. Predatory Ruling Class: As previously noted, the mass media are often development-driven but their efforts do not seem to achieve much because of the self serving, predatory ruling class which consigns issues of social justice, equity and fairness to the background for their selfish reasons. For instance, if the media bring to the attention of the public certain terrible actions of some persons, it is left to the political authorities to do the needful by ensuring speedy dispensation of justice so that the society would be a better place.

A recent case where a *Vanguard* columnist, Donu Kogbara, received a heart-touching letter from Christians minority in Borno State, Nigeria is one of such examples. The letter entitled 'Chronic Injustice!' detailed how Christians in the north are treated as second class citizens, through appointments, promotions and other indices of belongingness. Reacting to the letter which she published in her column of August 5 2016, she noted inter alia:

> Journalists can support the down trodden by drawing attention to their plight. But in an essentially unprogressive country like Nigeria in which the elite is and consistently abuses its privileged position, journalists are rarely able to achieve change. Sometimes I am filled with despair and I have frequently wondered whether there is any real value attached to having a media platform.

This might be the pain of many journalists whose effort at drawing attention to the in justices suffered by the weak and oppressed are often ignored. Social justice must be the hallmark of any developed society.

ii. Low Multimedia Literacy: Apart from the pervasive, oppressive influence of Nigeria's ruling class, including their massive corruption as media reports clearly show, media attempts at development are substantially circumscribed in important ways as a result of low level multimedia literacy. Apart from the simple level of being able to read and write, literacy has moved to greater levels. As Adum and Ekwugba (2011, p.6) have pointed out:

> Since the invention of the computer and the internet, there is the argument that literacy should include the ability to use and communicate in a diverse range of technologies. According to Kress (2003), modern technology involves mastery of new took such as internet browsers, word processing programmes and text messages. This has given rise to a new form of literacy called 'multimedia literacy".

iii. Difficulty in Acquiring Communication Technologies
It must be quickly pointed out here that the acquisition of these communication technologies in developing countries such as Nigeria is a huge challenge. In Nigeria today many are living on mere subsistence existence, barely having enough to eat, even though the 'fat cats' remain unhealthily overfed, bordering on obesity! It is no longer news that many Nigerian political office holders are the highest paid in the world. The question remains 'What is the justification for such remunerations?'

iv. Ethnic and Other Base Considerations
The media in Nigeria are generally believed to be industrious, hard fighting and courageous, even from the colonial era. However, with the colonialists in recession, the media in Nigeria

appeared to have jettisoned the nationalist instinct. Regional, ethnic and other parochial interests appeared to have taken over the soul of the media. This was made worse with the deregulation of the broadcast media which perhaps, inadvertently encouraged extreme commercialization of the media, giving vent to the assertion that he who pays the piper dictates the tune. As a result of ethnic, commercial, political interests, the mass media, it would seem, have consigned national interests to the background just as the political elite has done. The struggle for political control at Abuja and the state capitals is perhaps the driving force of the political class.

SUMMARY

The media institution in any environment can make as much impact as the society allows or encourages. For instance, a former America President Thomas Jefferson is often credited with the statement that if given a choice, he would prefer an America with the mass media but without government. With such a high level confidence in media efficacy, the media are likely to perform better in such environment. In articulating a theory, for this presentation, the development media theory was explored. Essentially, the theme of media and development was appropriately treated to bring out different dimensions, leading to the conclusion that there is an intricate and positive relationship between communication and development. The media power, though generally acknowledged, is vitiated or even circumscribed, by certain societal influences such as politics, ownership structure, low multimedia literacy, culture, among others. Despite all odds, the media in Nigeria have made some gallant efforts at investigative journalism which have addressed some issues of corruption and dishonesty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria is not a knowledge-driven economy, hence the seeming backwardness of the country. Hence, Research findings, when they are carried out at all, are usually dumped in the litter bins. Despite the situation, a few recommendations are being put forward to whom it may concern.

i.   A new ruling class that is nationalistic and fair to all Nigerians must begin to emerge to help the country develop. The current practice where ethnicity reigns supreme should be jettisoned if room well be created for national development.

ii.   For this to happen there is need to de-emphasize the role of money in politics. A situation where all one reacquires to participate in politics are bags of Ghana-Must-Go full of different currencies must be discouraged if humane and service-oriented leaders will emerge to halt the drift.

iii.   Importantly, media must be nationalistic and wean themselves of extreme commercialization. Everyone appreciates the place of adequate funding in running an business, including media, but this must not be done at the expense of ethical conduct and nationalistic orientation. There must be a nation before businesses, including media, can thrive.

iv.   There should be a deliberate policy which encourages the search for knowledge and the concomitant acquisition of multi media literacy. This may not be possible under the present harsh economic situation as evident in poor power situation, poor earnings, high infection finance and a general worsening poverty. People would seek food before running after knowledge.

v.   It might be necessary to have professionals running media outfits so that professionalism and national interest may have a higher chance of being manifest in media operations. There are a few cases of professionals successfully owning and

running media organizations. Such examples as Tell Magazine, City People, The News and until just a few years, Newswatch.

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