



22

African Communication Research

22

African Communication Research

VOL 9, No 1

December, 2020

African Communication Research (ISSN 1821 - 6544) is published once a year, in December, as a service of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Communications at St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Mwanza, Tanzania for Communication Researchers of Africa.

All correspondence should be directed

to: Albert Tibajuka (Ph.D)
Coordinating Editor
P.O Box 307 Mwanza,
Tanzania
Email:
tibajuka.albert@saut.ac.tz

To obtain a subscription and arrange a suitable form of payment or establish an exchange of journals, send an email to
tibajuka.albert@saut.ac.tz

Communicating Innovations in Africa to Rural Farmers In Mbaise Communities
Nwachukwu Faustinus Ginikanwa
University of Harcourt Nigeria

Media Economics and Nigeria's Democracy
Victor Jatula
University of Utah Asia Campus

Social media use Among Journalists in Zambia and Tanzania: Examining Prospects and Challenges
Judith Wanda
St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT)
Gregory Gondwe
Colorado University

Adolescent Girls Communicating About Their Menstrual Experiences in Kabera Slums of Kenya
Stella Jerp Chebii
University of Eldoret Kenya

Roundtable Dialogue and its Inherent Complexities: Learning from the Accounts of the Less Influential Dialoguers in Geita Tanzania
Albert Tibajuka
St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT)

Public Meetings and Citizen Participation in Rural Development Programs in Ethiopia
Hagos Nigussie
University of Makelle Ethiopia

Cultural Elements in a Selected Reality Television Program in Nigeria
Alex Eloho Umuerrri
Benson Dahosa Nigeria



African Communication Research

A peer-reviewed journal

**published by the Faculty of Social Sciences and
Communications at St. Augustine University of
Tanzania, Mwanza, Tanzania
as a service to communication research in Africa.**

**Listed in the accrediting indices of
The International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
Cambridge, England**

**Managing Editor - Prof. Costa Ricky Mahalu, Vice
Chancellor, SAUT**

**Chief Editor - Carolyn Cummings Osmond, Southampton
Solent University**

**Coordinating Editor - Albert Tibaijuka,
SAUT**

Editorial Assistance – Emily Smith

**Proof Readers - Weronica Walerosca,
- Sean Johnson,
- Molly Ann Hopkins**

International Editorial Advisory Board

Prof. Robert A. White, Tangaza University, Nairobi

Ayobami Ojebode, University of Ibadan Nigeria

Monica Chibita, University of Makerere, Kampala, Uganda

**Cees Hamelink, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands and
University of Aruba**

Audrey Gadzekpo, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

Winston Mano, Westminster University, London, United Kingdom

Peter Mhagama, University of Malawi, Malawi

Francis Nyamnjoh, Cape town University, Cape town, South Africa

**Isaac Phiri, Dept. of Mass Communication, University of Zambia,
Lusaka, Zambia**

**Terje S. Skjerdal, Faculty of Journalism and communication, Addis
Ababa University, Ethiopia**

**Kenyan Tomaselli, Professor, Culture, Communication and Media
Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa**

Desmond Wilson, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

Eric Kwame Adae, University of Oregon

Gregory Gondwe, University of Colorado, Boulder

African Communication Research

Table of Contents

Volume 9, No. 1

December 2020

Communicating Innovations in Africa to Rural farmers in Mbaise communities

Nwachukwu Faustinus Ginikanwa
University of Harcourt Nigeria 1

Media Economics and Nigeria's Democracy

Victor Jatula
University of Utah Asia Campus 11

Social media use Among Journalists in Zambia and Tanzania: Examining Prospects and Challenges

Judith Wanda
St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT)
Gregory Gondwe
Colorado University Boulder 27

Adolescent Girls Communicating About Their Menstrual Experiences in Kabera Slums of Kenya

Stella Jerp Chebii
University of Eldoret Kenya 38

Roundtable Dialogue and its Inherent Complexities: Learning from the Accounts of the Less Influential Dialoguers in Geita Tanzania

Albert Tibaijuka
St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) 49

Public Meetings and Citizen Participation in Rural Development Programs in Ethiopia

Hagos Nigussie

University of Makelle Ethiopia

65

Cultural Elements in a Selected Reality Television Program in Nigeria

Alex Eloho Umuerrri

University of Benson Dahosa Nigeria

80

Media Economics and Nigeria's Democracy

Victor Jatula

Abstract

In Western democracies, the news media is constitutionally free, liberal and independent. As watchdogs, mediators and mediums of idea exchange, they provide information that facilitates transparency, accountable governance and public participation. In authoritarian regimes, information is state controlled. In emerging democracies with a history of authoritarian rule, what is the nature of the press and do they contribute to democratic consolidation? Using political economy of communication as its framework of analysis, this paper investigated the nature and influence, if any, of mainstream news media in Nigeria on the democratic process. Findings indicate that since democratization in 1999, news outlets have transformed into capitalist, neoliberal, ad-driven industrial complex. Although, small portions of the media still embody nationalist sentiments, are adversarial, alternative and politically non-aligned; in general, the media is shaped by market forces to the extent that substantial deficits in investigating corruption, critical reporting and exposing elite privilege have become widespread. While the press provides a platform for broad and robust political discussion as well as a medium for public opinion to fester, they do not adequately survey the political terrain nor act as watchdogs. As a consequence, democracy in Nigeria will continue to lack openness, inclusiveness and transparency.

Keywords: Nigeria, journalism, neoliberalism, political economy of communication, democracy

Victor Jatula

Victor Jatula is a lecturer in communication (journalism sequence) at the University of Utah (Asia Campus) in South Korea. Specifically, he teaches news and feature writing, digital journalism and public speaking. His research focuses on political communication and the role of the press in democratic societies with a particular emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa. His current research focuses on political culture in post-colonial societies and its impact on democracy.

Introduction

An investigation of media/democracy nexus in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is essential to understanding democratic deficits and development shortcomings in the Third World. The picture emerging across the Global South suggests that democracy, or versions of it in newly democratized developing nations are an essential ingredient of political change but not necessarily required for economic and social development. Across Africa, faith in democracy as a political means to economic ends is increasingly questioned with deep-seated political corruption, rising income inequality, infrastructural shortfalls and disappointing economic performance on one hand. On the other hand, the rise of China— a non-democratic, centralized state with limited media freedom; yet, with startling economic outcomes fuels discontent with democracy. Although, democracy has significantly reduced political violence in Africa since 1990, we argue that democracy has more to offer under right conditions. Can the free press in Nigeria and elsewhere across the continent create conditions necessary for democracy to transform, not just politics but also deliver socio-economic dividends? Can the Fourth Estate of the realm investigate and expose corruption, adequately analyse state policies, provide a platform for alternative views, facilitate free and fair elections and promote transparent governance; ultimately leading to national development? This paper evaluated the contributions of Nigeria's mainstream news media to democratic consolidation from the lenses of political economy of communication.

After three decades of post-independent military regimes, Nigeria democratized in 1999. Media liberalization, a core component of Nigeria's new governmental structure was intended to open the political space for civil society and the news media to freely and critically influence good governance and development (Ette, 2013). In two pragmatic ways – freedom of expression and ideas exchange through any media regardless of frontier on one hand and on the other hand, right to vote on the basis of a thorough understanding of contestants, their political records and party manifesto, a free press is a means to broad political ends that includes free and fair elections (World Press Freedom Day, 2019). It was believed, and rightly so, that openness and public participation in politics will translate into national consensus, stability and economic development. It was hoped that the availability of detailed, balanced, open and critical media content, will provide Nigerians with vital information required to make sense of the democratic process, understand important election issues and portrayal of political players and what they symbolize. These were particularly significant in the context of Nigeria's ethnic, religious and political history.

Political and media freedoms therefore heralded a new dawn for Nigeria in general and the press in particular. Democracy and its accompanying quintessential — rule of law, multi-party elections, separation of powers, independent judiciary and a free press opened the door to new voices and fresh ideas. The media landscape, once plagued with decrees, censorship and restrictive laws gave way to a wider-ranging and liberal space in which the media became free and enabled to pursue their statutory roles. For example, the obnoxious Decree 4 of 1984 (Protection Against False Accusation) was not only repealed but in 2011, the Freedom of Information Act established a legislative framework that granted media professionals access to state-held information. Importantly, constitutionally-

guaranteed protection was put in place to shield journalists from physical attacks, blacklisting and the use of security and extra-legal means to suppress the press. These measures emboldened Nigeria's news media to perform as watchdogs – critical of politicians, champion citizens' rights against the abuse of state power and provide a platform for debate.

Two decades after democratization, what has been the input, if any, of the press to the political process in Nigeria? Is the Nigerian news media resilient to, or incapacitated by, arbitrary government intervention, arrests and pressure? Have regional and geopolitical imperatives impacted negatively or otherwise on news content? Does proprietorial control and commercial affiliations limit or boost the capacity of the press to perform its core responsibilities? Has the press in Nigeria upheld its reputation as the most vibrant and resilient in Africa with a tradition of agitation and antagonism against power, or have they become part of the capitalist, industrial complex? Is the Nigerian press mired in regional politics and as a consequence become docile or has the press demonstrated commitment to and vigor in holding politicians at all levels accountable to the electorate? Or have they become biased, sectional agents of regional disunity? These sub-questions are tackled in this paper.

As its main finding, market-driven practices within the media through a series of filters – ownership, advertising, corporate affiliations and political alignments shape news content to the advantage of the power elite. These filters limit the potency of the media to the extent that hopes raised in 1999 during democratization and consequent liberalization have faded considerably. Although, the press has been impressive in providing a platform through which broad discussions have festered and have remained a forum for galvanizing public opinion; they are yet to and are operationally incapable of effectively surveying the political landscape as well as serve as investigative watchdogs of the ruling class. Evidence from semi-structured interview participants indicates that Nigeria's pro-market media worldview restricts the news media from investigating, challenging, barking at and 'biting' corruption! Although, democracy is consolidating; democratic dividends — human rights, rule of law and development lags significantly behind. Press freedom is yet to translate into an open, accountable and transparent political space as media dictate media outcomes. In the absence of a more critical press, Nigeria's version of democracy, if not reformed, corruption will deepen, bad policies will go unchallenged, serious journalism will shrink and the quest for development unrealized.

Political economy of communication: A theoretical framework

Political economy of communication is an alternative approach to understanding the media industry, news production, media proprietorship and media effect on society. It emphasizes class conflict and social upheavals within the liberal-capitalist order and focuses on media ownership and control, convergence and consolidation of media industries with other industries. It rejects the notion that in a constitutional democracy, the press acts in the capacity of a watchdog by monitoring the activities of the state. Rather, it argues that the press is a capitalist enterprise, owned and controlled by members of the political class and is designed to serve the ruling elite (Mosco, 2009).

Political economy in general focuses on power relations within society and the struggles between labor and capital. In media studies, it is holistic in its approach to understanding the media and studies the historical, political, economic, organizational, technological, personal and professional factors that impinge on the media production process. Political economy of communication studies the media with other institutions – social, economic and political, and within the wider social context (nationally and internationally). It deals with communication as a social process, having forward and backward linkages with emphasis placed on capitalist news organizations, concentration of ownership, government policy, regulation and control, institutional structures within media organizations, globalization, media imperialism and the flow of information from the Global North and beyond; and neoliberalism and its impact on journalism, organizations and across nations (McQuail, 2005).

From the early 1970s, the emergence of a critical research approach has challenged the supremacy of earlier, mainly positivist research approaches that conceptualize the liberal press as independent and central to democracy. This basic assumption of the press as a force for public interest was re-examined within the context of propaganda studies and media agenda-setting research. Studies show that the interlocking relationship between media owners, politicians and corporate elite causes the news media to self-censor alternative voices that question elite agenda. From 1970 onwards, political economy of communication shifted its focus on international communication at a time when much of the work in this particular field was addressed to the modernizing potential of the media in developing countries with little or no reference to questions of media ownership, control, nor even to content, and still less to broader issues of dominance and dependency, tied aid, super power conflict, and media commercialization. Questions on the link between the different indices of modernization, including industrialization and urbanization and other broader social questions, about who was setting the research agenda, to whose benefit, informed by which ideologies and discourses became the focus of critical research. The political economy of the mass media acknowledges that the media are commercial, industrial, ideological organizations who function as means to an end and not ends in themselves. The political economy approach also draws attention to the dynamics of change in media industries, with particular reference to processes of concentration in the control of media by a few large organizations (Boyd-Barrett, 1998).

Political economy in the 1990s continues to chart the extent to which cultural production is controlled or influenced by large corporations. Mosco (2009) argues that there are four key trends in world communication: digitalization, consolidation, deregulation, and globalization. A relatively new feature of political economy of communication is its concern to understand the causes and implications of privatization, which is to say the processes by which governments since the early 1980s have sought to reduce support for publicly-owned media and at the same time to dismantle and reformulate the regulatory frameworks governing private control of media, processes which were further accelerated by the collapse of the communist bloc in the later 1980s. In the 2000s, Chomsky and Herman (1988) and McChesney (2008) have focused more on the threat of media ownership and its real and potential dangers to democracy and freedom. They argue that concentration of media ownership in a few hands to the extent that what the public see, hear and read is controlled by six global, ad-driven conglomerates will ultimately create a media loyal to advertisers, privilege and politicians with access to vast resources.

Transformations in Nigeria's Press/Politics Nexus

British trade influence and later colonial rule over the River Niger area in West Africa brought together diverse peoples and cultures into a single political and geographical entity known today as Nigeria. However, demand for racial equality and political inclusion in a handful of Lagos-based newspapers around 1914 transformed the press in Nigeria from its missionary roots into an awakening force and a platform for national consensus (Omu, 1978). Amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates in 1914 according to Campbell (2013) not only enlarged Britain's administrative control over Nigeria's vast territory, it also expanded the scope of local newspapers and laid the foundation for Nigerian nationalism. Newspaper agitation inspired constitutionalism in 1922 that introduced local elections in Lagos and Calabar. By the 1940s, nationalism in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, championed by the press along with discontent intellectuals and civil rights groups snowballed into decolonization after World War II (1939-45) and eventual independence in 1960. Strong nationalist sentiments that pitched the press against colonialism changed from agitation into cooperation with Nigeria's newly-elected government. The euphoria of independence and the media's developmental agenda was, however, brief. Constitutional strains, regional rivalry between the north and south, and power politics created conditions that allowed military intervention in 1965. As indicated by Oso (2011), after five short years of parliamentary democracy, despotic military rulers forcefully hijacked the political process through coups and counter-coups. Military rule in Nigeria was characterized by power centralization, dissolution of political parties, suspension of parliament, and press censorship. The press again recalibrated its nationalist, adversarial force to demand for political reform, freedom, multiparty elections and the return to civil rule. By early 1990, portions of the news media were forced underground amidst military repression; but, collectively, the press remained resilient and served as platforms through which radicalism and resistance to authoritarian rule festered. They also provided a window, an alternative view through which the international community understood political and social development within Nigeria. Together with civil society, Nigeria's dogged and unrelenting news media exerted pressure on the military until 1999 when democratic politics was reintroduced (Siollun, 2013).

Existing literature on the nature of the press since democratization is twofold. Media ownership and control, except in a handful of new starts-ups and online platforms, is the exclusive preserve of well-connected politicians who see the press as means to political and economic end. Owners use their titles principally to back certain political parties, drum up support for particular political candidates and antagonize or criticize opposing groups and interests. They control their organizations through staff micromanagement, news content censorship and recruitment of editorial staff that comply with the owner's worldview. Although media ownership in Nigeria is unlike the corporate ownership structure in the West, they share similar capitalist motivations. Consequent upon the above, the quest for financial success and profit maximization now plays a more open and influential role in the operational dynamics of major news organizations. Editorial independence, critical reporting and nationalistic sentiments are sacrificed for advertising revenue and commercial success (Adesoji, 2010). "The market has become the decisive moderating force for mainstream press outfits, location, ethnicity or political affinity notwithstanding" (Oso, 2011: 21).

By implication, Graber (2013) notes that a commercial press is principally accountable to its capital, owners and shareholders, not the public. Press freedom is not only threatened under these circumstances; it is radically endangered as it becomes increasingly difficult for media professionals to act independently in public interest (Oso, 2011). Economic and political power are not mutually exclusive. They are ends for which the press has become means. In the section below, I lay out a systemic method of examining Nigeria's dynamic mainstream news media.

Methodology

To investigate the nature and influence of Nigeria's news media to the democratic process since 1999, the study measured press performance against public expectations – provide a forum for public discussion of diverse, often competing ideas; give voice to public opinion; serve as citizen's eyes and ears to survey the political scene and the performance of politicians; and act as a public watchdog that barks loudly when it encounters misbehavior, corruption and abuse of power in the government (Graber, 2003). Four critical questions were used: 1. Does the Nigerian press provide a forum for public debate and discussion? 2. Do they give expression to public opinion? 3. Do they survey the political process to scrutinize the performance of elected officials and finally; 4. Do they engage in watchdog, expose journalism?

Focused group discussions and semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the perspectives of a cross-section of Nigerians who participated in the study. The use of qualitative method was justified by its potential to gather broad and wide-ranging perspectives that addressed the study's research questions. The underlying methodological objective was twofold: one, it is believed that different types of opinions can be gained using different methods. This makes it therefore possible to fully understand the Nigerian press if it is studied from multiple approaches. Two, when research is not bound to a single method and the researcher is at liberty to combine methods, it is believed that using more than one method should help get a clearer picture of the phenomenon under study to make for more adequate explanations. In sum, the mixed methods approach increases the propensity to get at the truth.

Focused group discussions were conducted in Lagos, Nigeria in 2019. As suggested by Kitzinger (2004) of the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG), much emphasis was placed on interpersonal familiarity among group participants on one hand while on the other hand, familiarity with the subject matter was both relevant and quintessential. In total, three focus group discussions were conducted with six news reporters in Group One; five university students (University of Lagos and Lagos State University) in Group Two, and six social media bloggers in Group Three. The mixed composition of the groups as well as their interest in Nigerian politics generated varying standpoints and views that proved relevant to the study. To further explore individual views intimately, 12 semi-structured interviews with news reporters were conducted in Lagos. Participants were purposefully selected based on their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study and their work in political reporting in national newspapers located in the Lagos/Ibadan press axis in Southern Nigeria. These semi-structured interviews also generated useful views deemed relevant for the study. Importantly, the participants at focused group discussions and semi-structured interviews represented an urban, educated, middle-income, politically-conscious class that lived in Lagos – Nigeria's

former capital and cosmopolitan mega-city. The age bracket of selected participants ranged from 22 to 50. Gender balance and academic diversity was also ensured to the extent that participants included students, professionals, reporters and bloggers with varying educational qualifications and socioeconomic status. This, according to Silverman (2016), increases the credibility and believability of a qualitative research enterprise. Subsequent data analysis followed a rigorous process – transcription, familiarity with content and development of salient issues into broader thematic categories that best reflected the data.

Researchers initially familiarized themselves with the content of the transcripts before individually coding sections of text in to meaning units. These were then discussed by the research team and developed into broader thematic categories which best reflected the data. A single member of the team checked the final analysis for category integrity and fit with the data”

Discussion and analysis

Do Nigeria’s news media serve as a marketplace of ideas? The concept of a marketplace of idea is premised on the belief that in democracies – new and old – the liberal press is expected to function as a platform for wide, conflicting debates, discussions and ideas in the belief that when varying and conflicting ideas are given broad and robust coverage and analysis in the media, the truth in political dialogue will prevail, capable of guiding public opinion and policy. According to Gordon (1997), ideas will succeed or fail on their own merits when subjected to media and public scrutiny. This notion of providing a platform for open, political discussion and inclusive public debate is strengthened by concepts such as media neutrality, objectivity, and impartiality. The marketplace idea is meant to stock public spaces with a diversity of perspectives and broad-ranging opinions, essential for public information and enlightenment.

In the context of Nigeria, findings indicate that the increase in the number of newspapers is a reflection of a more tolerant political and legal environment that accommodates open discussion, political communication and media entrepreneurship. These press outfits are mainly clustered in urban centers – Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja, Kano, Benin City, Port Harcourt and Enugu– where access to government sources, a growing readership, trained manpower and secure internet connectivity are available. A *Punch* newspaper reporter noted that “the plethora of news platforms across Nigeria is tantamount to diversity of opinions and representative of the many facets of society.” Accordingly, these platforms have opened new and inclusive windows through which Nigerians and outsiders understand national politics.”

A *ThisDay* newspaper reporter added that mainstream newspapers have had to adapt to the changing mediascape, especially influenced by social media’s flexibility, immediacy and vibrancy. Participants commended traditional newspapers, especially *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *ThisDay*, *Daily Trust*, *The Sun*, *Tribune* and *The Nation* who regularly publish a letters-to-the-editor section, columns and editorials that highlight social discontent and infrastructural deficiencies in the system.

These views, if true, challenged the notion that mainstream newspapers located in Lagos/Ibadan newspaper axis are mainly controlled by Yoruba political elites who use these outlets as propaganda machinery to further their political, regional and economic agenda. Commenting on the historic rivalry between newspapers in Lagos (South) and Abuja (North) and the conflictual editorials and coverage of news, almost entirely unique to Nigeria, a *Vanguard* reporter participant said “all sides of every narrative – north and south, east and west – enrich public understand and discourse to the extent that multiple viewpoints offer a more complete view of Nigeria's society.” Her comment, if accurate, suggests a robust public space in which multiple opinions fester. Some argue that multiple opinions with competing interpretations of facts and perspectives polarize and fragment media audiences, but an online blogger participant commented that “freedom of expression as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution is specifically for that purpose – diversity of ideas. It is better to have many voices than a few, gatekeeper-controlled dominant views.” A student of University of Lagos added that “all voices – rational, irrational, professional, raw or bias, fresh or old contribute to the general commonwealth of ideas available within society. I particularly look out for Ruben Abati’s articles in *The Guardian* newspaper.” Evidence from participants suggests that Nigeria’s news media embody a wide range of ideas from various political, economic, academic, regional, religious and diaspora interests that represent divergence. Although each publication may vary slightly as is the case elsewhere, put together, these multiple elements enrich press content. Evidence therefore indicates a marketplace of ideas that offer alternative perspectives.

Do Nigerian news media give expression to public opinion? Conceptualized as the complex collection of perspectives from different people and the sum of all their views (Boyd-Barrett, 1995), the liberal press should function to crystallize and articulate the collective and prevalent thoughts and views in society, whether political or otherwise. Through their mediatory roles, the press should moderate and reconcile the dialogue between the public and the political class to allow meaningful interaction. This enables government to know both public opinion and minority views on one hand and on the other, media mediation should allow the electorate to understand the government policies and direction. This dual role should help cement the media's relevance as a quintessential democratic institution, required for modern participatory politics (Moy, P & Bosch, B., 2013).

To ascertain if Nigerian newspapers represent public opinion, reporters who participated in the focus group discussion stated that, to a reasonable percentage, the opinion of the public is well represented in the news media. They asserted that Nigeria's news media is fair in granting access to many viewpoints, particularly views that criticize the state and its political elite. A *Guardian* reporter added that, "In so doing, we enhance participatory democracy by providing the public with access through which various opinions are expressed on several national issues." A news blogger observed that, "all newspapers in Lagos have lively online comment sections but the attention they command is minimal compared to the traffic on blogs and social media. Examples include *Lindaikeji* blog and *Tundeednut* on Instagram. These platforms see thousands of comments from the public." The suggestion here is that the press, particularly online, is a no-holds-barred medium through which the views of the public are heard – though it is often the case that these lively online commentaries are the exclusive preserve of an educated, urban middle class.

Student participants, however, accused editors of national newspapers of being too selective in the opinions they publish offline, to the extent that they (the students) believe these papers often restrict alternative views. According to a political science student at the University of Lagos, "Sadly, since 2003, Nigeria media has gradually left the public for the elite. They express more of elite views. They have now become a vehicle for the elite to push talking points." Another student added that in most newspapers, "it is difficult to get an article published except you know someone on the inside!" It is difficult to quantify the extent to which this latter comment is accurate, but the general consensus during the student-populated focus group discussion is that newspapers are overtly political in their coverage, not radical enough in giving voice to the views of youths and students, and are too preoccupied with the actions and inactions of political actors. Reacting to the above, a *Guardian* newspaper journalist noted that "editors select and publish articles that are well written, clearly thought-through and very current. Articles that do not embody these qualities are dropped."

A former *ThisDay* newspaper reporter observed that "In 2006, *The News Magazine* sold pages of its publication to politicians to help 'showcase their accomplishments.' *ThisDay* newspaper adopted the same concept and has become very notorious for publishing as news,

politician-sponsored content.” Other participants indicated that it has now become the norm for journalists to accept ‘brown envelopes’ in exchange for positive media coverage. “The media you read determine what you know. It is no coincidence that some Lagos papers are commercial entities and politicians are their main customers. It is therefore untrue that Nigerian newspapers and their online counterparts always and often represent public opinion,” noted a blogger participant. These comments open up the link between certain news media and their commercial interest on one hand, while on the other hand, they suggest that social media and online news are more open to accommodating public comments and diverging views. It is believed that while all newspapers claim to adhere to strict professional ethics – independence, balanced and objectivity – in practice, each medium defines its own rules and framework. In sum, while Nigeria’s newspapers may not have done enough to accommodate the views of college students or the likely consequences of various types of political decision, online news platforms serve as a forum for expanding discussion of conflicting elite and/or popular views about numerous political issues. They also publish diverse opinions that are deemed radical and divergent. As democracy consolidates in Nigeria, more and more news media now subscribe to non-partisanship and editorial independence, though with varying degree and depth.

How effective is the Nigerian press in performing its surveillance functions?

The press is expected to survey the political landscape and advance the course of democracy (Graber, 2003). Effectiveness and efficiency in public office is critically related to transparency and accountability. The media is expected to serve as eyes and ears for citizens, and monitor the soundness of policies as well as oversee the performance of politicians and senior civil servants. Although the media might not always have the resources and sophistication to closely scrutinize politicians, the evaluator role of the press rests with in their ability to insightfully and constructively appraise government actions and policies. Media criticism is largely geared towards reform and performance, though it makes uncomfortable reading and may attract elite disapproval. **In dispensing this responsibility**, most blogger participants expressed confidence in the media’s potential to scrutinize and critique the actions and inactions of government – federal, state and local. Participant cited several examples of media’s surveillance including but not limited to: uncovering plots to illegally alter the Nigerian Constitution by Olusegun Obasanjo – Nigeria’s president between 1999-2007; and exposing the excesses of political office holders who embezzled state resources – former state governors such as James Ibori (Delta), Murtala Iyanko (Adamawa), Martin Elechi (Eboyin) and Sule Lamido (Jigawa). Other investigative work according to a reporter included “exposing legislators with fake degrees, institutional decay, abuse of power and deep-seated corruption by politicians”. Reporters and bloggers at focus group discussion generally agreed that the current and somewhat open political space is a product of press agitation and sacrifice. The comments suggest a political environment and its inherent media surveillance has remarkably helped civil society engage more meaningfully with politics, with the collective goal of cementing enduring democratic principles. According to a political blogger in Yaba, Lagos,

“Despite several attempts to suppress and control the press, our resilience as journalists in Nigeria has become our identifying character. We do as much as the political framework allows” – however, a *Punch* newspaper reporter said, “I am not sure we still have that [serious journalism] in the Nigerian media anymore. The only media that do this is the *Premium Times* and *Channels TV*.” A blogger argued that “this aspect of news reporting is both disappearing and, in most cases, almost non-existent in Nigeria”. In probing the phrase “as much as the political framework allows” during focus group discussion, both news reporters and bloggers commented that Nigerian journalists must conform to written and unwritten rules. They asserted that the former is defined by the state, Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the media organization you work in. These include issues of national security, ethnically sensitive discourse between north and south, anything that tampers with religion – especially Islam – and political affiliations. The more important rules they believe are unwritten! These, they say, are in layers. For example, a *Punch* newspaper reporter commented that “most organizations are not keen about exposing corruption and abuse of power, especially when it involves an incumbent president, governor, legislator, senior officer, corporate sponsor or a political ally.” He added that “When you attack the corrupt; they attack you back.” A reporter noted during focus group discussions that the now defunct *Next* newspaper is a case in point of if you attack corruption, it attacks you back. *Next* newspaper was radical and investigative. Within a few years after it hit the newsstand, it became the go-to publication for exposé journalism. However, corruption fought back. First, journalists working with *Next* were blacklisted and barred from attending press briefings and related events. Second, *Next* newspaper experienced ad-drought. This depleted the publisher’s ability to meet its operational cost. Finally, covert and overt surveillance by officers of the state security service made reporters nervous and uncomfortable. This is more so worrying in a country with a long history of state impunity and police brutality against media professionals. In sum, the paper seized publication not because the content was not in demand but because it is difficult to fight power!

A blogger, commenting on the unwritten rule added that “the rule can be the difference between life and death. I know of a few colleagues who were arrested, put behind bars without trial for several weeks due to an article or report posted on their blogs.” Bloggers are in a more precarious situation, she continued, because “we lack the institutional, legal and financial resource of news reporters working in established media organizations.” Another blogger noted that “Nigeria’s poor ranking on Transparency International’s corruption perception index is an indication of deeply embedded corruption within the system but corruption is rarely investigated in traditional media. Even within Nigeria’s blogosphere, authorities monitor everything to silence radicals.” These comments, born out of frustration and anger, indicated a willingness on the part of the press to investigate the polity; but, in reality, the system is littered with restrictions visible and invisible, legal and otherwise imposed from the top to hinder openness, accountability and transparency.

More evidence from interview participants indicated that the news coverage of corruption, limited as it is, is not an outcome of in-house investigations but obtained from secondary sources including court proceedings, insiders, whistle-blowers and anti-corruption

agencies (Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and Public Complaint Commission). A *Punch* reporter noted that “while it is common practice for the media to gather information from these sources, the inability to conduct in-house investigation is the sign of our times. Publishers are not interested in rocking the boat. They have too much to lose; and very few to gain.” Students believe the news media can and should do more to survey Nigeria’s political space. According to a Lagos State University student, “the disappointingly low coverage on corruption in the press does not suggest that corruption is not widespread. In fact, it is deeply ingrained and antithetical to development. What it shows is that the system and news reporters are conditioned to stay away from any form of news content that expose the rich and powerful.” While most journalists who participated at interview contended that the press can do more to expose corruption, they identified three obstacles: first, the press cannot do it alone due to limited resources. They do not have the capacity and finance to effectively monitor the activities of public office holders at all levels. Second, a significant section of the press is also entrenched in corruption, necessitated by poor conditions of service, unpaid salaries and, more prominently, external pressure from politicians and corporate organizations. Lastly, the subtle use of security operatives and legal tools to clamp down on journalists deemed critical of government is a deterrent. A *ThisDay* journalist added that “according to reports by *Campaign to Protect Journalist (CPJ)*, Nigeria is second only to Somalia in terms of Africa’s worst record on unpunished journalist murders. Routine censorship and harassment by state security personnel have made Nigeria a dangerous place to be a journalist.”

In sum, the press is yet to live up to the expectations in terms of surveying the political landscape.

Does the press hold public office holders accountable to the Nigerian public?

The press is expected to perform watchdog functions (de Burgh & Lashmar, 2008). In line with Section 21 of the Nigerian Constitution, the press, including radio, television, and other agencies of the mass media, should hold elected office holders responsible and accountable to the people. Investigative journalism is therefore predicated on the media’s ability to supply citizens with deliberately hidden information the public must have to prevent or stop the abuse of power. Accordingly, the press must expose the abuse of power and warn society about those doing harm by keeping the public informed to the extent that they (the public) can meaningfully engage in politics.

An overwhelming majority of participants (bloggers and reporters) during focus group discussions agreed that the press have not fully performed its watchdog function since 1999, particularly in investigating the system. A *Punch*-based journalist noted that “it is obvious that the political scene has changed; the role of the press is no less important in keeping politicians on their toes. What is shocking is that today’s press is less interested in critical work.” According to her, critical work includes detailed, time-consuming investigative work that examines policies and their consequences on the public, political actors and their actions, as well as examining public institutions and their performance. A blogger added that “we thought the media will retain its role against the military and put the present civilian

government on edge, but what we have is complacency." Another participant added that "the press in Nigeria is now part of the Establishment, equally participating in the sharing of the national cake."

Reporters believe that two factors hold the media in Nigeria back from functioning as watchdogs. First is revenue. The state is the biggest spender in the media market through advertisements and public service announcements. Political parties and their candidates are also heavy spenders, especially during election seasons. Corporate advertisers and sponsors with access to enormous resources also feature in the mix. To attract advertisements required to function on one hand, and make up for declining revenue from circulation on the other, media organizations increasingly depend on the state, political parties and corporate elites. A reporter said: "It is therefore difficult, if not somewhat impossible for journalists to scrutinize, bark and bite the fingers that feed (advertise with) them". According to another reporter, "most news media outlets are like diaries of political actors in and out of power. If you don't know what the politicians are up to or what the next big thing is, just pick up a few copies of daily newspapers, you will get a complete itinerary and list of their activities". Second is the power of elite and state intervention in the media. Contrary to the principle of free enterprise and market economy enshrined in the constitution, state intervention, censorship and control is not only apparent but also inhibiting. A *ThisDay* reporter said "although freedom of expression is guaranteed by Section 39 of the Constitution, since 2015 when President Buhari got into office, the administration has systematically tightened the noose on non-compliant reporters." Other reporters and bloggers mentioned several cases of arrest without trial and detention without charge: Jones Abiri, editor of *Weekly Source*; Segun Ogundipe and Evlyn Okakwu of *Premium Times*, and two police invasions of the *Daily Trust* newspaper office in Abuja. A *Guardian* reporter noted that "President Buhari is a converted democrat who is yet to live up to his promise that journalists will be safe under his democratic administration." Participants also contended that many bloggers are undergoing prosecution across the country by elected politicians who attack press freedom and free speech using normal state apparatus: denial of advertisements, spying on journalists, and sometimes outright attack. Reporters also mentioned that "the state uses accusation of terrorism or aiding and abetting. These, according to them, are ways to arm twist the press in dancing to their tunes."

In sum, these commentaries suggest that the news media are for-profit enterprises, interested in boosting their resources. While it is not uncommon for news organizations to focus on revenue, it appears that in the Nigerian context, the bottom-line has become the end of which journalism is merely a means. The views of participants, in the absence of counterevidence suggests that the media in general and newspapers in particular are not sufficiently engaging in surveillance or adequately performing their watchdog role. A few participants also added that the absence of investigative reporting indicates that most media houses are not devoting the required resources into and giving serious reporting the attention it deserves. Simply relying on secondhand information may not allow the press to dig as deep as is required.

Conclusion

This paper is located in the broad field of media and democracy in Africa. Specifically, it examined the symbiotic relationship between press and politics in an emerging democracy – Nigeria. This paper investigated the nature and contributions of Nigeria’s news media to the current democratic process to determine if the press have helped or hindered political progression since democratization in 1999. As its framework of analysis, the study focused on four key questions: has the press in Nigeria provided a platform for broad and robust discussion? A forum for public opinion? Do they adequately survey the political terrain? And, have they acted as watchdogs? Using a blend of focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, evidence indicates a mixed picture. On one hand, Nigerian papers are especially likely to represent the views and beliefs of a wide cross-section of society. Most newspapers still embody a long-standing Nigerian tradition of being politically affiliated or ethnically connected, and as such, they articulate a range of political opinion, united without a doubt by adherence to shared elite norms, but differing in partisan concerns and loyalties. Partisan political diversity is an especially recognized characteristic of the press in Lagos and here, too, there seems to be more editorial effort than elsewhere to solicit public opinion through the letters-to-the-editor page and reproduced views that challenge authority. Nigeria’s news media remain willing to carry criticism of the shortcomings of the government, albeit in a regionally-biased fashion. On the other hand, the media fall short of expectations in surveillance and watchdog functions. They have become capitalist, neoliberal and ad-driven.

The implications of this study are multifaceted. Findings suggest that hopes of a transparent and efficient democratic process facilitated by an independent and free news media may remain elusive due to economics. In Nigeria and possibly across the Global South, versions of democracy in practice across the Third World may remain nothing more than periodic elections, occasional change of party in power and a means to political power; not a political means to socioeconomic, people-centered and developmental ends. In the context of market-driven media, critical roles such as watchdogs and platforms for open and liberal discussion are compromised in the interest of power.

Bibliography

- Adesoji, A. O., & Hahn, H. P. (2011). When (not) to be a proprietor: Nigerian Newspaper Ownership in a Changing Polity. *African Study Monographs*, 32(4), 177-203.
- Boyd-Barrett, O., & Rantanen, T. (1998). *The Globalisation of News*. London: SAGE Publishing.
- Campbell, J. (2013) Nigeria: *Dancing on the Brink*. London: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers.
- De Burgh, H. & Lashmar, P. (2008) *Investigative Journalism* (2nd Edition). London: Routledge
- Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2007). A Comparative Content Analysis of Nigerian Newspaper Coverage and Management of Political Conflict in a Pluralistic Society (2003 – 2007). *Babcock Journal of Mass Communication*, 1(3), 85-109.
- Ette, M. (2013). The Press and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. In: A. Charles (ed.) *Media/Democracy: A Comparative Study*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.
- Gordon, J. (1997). John Stuart Mill and the “Marketplace of Ideas.” *Social Theory and Practice*, 23(2), 235-249.
- Graber, D. A. (2003). *The Power of Communication: Managing Information in Public Organizations*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Halloran, J. D. (1981). *The Context of Mass Communication Research*. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre.
- Hamelink, C. J. (1994). *The Politics of World Communication*. London: SAGE Publishing.
- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Kitzinger, J. (2004). Audience and Readership Research. In J. Downing, D. McQuail, P. Schlesinger & E. Wartella (Eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Media*. London: SAGE Publishing
- Kperogi, F. (2020). *Nigeria’s Digital Diaspora: Citizen Media, Democracy, and Participation*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Leman, S. U. (2014). *Thoughts on Nigerian Media and Ethical Challenges*. Paper delivered at a workshop organized by Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the German Embassy in Nigeria in Abuja, September 30, 2014.

McChesney, R. W. (2008). *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (Fifth Edition). London: SAGE Publishing.

Mosco, V. (2009). *The Political Economy of Communication* (Second Edition). London: SAGE Publishing.

Moy, P., & Bosch, B. (2013). Theories of Public Opinion. *Sociology Department, Faculty Publications*, 244. Available at:
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1251&context=sociologyfacpub>

Omu, F. (1978). *Press and Politics in Nigeria 1856-1937*. Ibadan: Longman.

Oso, L. (2011). *Press and Politics in Nigeria: On whose side?* 47th Inaugural Lecture of the Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria.

Siollun, M. (2013). *Soldiers of Fortune: Nigerian Politics from Buhari to Babangida (1983 to 1993)*. Abuja: Cassava Republic.

Silverman, D. (2016). *Qualitative Research* (Fourth Edition). London: SAGE Publishing.

World Press Freedom Day (2019). *Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation*. Addis Ababa: UNESCO. Available at:
https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/wpfd2019_concept_note_en.pdf.