
THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN NIGERIA'S 2023 ELECTORAL PROCESS: AN ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

This paper focuses generally on the role of the mass media in Nigerian electoral process as it pertains to overall development of Nigeria. The background is the recognition of the central role of the media in political and social affairs as a natural outcome of its unlimited communicative strength and outreach. The statement of problem is anchored on the wide spread negative image of the media in electioneering campaigns in Nigeria's political history. The objective of this seminar is to readdress media practice in Nigeria to its fundamental ethical journalistic foundation as basis for positive contribution to national integration. It is also aimed at the examination of both external (official) and internal obstacles that hinder the realization of the goal. This paper uses the method of comparative phenomenological analysis to examine the performances of the media in Nigerian electoral process with regard to its fundamental roles to inform, educate, entertain and monitor in the electoral process.

INTRODUCTION

Broadcasting in Nigeria has surely come a long way since the first radio transmission in 1933 and television in 1959. Since then, broadcasting has played massive economic, social and political roles in the life of Nigerians. Quality programmes have not only educated, entertained and informed citizens, they have positively influenced citizens' perceptions and deepened understanding and tolerance amongst diverse socio-cultural and occupational groups. They have also provided farmers and others with knowledge and skills to improve their lives thereby laying the grounds for the emergence of a united, stable, prosperous and strong nation.

The history of elections in Nigeria generally has afforded us the golden opportunity of assessment of the divergent roles of the media in Nigeria political process within the framework of our national political goal. The issue and question of education, information, mobilization and monitoring has become a very crucial factor in the realization of the national objectives in the context of the electoral process. This is as a result of the ugly incidences of various forms of electoral malpractices which have repeatedly threatened the possibility of credible elections and national integration in Nigeria. Though the issue at stake is the responsibility of all stakeholders in the body politic, there is however, a rationale in assigning this responsibility as a primary concern of the mass media on the ground of professional competence as the fourth estate of the realm. It has therefore, become very important to assess the roles of the mass media in the electoral history of Nigeria. To what extent has the Nigerian media discharged its statutory functions towards achieving a positive political national agenda? Iredia (2007:12) the former Director General of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), states the problem in this regard very clearly that, the people must be assisted to premise their choices of rationality and vote wisely during elections. They must have all information that is needed to elect the right candidates who can ensure good governance. Where such public awareness is lacking, those of us in the media must accept a share of the blame of failed elections in Nigeria.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MEDIA AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA

Media and Politics in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective on the Problematic At independence, African leaders borrowed the authoritarian attitude in respect of the curtailment of press freedom from regimes of Eastern and central Europe "action seemingly justified by the urge to fight against western imperialism and colonialism". This according to (Becker, S. and Lower, E 1976) gave rise to, the culture of one voice... institutionalized ... one voice culture entailed that there be only one official press... the effect (of which) was that authoritarianism grew into conformist press. While during the colonial struggle, indigenous newspapers became a rallying dissent point against colonial iniquities and injustices to "propagate political ideas, to fight colonial injustices, to seek and demand freedom, to protect the people's interests, and to educate them about the present and the future" (Dare, L (1985), the reverse became the case on attainment of political independence. However, as a colonial heritage, when in 1953 the motion for self-governance was made by the Action Group, Sir John Macpherson, the then colonial Governor, made a radio broadcast castigating the party. When Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the party, sought a "right of reply" to the broadcast, the management of the radio service rejected the request on the directive of the colonial government. According to scholars this introduced into the Nigeria media the culture of imbalance and partisanship. According to Adedeji, A. (1991), in 1961 the same government media were used to announce landslide victories for the ruling political parties in the regional elections. According to , it was on Adedeji, A. (1991), the contrary a public knowledge that the victories attributed to the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the north

and the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon's (NCNC) in the East were achieved using in part all forms of electoral chicanery, political intimidations and even coercion including imprisonment of opposition leaders. In 1964, the government media again were used to announce that over fifty percent of the candidates of the ruling party were returned unopposed without voting in many places in the election into the federal house of representative that year. This again was contrary to the fact as Dare (1989:6) observed that Nigerians were aware that the announcements were false, because in some cases, the returning officers disappeared and could not be contacted after receiving papers for the official candidates. In 1965 Okolo (1993:16) noted that different versions of the results of the same election held in the western region in October of that year were announced by different media houses operating in Ibadan the regional capital. The affected media were Eastern Nigerian Broadcasting Services (ENBS), the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service (WNBS) and radio Nigeria. In the second republic civilian government, the newspaper and electronic media were owned by different state governments and the federal government. These media were therefore loyal to the governments in control of their states. This situation though it has the tendency of promoting healthy rivalry further dampened the image of the media. "This is because, the practitioners of journalism wrote reports and news in their preconceived images, thereby destroying their integrity and profession leaving behind a vulgarized journalism" (Dukor p.286). The implication of this scenario of unprofessionalism is that the Nigerian media became concerned not with "the truth, but with rumours". This has largely led to the opinion that journalism as is practiced in Nigeria is a "hogwash of exaggerations and speculations", where, facts are distorted to suit the ends of those who own the media". Therefore, it can be argued that journalism in Nigeria with regard to its constitutional roles is not scientific. This position is authenticated by many other findings, especially with regard to election in Nigeria.

For instance, Egbon, M. (2004) in his study of the 1983 elections alleges That television houses made it impossible for any politician opposed to the government in power to appear on the screen and when he appeared at all, his picture would be distorted and television mechanism upset in order to deliberately render his voice inaudible. As Okolo opines, Nigerian political parties and their functionaries have always been known for using the media in an unwholesome manner. In 1983 for example, the incumbent state governors used the media controlled by them to announce their own re-election. The announcements by the governors were made well before the Electoral commission could include the collation of votes cast at the same election (Alao, D (1992). In 1991, the Governorship election held in Edo on December 14 was nullified because the state owned broadcasting service breached the rules on political broadcast (Alao, D (1992). A report of the European Union (EU) Election observation mission in respect of the 2003 general elections opines that media performance during the Nigerian elections was flawed, as it failed to provide unbiased, fair and informative coverage of political parties and candidates contesting the elections. Federal and state owned media were biased in favour of parties and candidates in power. A cursory insight into the history of elections in Nigerian political development suggests a verdict of irresponsible media. This is because the media has unduly left itself to the manipulation of the negative factors in Nigerian election and politics, thereby, becoming irresponsible. First of these influences is the influence of tribalism in political party formation. Right from the period before and after independence, till date, political parties in Nigeria are formed along ethnic and tribal lines. These parties have championed parochial and ethnic interests at the expense of national unity and stability of the polity. According to Agba (2007:70). From the NCNC, AG and NDC of the precolonial days and the first republic (1951-1966), through the NPN, NPP, GNPP (1979-1983) of the second republic and the third republic and the NRC

and SDP (1991-1993) of the botched fourth republic, and even to the present day PDP, APGA, ACN, CPC and others (1999-2011), political parties formation has been an ethnic affair. As a result of this tribalistic scenario, Marcia grant, as reported in Edogbo (1994:33), carried out a comprehensive study of the relationship between the press and the political system in Nigeria and discovered that the character of political reporting and commentary was entirely dependent on media ownership structure and the owner's relationship with the political system. He therefore concludes that most newspapers often spoke for one political party or one region against another, which meant that the press has always acted not as impartial estate, but as mouthpiece of the political divisions in Nigeria. Also Mohammed, J. (1994), observes that much did not change in the role of the media with regard to its impartiality in subsequent democratic elections and electioneering campaign. For him press partisanship has always manifested in political reporting. As Agba (2007:71), points out, these scenario represents a failure on the part of the media to engage in thorough analysis of party manifestoes and de-emphasis of ethnic politics. Agba's verdict on electioneering campaign in Nigeria is that of the absurd. According to him, electioneering campaign seem to portray a consortium of insincere political figures, whose failure to keep promises dampens the spirit of the electorate and the masses.

The Media, Democracy and Democratic Governance

The media are not only the cornerstone of democracy, they also play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy. The vital role of the media as a watchdog of the democratic process and in influencing political discourse, especially during elections, is essential to democratic consolidation. Universally, the role of the media in information dissemination and public enlightenment through the provision of platforms for electoral campaigns, public debate and voter education is a pre-condition for free and fair elections. Without the media, safeguarding the credibility and transparency of the electoral process would be a difficult task. While a free and objective media can foster transparency by disseminating important electoral information, a stifled or compromised media is capable of undermining the electoral process, ultimately weakening democracy.

The important role of the media in a democracy was underscored in the 2005 UNESCO World Press Day Conference in Dakar, Senegal. The outcome of the Conference as articulated in the Dakar Declaration of 2nd May 2005, stressed that "independent and pluralistic media are essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and participation as fundamental elements of good governance and human rights-based development". Furthermore, the Declaration urged states to, "respect the function of news media as an essential factor in good governance, vital to increasing both transparency and accountability in decision-making process, and to communicating the principles of good governance to society".

In facilitating the full participation of the citizenry in democratic elections, the media are specifically saddled with the responsibility of:

1. Educating voters on how to exercise their democratic rights;
2. Reporting on election campaigns;
3. Providing a platform for political parties and candidates to communicate their messages to the electorate;
4. Providing a platform for public feedback, concerns, opinions and needs to political parties and candidates, the Election Management Bodies (EMBs), government and other electoral stakeholders, thus facilitating interactions on governance issues;

Elections are not just about the right to vote. Knowledge of the voting process, information about political parties, candidates and their programmes are also crucial. Also required is the acquisition of the knowledge of how to vote. It is the sacred responsibility of the media to provide avenues and opportunities for citizens' participation, political inclusion and empowerment. The media should avail voters with adequate information about the electoral process and informed analyses on policies, political parties and their candidates, to enable the citizens make informed choices. To fulfil this obligation, the media have the duty to subject the electoral process to scrutiny and to provide public education on the activities of the EMB and other electoral stakeholders, in order to hold them to account.

The Media, Democracy and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Chapter II Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stipulates the obligations of the mass media as follows:

The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.

The obligation under this Chapter on the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy is anchored on the premise articulated in Section 14 that Nigeria is a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice governed by the belief that:

1. Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through the Constitution derives all its power and authority;
2. The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government; and
3. The participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

It is therefore the duty of the media to act as the watchdog of the society, with the primary responsibility of protecting public interest against any abuse by those entrusted with power and resources of the state. Flowing from this, is a responsibility for the Nigerian media to create awareness to sensitise citizens about their rights and responsibilities by continually providing information on public and current affairs. The media should also educate and empower the citizens to hold public officials accountable for their actions or inaction. By serving as a market place of ideas, playing diverse advocacy roles and providing platforms for the government, interest groups and individuals to push their messages, the media must be constantly aware of its position as the Fourth Estate of the Realm and the fourth pillar of democracy. This consciousness in turn strengthens democracy and promotes good governance and promotes the development of society.

As noted by many constitutional lawyers including *Ogugua V.C. Ikpeze*, in his article "Non-Justiciability of Chapter II of the Nigerian Constitution as an Impediment to Economic Rights and Development" published in the *International Knowledge Sharing Platform (IISTE)* Vol. 5 No 18 (2015), the provisions of this Chapter of the Constitution may not be justiciable and should be made so. But the *status quo* does not abridge the obligation of the media as the watchdog of society.

To all intents and purposes, the media has continued to play a key role in the struggle for, and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. In fact, the media was in the forefront of the struggle for the return of democracy in 1999. Where other entities were complacent or failed to act, certain sections of the media, in spite of the enormous and draconian state powers, mustered the courage to speak truth to power at great personal and corporate costs to the journalists and media organisations involved. Indeed, this attribute of the media dates back to pre-independence and the immediate post-independence period, and it is within this context that the role of the media in the Nigerian Electoral Process will be analysed.

Perspectives on the Role of the Media in Nigeria

Societies the world over, recognize that the media – print, broadcast and now New/Social Media – are an indispensable link between leaders and governance on the one hand, and between government and the governed on the other. Efforts towards making the media accessible through provisions of outlets as well as regulatory frameworks for that access and for the operation of the media itself, are critical indicators of development. Media access, whether by government, opposition or ordinary people and the conditions governing that access are critical in understanding the extent of freedom and information available in any particular country. It is the role of the media to provide balanced information and adequate coverage of events to enable citizens make informed choices about the political and electoral processes.

In Nigeria, the media in general and broadcast media in particular has historically served as a critical national institution engaged in the task of nation-building, mobilization, as well as a store of information on a variety of economic, social, and political issues. While variations in discharging this role are noticeable at various stages of the country's political evolution, there are nevertheless core elements in the development of the broadcast media in the country.

The establishment of the Radio Distribution System (RDS) under the Department of Post and Telegraph (P & T) by the colonial government in 1933 heralded modern broadcast in Nigeria. Initially limited to broadcast only in Lagos, the RDS was expanded to Ibadan and Kano with the establishment of stations in 1939 and 1944 respectively. In the period up till the late 1940s, broadcast activities (content, operation, regulation and access) were effectively under the control of the colonial government. The need to respond to rising anti-colonial agitation by the nationalist movements from the mid-1940s led to an appraisal of radio broadcast in the country that resulted in the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) in 1950. The role and objectives of the NBC were later revised and expanded, with the extension of coverage to Kaduna and Enugu and transmission on both short and medium wave bands. The NBS transformed into the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in 1956 and took on the responsibility of radio broadcasting in Nigeria. By 1978 the NBC was reorganized; vide decree 8 of 1979 (made retroactive 1st April 1978) to become the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) with nationwide broadcast stations in Enugu, Ibadan and Kaduna. Further reorganization in 2006 led to the establishment of six zonal stations in Enugu, Ibadan, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Makurdi and Yenegoa with supervisory roles over all Federal FM stations in their respective zones. Currently, FRCN controls about 37 FM/MW/SW stations nationwide.

Unlike the radio, the provision of television service was spearheaded by the Western Regional Government in October 1959 with the establishment of the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) in Ibadan. The Eastern and Northern regional governments established

their own TV stations in October 1960 and April 1962, respectively. However, television service in Nigeria went into a lull thereafter, until 1972 when the Mid-West TV was established as a TV broadcaster in Port Harcourt but run by the state government from Benin City. The establishment of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in 1976 led to the rapid expansion of TV broadcasting in the country. Indeed, by 1977, all regional TV stations became unified and since then, the creation of more states and the deregulation of broadcasting in 1992, which led to the establishment of private radio and television stations, have resulted in the expansion of broadcasting organisations across the country.

The Media in Effective Electioneering Campaign Reportage in Developing Context

The fore knowledge of Nigeria's unhealthy political culture should form the springboard for media action. Its present status as an elite media, that is, the preserve of the powerful and the harbingers of government, does not augur well for the media, government and society. Agba (2007:261) argues that the media should go back to the concept of journalism in public interest to be able to discharge its proper role in times of election. In this regard, the very first task of the media is how to make politicians respect people's right to candid electioneering. In this regard, news should not mean alienating the audience and keeping the electorates groping in the dark. According to Nwaozuzu (1997:87), electioneering campaign reportage should seek out relevant truths for the people who cannot witness or comprehend the events that affect them. Cohen (1970:27), collaborates the above viewpoint and clearly defines its implications for good political culture. According to him news has gotten so complex that mere reportage is not good any more. What is required is for the journalist to add analysis to campaign news. This implies that the media must interpret campaigns in the light of the electoral needs of the people, that is, implications and actions to people and to realization of a vibrant political system. This simply means directing the goals of electioneering campaign to the desirable goal of responsible democratic principles that recognize the sovereignty of the people's votes. The media, Agba points out, should aim towards getting all political actors to truly believe in one Nigeria, to accept the rules which are made to guide the conduct of elections. These form the purview of media self-examination. Agba (2007:71) acknowledges the fact that electioneering campaign for political power in Nigeria has become part of the problem of national cohesion and integration. It has therefore, become "part of a profound socio-political rot". Electioneering campaign has become part and parcel of national development, in that most often, it has become "intriguing and intricate and bloody", as ethnic rivalry and struggle to get big chunk of the national cake is a recurrent political experience". It is also an acknowledged fact that the mass media has a very important role to play in channeling electioneering campaign to serve the goal of national development. This is because the mass media is described as "a pivot of social interaction, seeking to use the power of mass information to solve the problem of national cohesion and integration, which are both critical to the growth of healthy electioneering campaign" (Agba: 2007:69). But to achieve the above objective, the mass media in Nigeria needs to solve its internal problem of cohesion and integration; "for there are as many media houses as there are many political interests. There are therefore, external and internal obstacles in the realization of the positive role of the media in electioneering campaign. In all, it is argued that the media require a political ideology that guarantees freedom of speech and access to information. This is particularly true as noted by Kalu (1985:14), that We can depend on free speech and democratic ideas only if we accept that free flow of information is necessary for the propagation of political freedom especially during election. This argument hinges on the fact that without a free press, the reporter becomes a public servant, a stooge of the powerful and a robot who acts out the scripts of callous politicians. Under this scenario, the media fails to

become worthy representatives of the people. Apart from the issue of critical self-examination of the role of the media at elections, the media also shares in the responsibility of channeling the electoral process towards the desirable goal of national development and integration. For instance, Kalu (1985:19), points out that “the ordinary expectation is that the mass media will focus on serious matters that portend serious consequences for the people and their political choices”. For Akpan, E. (1985) the media must clarify issues during campaigns, bring aspirants close to the electorate, and teach the differences between party and candidate to enable the electorate make a wise choice. If this is not done “political reporting will lose much of its luster if it does not deal adequately with such issues as national problems, policy guidelines, party programme and government performance” (Kalu 1985:19). The mass media should enable the electorate to analyse campaign messages of politicians. Media focus should be to set the correct political agenda for the audience and not allowing the politicians to do so Ciroma, A (2005) Journalistic writing ... commentaries, editorials, articles, reviews, columns, broadcast discussion ... should raise and answer pertinent question that help to elucidate confusing issues, particularly those relating to policies and leadership... . Agba argues that questions like these and more could suggest workable techniques that can help Nigerians deal decisively with problems of corruption, ethnicism, lack of accountability and weak checks and balances in government. As pointed out earlier, the political trend in Nigeria with regard to the electoral process demands specialist political reporters. This should cover critical areas as knowledge of legal issues in campaign reporting, investigation and balanced judgement that allows the establishment of gathered facts. It is on this note of expertise that general reporting can be said to have become increasingly handicapped. As Louis (1971:151) puts it, thorough voters’ guidance should be the heart of campaign reporting by the mass media. To achieve this objective, the reporter must do with absolute detachment. He should instead carry critical and objective analysis of candidates with the aim of educating the electorate. In this capacity of impartiality, the campaign reporter acts as a catalyst between the candidates and the electorate. Becker, S. and Lower, E (1976) gives an articulate summary of the functions of the mass media in electioneering campaign as follows” reporting and interpreting events, defining issues, portraying personalities, investigating support” There is a very serious angle to the public enlightenment dimension of the role of the mass media in the electoral process. As Agba, P.C (2007) observes, people are eager to join the plethora of electoral malpractices without realizing that it is they who will be victims of bad government resulting from involvement in electoral fraud. Agba, P.C (2007) argues that 43% of our population is still illiterate, a rather large group which requires the special attention of the media. For this group, it is necessary that every electoral information be repeatedly disseminated and in the local languages too. This is why the media must go beyond the mere dissemination of information and engage in political education. For example, it is necessary to educate non-voting population on why they cannot vote instead of scaring them with numerous penalties for breaching the electoral law. As for the voting population, voter education programmes must be userfriendly, especially for the disadvantaged groups like the nonliterate and physically incapacitated. The programmes of voters’ education must offer opportunities for all issues at stake in election to be highlighted and explained.

Media and the Electoral Process in Nigeria

The critical role of the media to democracy cannot be over-emphasized. Some scholars even hold view that democracy is impossible without the media. This position is rooted in the recognition and understanding that the media undergirds, monitors, and strengthens the entire electoral process from the registration of voters, through the actual voting process and the announcement of electoral outcomes or results, as well as the management of public opinion

and perception in post-election period. An election is credible not just because of the ability of EMB to ensure that voters have the requisite information about the process and exercise their rights to choose whom they want; credibility is also judged by the participatory process in which voters have adequate information of policies, programmes, political parties and their candidates, and the entire electoral process, including the level of public debate and quality of information that informed the choices of the electorate.

Similarly, the media acts as an ombudsman, a general overseer safeguarding the transparency of the electoral process, ensuring not only that information is available to voters, but also that the activities of stakeholders in the electoral and political process are consistent with laid down rules and international best practice. The media thus, has both a duty to ensure effective coverage of the electoral process and through it, the obligation to protect voters' rights to full and accurate information, participation in debates and dialogues on the electoral process and engagement with stakeholders in the entire process.

Beyond protecting the rights of voters, the media should, by that measure, also protect the rights of political parties and candidates to have access to, and use of media platforms for public engagement. Similarly, EMBs ought to rely on the media as partners in the delivery of credible elections, e.g. in voter/civic education, respect for electoral codes on political conduct by all stakeholders.

In general terms, therefore, the media should serve as communicators and information channels for voters, political parties, candidates, EMBs, civil society organizations and other stakeholders in the electoral process, as well as informal regulators of the entire process.

In performing these three-dimensional roles, the media must be professional, accurate in its reporting and impartial in its coverage. Without professionalism, the media could become an impediment to the democratic process.

Media Ownership, Control and the Electoral Process

The media in Nigeria has come a long way, with an evolution dating back to 1859 when *Iwe-Irohin*, blazed the trail. From that date to 2018, Nigeria has over 100 government, community and privately-owned newspapers and magazines, some 200 radio stations and about 150 television channels. This is apart from the large and increasing number of online publications and bloggers. While some of the pioneer publications such as *The Lagos Times* and *Gold Coast Advertiser* were published fortnightly and sold for six pence, newspapers are now published daily and sold for N200 and above, while it costs a lot more to subscribe to a variety of television channels on satellite.

Some have argued that the existence of multiple platforms today is healthy and helps to bring the best out of the media. Media organizations now know that they must be innovative and do something unique in order to attract a sizeable audience and profit in the midst of fierce competition. The advent of the social media has, indeed, expanded the challenges and opportunities that traditional media organizations now face in previously unimaginable ways. But I am confident that the traditional media has the capacity to withstand the pressure and protect its hard-earned territory.

But how does ownership and control affect the reportage of the electoral processes? Our experience at INEC, as an Electoral Management Body has been a bitter-sweet one. I must admit that INEC has enjoyed good coverage by the media generally, including members of BON. The reportage has been very helpful. The increasing public confidence in the Commission today is partly attributable to the balanced coverage we have enjoyed so far.

The role of media broadcast in a credible election

The emergence of the Internet has changed the way we think and do things all over the world. It has, indeed, brought with it, tremendous opportunities for the media, like all other sectors. It has broadened the scope of human abilities to share information and knowledge within seconds such that it is no longer possible to hoard information.

The social media, through digital technology, has revolutionized the ability of media organizations and even interested individuals to share breaking news in terms of photos and video clips. It is now possible to watch television programmes live on Facebook and even post comments. Individuals can also record scenes, take pictures with their mobile phones, upload same with their narratives on social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook and to share them. Such content could be viewed by millions of people all over the world within minutes.

The effect is that the monopoly of “Breaking News”, hitherto the exclusive preserve of the traditional media, has been taken away by the new generation of bloggers and those who refer to themselves as “Citizen Journalists”. This poses a major challenge just as it offers new opportunities to media organizations.

The opportunity is that media organizations now have more platforms to ply their trade. There is no need to wait for the prime time to broadcast events, as breaking news can now be released as the news breaks. It has also opened a new way of making money, through digital advertising.

The downside, however, is the circulation of fake news, which the unsuspecting public may believe as the truth. In any case, media organisations have also been victims. There have been reports of certain individuals cloning the platforms and some media organizations and broadcasting fake news which sometimes attract the attention of the public.

INEC has been a victim too. There is a lot of misinformation in circulation, some of which we have had to refute, posted on the social media by unprofessional journalists or bloggers. Some of them even open fake accounts in the Commission’s name with the intention of duping the unsuspecting public. Recently, we had to ask Facebook to pull down a fake account which was asking people to apply for non-existent jobs at the Commission. So too is the fake news that INEC will not sell forms to persons with outstanding corruption cases, thereby effectively banning them from contesting in elections. Apart from the fact INEC does not sell forms to candidates, nothing in the Constitution or the Electoral Act empowers the Commission to ban candidates on account of pending investigation or prosecution. How then do we tackle fake news? Some people have suggested some form of regulation by the government. But can the government put some control measures in place that would not be quickly misunderstood as an attempt to censor the media? If the government cannot regulate, who should? The New Social Media has become the new normal. INEC does not support censorship in any way. We believe that this is a subject that requires constant and open conversation until a solution can be found through structured and sustained engagement between the media and other stakeholders.

Promoting Credible and Peaceful Elections: The Role of Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria

Having explored the role of the media in the Nigerian electoral process, it is important at this point to highlight how INEC and BON can work together towards the promotion of credible and peaceful electoral process and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. As an

independent, non-governmental umbrella association of all public and private electronic media organisations in Nigeria, we solicit the support of BON in three major areas as follows

i. Civic and Voter Education

Civic and voter education is a cardinal statutory function of the Commission. Section 2(a) of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) grants the Commission the power to conduct civic and voter education in addition to other functions conferred by the Constitution. Every year, but particularly at elections period, the Commission commits enormous time and resources on voter education. However, the Commission's human and financial resources are always limited, especially given the size and diversity of both the country and the voter population. Consequently, the incidence of low voter turn-out, voided votes as a result of improperly marked ballots and the case of uncollected PVCs are often blamed on inadequate voter education by the Commission.

ii. Fair, Professional and Ethical Coverage of the Electoral Processes

Elections have become an important source of revenue for the media with wealthy candidates and political parties spending large amounts of money on political advertising which sometimes resulting in skewed coverage in favour of those who can afford the high cost of such advertising. In some cases, sections of the media do not always strictly adhere to professional and ethical standards for a variety of reasons. This is not only a violation of Sections 99, 100, 101 and 102 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended), it actually imperils our democracy.

iii. Organisation of Debate for Candidates Seeking Political Office

Since the restoration of democracy in 1999, the Nigeria Elections Debate Group (NEDG), which is a coalition of broadcast organizations, civil society and professional groups, has been in the vanguard of organizing and hosting live televised debates for all presidential, vice presidential and gubernatorial candidates in Nigeria. Some media organizations have also been involved in the organization and live broadcast of debates among candidates seeking political office, especially during off-season Governorship elections. The conduct of such election debates amongst candidates has become a key mechanism for deepening political participation, helping to focus candidates on the policy issues, clarifying choices and options open to the electorate, creating level playing field in political contest and reducing political tension. Undoubtedly, these debates have afforded the Nigerian electorate the opportunity to watch and listen to presidential and governorship candidates on their intentions and aspirations through an equal opportunity platform. It has also allowed them to compare the candidates running for office and to understand their position on key public policy issues.

As a key player in the Nigeria Elections Debate Group (NEDG), it is appropriate that BON and its members, in consonance with the practice in advanced and developing democracies, should remain in the forefront of efforts to institutionalize the practice of debate among candidates seeking political office in Nigeria. Such debates are necessary for deepening democracy by promoting civil discourse and providing a platform for candidates to articulate their positions on public policy issues. They also allow the public to judge aspiring candidates for political office under pressure and evaluate their arguments in competition with other candidates.

Debates also serve an important role of demonstrating to the aspiring candidates that democracy is about standing before the public and answering their questions. Invariably, debates assist voters in making informed decisions on election day and provide a yardstick

for holding the elected candidates accountable to their party manifestos and campaign promises.

Conclusion

This paper has restricted itself to the role of the media in the electoral process with particular reference to Nigeria. In doing so it has examined the various obstacles that have affected the performance of the media in Nigeria's electoral process. While in a sense it can be said that some improvements have been recorded by Nigerian media in the critical area of electioneering campaign since 1993, however, from what we have said, the Nigerian media may need to improve their coverage of politics and elections. But any assessment of the media must take into consideration the legal, normative and economic factors which constrain their performance. We need to note that although media functions are the same everywhere, they are not and cannot be performed the same way in every society. Indeed the performance of each nation's institutions is contingent upon the nation's level of development, its literacy rate, its culture and general disposition. To this extent, every nation gets the media it deserves. It therefore, implies that the media in any country are propelled not only by news content but more by societal values. The Nigerian Constitution does not empower the media.

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