FEATURES OF DEMOCRACY AND HOW THE MEDIA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE ATTAINMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The work examined the features of democracy and how the media has contributed to the attainment of democracy in Nigeria. The work is anchored on the agenda setting, framing and priming theories of the mass media. The impact of mass media in sustainable democracy in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, mass media must look for avenues to improve on the quality of information they disseminate in order to sustain Nigeria's democracy. The Nigerian media has an important role to play in this present democratic dispensation by allowing for orderly succession of civilian to civilian administration. It is by so doing that democracy can fully be sustained and beyond.

INTRODUCTION
The mass media is instrumental in the survival of democracy. The media serves as a link between the electorates and their representatives by supplying information concerning efforts of governance. They are the watchdogs for uncovering errors and wrongdoing by those in power (Fog, 2004; Kellner 2004). To argue about the media today is almost inevitably to argue about democracy. Furthermore, conflicting views of the history of communications often reflect the disagreements about democracy and its possibilities. Much of the foundational thought about mass media from the writings of Walter Lipmann and John Dewey in the 1920s and'30s to the work of Jurgen Hebermas and others in recent decades has held wide intellectual interest because of its implications for democracy and good governance. Has the media's development advanced or devastated democratic aspiration? Or is the media a mere "phantom" in Lippmann's phrase, or can it be an outstanding force in popular self-government if it can furnish the necessary information and means of criticism and debate (Paul, 2006; Walter & Dewey, 1925 and 1927). Therefore, there is a growing concern about the mass media that they are not fulfilling some functions properly to enhance democratic ideals. Some media

critics have claimed that commercial mass media controlled by a few multinational conglomerates have become an antidemocratic force supporting elements of capitalism to further pauperize the masses (Kellner, 2004; Mcchesney, 1999). Even if they disseminate news, the news is more of entertainment than information and education; rather the mass media prefer to supply sensational news such as sex, violence, fashion etc. The political news they carry are more about personalities than about political ideologies. Therefore there is the absence of serious debate where voters are left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans making them disinterested and cynical about politics (Barnett, 2002).

Critics also have complained that media as the watchdogs are barking of the wrong things. The media hunt for scandals in the private lives of politicians and their families, but ignore much more serious consequences of their policies. They go after wounded politicians like sharks in a feeding frenzy, therefore making us afraid of the wrong things. Minor dangers are wittingly blown out of proportions while much more serious dangers go largely unnoticed. As a result, many fears are exaggerated which often lead to unnecessary measures and legislation (Althaide, 2002; Sabato, 1991; Fog, 2004). Furthermore, media critics have not only criticised the media of wrong doing in the democratic process but also in many other areas of social endeavour. For example, many media have suppressed information about the health hazards of smoking due to pressure from advertisers (Cirino, 1973). Even more alarming is the claim that certain mass media (especially women's magazines) are promoting worthless alternative health products, in the process conspiring with the industry to defraud consumers of billions of dollars every year. These and many other issues are against the mass mz edia   (Barrett   &   Javis,   1993). Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this work attempts to examine the possibilities of the mass media in enhancing democracy in Nigeria.

Conceptualisation
For clarity purposes the following concepts are highlighted:

Democracy
Democracy has a Greek origin and it is defined as the dominance of the people (the public). The most significant feature within a democratic constitution is that the majority rules, while the minority controls and imposes criticism on the majority. The majority protects the minority's rights, whereas, the latter

accepts the political system and functions within its limits (Kouskourelis, 1997; Athanasios, 2007). The first shape of democracy was in the Ancient Athens between 500-321 B.C in a particular country-state and took the pattern of direct democracy. However, this model has been replaced by representative democracy through the election of representatives. The earliest model of democracy which used to be dominant in ancient Athens was featured by citizens' direct participation in the legislative function that is known as the assemblies. This was the most powerful means of dominance during that time. Besides the assemblies, multiple elective methods were used for the public postulates, such as: instant election, voting, draw and selection (Heid, 2003). However, in modern politics and governments today, direct democracy has been replaced by the representative democracy. In this system, decision making concerning the whole of the country is not reached by the public but by democratically elected representatives, who come from various parties via national elections normally held periodically. The present type of political parties is a product of the Great Britain in the 18th century. The existence and function of political securing the equity of opportunity is one of the most fundamental features of the pluralist democracy (Meny, 1995).

In today's liberal-democratic system, the existence of more than one political party makes it distinctive. This is based on a historical tradition that is in favour of human rights, in favour of social welfare, of equity before the law and of the principle of national dominance. This type of democracy promotes exchange of views upon matters of policy which is the most fundamental principles of the function of democracy (Ball and Gry, 2001; Berstein, 2001; and Athanasios, 2007). In general, democracy is a type of government that is responsive, responsible and a system that gives the citizens the inalienable rights or freedom of choice, freedom of association, right to shelter, freedom from discrimination, right to clothing and unlimited respect for the rule of law. In sum, it may be stated that democracy is a form of government that connotes collective participation and is an antithesis to despotism, tyranny and totalitarianism. This form of government hardly exists anywhere in the world but rather what we have is "advanced democracies" where equality is subject to opportunities (Egbewole, 2002; Tobi, 1995; Egbewole, 2006).

The Mass Media
The mass media is perceived as the sources of information in the various media vehicles such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television and so on, that

reaches and influence large numbers of people from different heterogeneous background. Ojo (1999) explained that the mass media is grouped along the three other main estates viz. the executives, judiciary and the legislative while the agents of mass media are regarded as the fourth estate of the realm in any nation. The mass media have been group two into classes: the print media such as newspaper, magazines pamphlet, direct mail, circulars, bill boards, sky writing and technical device that carries a message to the masses by appealing to their sense of sight. The second category is the electronic media, under this we have radio, the television, motion pictures and video recording (that appeal to both the sense of sound and sense of vision); indeed mass media are said to be modern principle papers, magazines and the internet media (Uyo, 1987, Blank and Harolsen, 1975 cited in Ojo, 1999 and Ajibade, 2010). As defined by C. Wright Mills in the power elite (1956) the mass media have two important sociological characteristics: first, very few people can communicate to a great number; and second, the audience has no effective way of answering back. Mass communication by definition a one-way process media organisations are bureaucratic and (expert in societies where all media are state controlled) corporate in nature. Media output is regulated by governments everywhere, but the restrictions vary from very light advisory regulation.

Theoretical Framework

There are many different theories about how mass media influence people's attitude, world opinion and social behaviour. But early experimental studies have failed to confirm the assumption that mass media have a strong power to change people's attitudes. However, efforts have been made to solve the discrepancy between experiments and real world observations by the introduction of cognitive processing such as agenda setting, framing and priming (McGuire, 1986, lowery and Defleur, 1995).

Agenda-Setting

The agenda setting theory was made popular by the quote of Bernard Cohen (1963), saying that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is successful in telling its readers what to think about". There is plenty of evidence that the media have a strong influence on people's perception of which issues are important and which problems they want their government to do something about. The influence of news mass media increases when the need for orientation among the viewers is much. The need for agenda setting in democratic issues is necessary here. On the other

hand the agenda setting effect is lower for unpleasant issues that people can observe directly, as well as for other issues that the audience is well informed about. The media have little power to set the agenda when people have sufficient political knowledge to counter argue the claims made by the media. Therefore the agenda-setting effect is stronger for concrete issues that are easy to visualize than for abstract issues. Agenda setting for issues of democracy must be concrete and result oriented not issues that are products of sentiments otherwise the audience may be dissuaded from accepting the news (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002; Yagede and Dozier, 1990; Yengar et. al, 1982). Greater effect of agenda-setting is generally accepted among media scholars, there is some uncertainty about who sets the agenda. It has been shown by some studies that politicians have a strong influence on the agenda of mass media, at least in areas such as economic policy. To solve this problem the media may put attention catching issues on the agenda for economic reasons, especially when it involves sensational issues like danger, crime, sex, celebrity scandals and corruption (Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg, 1995; Zhu 1992).

Priming Theory

Relate to the agenda setting theory is the priming strategy. This refers to the fact that one piece of media information affect how we react and interpret subsequent pieces of information by changing our perception. This, therefore, means that news media can influence the criteria by which political candidates are judge by calling attention to some issues and ignoring others before the speech of the candidate. Schematic thinking forms the basis of priming. When evaluating new information or trying to make decision we normally tend to apply the information and schemata that are most reading accessible or available in memory at the moment rather than conduct a complete and comprehensive search and examination of information. Therefore, a schemata may be readily accessible to the individual either because it has recently been activated and remains in short-term memory, or because it is linked in memory to other constructs which have been activated (Pan and Kosicky, 1997; Hetherington, 1996; Goldel et.al, 1997; Domke et al, 1998 and Graber 1988). For good governance and democracy to be sustained priming by news of mass media should be an agenda setting for public opinion that will help the growth of democracy.

Framing

Framing is another theory which explains the consequences of schematic thinking. Framing refers to the frame of reference within which an issue is explained, described and presented (Pan and Kosicki, 1993) for example, a news broadcast about the electronic voting system can variously be framed as a story about technological development. The way the story is framed can have a strong influence on people's attitude towards the issue. It is also assumed that framing is a kind of second level agenda because it makes certain aspects of an issue more salient in a way as to promote a particular problem. However, in spite of its huge frame of agenda- setting, framing only influences how audiences think about issues, not by making aspects of the issue more salient (Entman, 1993; McCombs et.al., 1997). The commercialisation and trivialisation of news media has a strong influence on how issues are framed and presented in the commercial news media. Framing news about democracy around the strategies of politicians rather than issues portrays the perceive motives of politicians as egoistic. The pervasive media focus on people rather than principles, events rather than themes, and simple rather than deep causes, is adversely affecting the problem-solving capabilities of democratic societies on a broad variety of issues, ranging from poverty to international conflicts (Fog, 2004, Iyengar and Reeves, 1997; Capella and Jamieson, 1997).

Democratic Principles

The following are some democratic principles put together by Universal Declaration on democracy adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 161st session Cairo, 16 September 1997.

1. Democracy is a universally recognised ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the world community irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. It is thus a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equality, transparency and responsibility, with due respect for the plurality of views, and in the interest of the polity.

2. As an ideal, democracy aims essentially to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, to achieve social justice, foster the economic and social development of the community, strengthen the cohesion of society and enhance national tranquility, as well as to create a climate that is favourable for international peace. As a form of government, democracy is the best way of achieving these objectives; it is also the only political system that has the capacity for self-correction.

3. A state of democracy ensures that the processes by which power is acceded to, wielded and alternates allow for free political competition and are the product of open, free and nondiscriminatory participation by the people, exercised in accordance with the rule of law, in both letter and spirit.

4. Democracy is founded on the primacy of the law and the exercise of human rights. In a democratic State, no one is above the law and all are equal before the law.

5. Peace and economic, social and cultural development are both conditions for and fruits of democracy. There is thus interdependence between peace, development, respect for and observance of the rule of law and human rights.

6. Democracy is founded on the right of everyone to take part in the management of public affairs; it therefore requires the existence of representative institutions at all levels and, in particular, a Parliament in which all components of society are represented and which has the requisite powers and means to express the will of the people by legislating and overseeing government action.

7. The key element in the exercise of democracy is the holding of free and fair elections at regular intervals enabling the people's will to be expressed. These elections must be held on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage so that all voters can choose their representatives in conditions of equality, openness and transparency that stimulate political competition. To that end, civil and political rights are essential, and more particularly among them, the rights to vote and to be elected, the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, access to information and the right to organise political parties and carry out political activities. Party organisation, activities, finances, funding and ethics must be properly regulated in an impartial manner in order to ensure the integrity of the democratic processes.

8. It is an essential function of the State to ensure the enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights to its citizens. Democracy thus goes hand in hand with an effective, honest and transparent government, freely chosen and accountable for its management of public affairs.

9. Public accountability, which is essential to democracy, applies to all those who hold public authority, whether elected or non-elected, and to all bodies of public authority without exception. Accountability entails a public right of access to information about the activities of government, the right to petition government and to seek redress through impartial administrative and judicial mechanisms.

10. Judicial institutions and independent, impartial and effective oversight mechanisms are the guarantors for the rule of law on which democracy is

founded. In order for these institutions and mechanisms fully to ensure respect for the rules, improve the fairness of the processes and redress injustices, there must be access by all to administrative and judicial remedies on the basis of equality as well as respect for administrative and judicial decisions both by the organs of the State and representatives of public authority and by each member of society.

Mass Media and Democracy in Nigeria

More than ever before, the mass media have become more important to sustainable democracy because of their increasing power of reaching as well as the dependence on them for the needed information and guidance (Saliu, 2006). The mass media in virtually all democratic systems generally is regarded as the 'fourth estate of the realm.' The other three estates are the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislature. As I have argued elsewhere, the mass media educate the public on state affairs, disseminate information on the activities of the government – which are most often secretive in third world countries – expose wrongdoing, including corrupt practices which impacts negatively on economic development, and keep the government on its toes, all to ensure 'accountability, transparency, probity and integrity' (Ojo, 1999). There virtues are well known norms of democratic systems across all regions and climes of the world. Further, it is the role of the mass media in a democratic setting to keep the citizenry well informed. Unless citizens have adequate and accurate information on all issues and problems confronting them; they will be unable to take enlightened decisions on them. Without such information, they will be unable to comprehend the day-to-day workings of the government and to participate in same. Nor will they be able to hold those in authority responsible for their acts of omission and commission. In other words, in the absence of full truthful information, they can perform none of the functions that citizens have to perform in a democracy. Furthermore, the mass media can act as a channel between the people and the authorities.

The media may convey to the authorities, the grievances, the needs, the problems, the hopes and aspirations of the people and the responses of the authorities may in turn be conveyed by the media to the people. The media can thus make up the major deficiency of indirect or representative democracy; the lack of a direct dialogue between the people and the authority. The media can perform the task of the watchdog of the people's interests. The media can expose the corruption, waste, inefficiency and negligence on the part of the

authorities. Through investigative journalism, scams and scandals can be unearthed, anti-social activities exposed and implementation of the policies and programmes monitored and pursued. The mass media can thus act as an ombudsman on behalf of the people almost every day (Sawant, 2002). In the words of Olukotun (2009:56), of the media's several celebrated, edifying roles in society, two stand out namely that of an agenda setter, highlighting issues germane to overall development and progress, as well as that of an interlocutor in which the media take on the role of an informed partner in social and political dialogue, responding to questions in an interactive way. Considering the nexus between the mass media and democracy the *Freedom of Expression Community*, identifies three glaring roles of the media viz.

a. They inform citizens in matters of public policy and politics by presenting and debating alternatives;

b. They act as watchdog by covering political, economic and corporate corruption as well as other forms of abuses of power or inept policies;

c. The media helps empower citizens to be aware and vigilant of civil and political rights and how to exercise these rights (The *Nigeria Freedom of Expression Community's* advertorial in *Tell*, September 20, 2004).

In the same vein, Akinfeleye (2003) highlighted imperatives of the press in sustainable democracy as including but not limited to the following; - Common carriers of ideas; Representative picture of the society; Truth and meaning of truth in a democracy; Classification of the values and goals of the society, Uncover and never to cover-up; Make the government accountable to the people; Inform, educate and entertain the people; Promote the concept of accountability, integrity, honesty, fairness and equity; Give voice to the voiceless in the society; - Society Agenda-setter; - Forging National Unity and Integration; - Promotion of society cultures, and the moral value systems and; - Promotion of sustainable National Interest at all times.

The media, in the New World order has emerged as a crucial part of the machinery for vetting and legitimising elections. The mass media provide information to the voters about the candidates, the electoral process, actual voting dates and the rules of the game (Olukotun, 2001). In any political dispensation the media have an enormous task to do because they have to work both with the political parties and electorates by educating the electorates on party manifestoes and ideologies. They also help by making electorates to appreciate issues about candidates and political parties. To buttress this view,

Graham Hilton quoted from the work of Wilber (1964) by saying that it is impossible to think of politics or democracy in isolation from media communication simply because the media oversee and monitor, analyse party candidates from the beginning of the election to the end (Saliu, 2006). Appreciating further the role of the media in the sustainable of democracy the Farm House Dialogue 15 of 1991 stated that the role of the mass media in a democracy must include the following:

i. To convey information to the people with a view to let them know how the mandate they gave their representatives is being discharged.

ii. To provide a forum through which the governed could then react to government policies and activities.

iii. To provide such analysis as would enable the people to secure an adequate understanding and background to event;

iv. To assist in the articulation and pursuit of the national interest;

v. To help strengthen the economic, social and political fabric of the nation;

vi. To provide informed criticism and viable alternatives to public policies;

vii. To monitor the performance of government with a view to preventing their deviation from clearly stated objectives

viii. To provide the medium for transmitting knowledge and for educating the populace.

Another area of democracy that is of interest to the press is dispersing ignorance. In today's world, democracy is a slogan for sustainable development; because it is a system that allows for growth through participatory development but unfortunately the whole idea of the concept is alien to majority of the African people in general and Nigeria in particular (Hamalink, 2003). As a result, the elite of the society do capitalize on this docility to corrupt it to their benefit. This prevents the people from reaping maximum benefit from the whole exercise. Therefore, for democracy to strive and for it to be fully sustainable, the process must offer opportunities to the different classes in the society particularly the common man on the street (Katz, 1987). To achieve these results, mass media must be seen to perform as a vehicle for sustainable democracy. For there to be sustainable democracy, Article 22 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states the obligations of the mass media: "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives and highlights the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people." While all this confers on the media the need for

ensuring sustainable democracy especially by making government accountable to the people, neither the media nor government need to unwittingly be adversarial to each other (Tunji, 1991). With the aforementioned roles of the mass media, one only needs to add that they help to build and sustain a participatory, transparent and accountable governance structure.

CONCLUSION

The impact of mass media in sustainable democracy in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, mass media must look for avenues to improve on the quality of information they disseminate in order to sustain Nigeria's flagging democracy. The Nigerian media has an important role to play in this present democratic dispensation by allowing for orderly succession of civilian to civilian administration. It is by so doing that democracy can fully be sustained and beyond.

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