

New Media and Democracy in Nigeria: An Overview

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Abstract

The media, their roles, channels and contents, are considered powerful enough to make democracy work in any part of the world. The Nigerian media have been in the vanguard for the promotion and sustenance of the democracy we now have in the country, even the struggle for independence arguably was pioneered and fought for by the Nigerian media. But a great number of existing media channels in the country need to take up responsibility of adequately engaging better governance in our democratic polity. As the institution mandated to hold those in governance accountable, the nexus between the mass media and the democratic process with particular emphasis on the roles the media are expected to play in public accountability has attracted and is still attracting increasing attention from the new media practitioners, advocates, researchers and other concerned scholars.

Introduction

Media performance and the quality of the democratic process in a modern nation are inextricably linked. The more robust the democratic credentials of a country, the more likely for its media to be professionally active, diverse and credible in enlarging the public space and strengthening the structures of freedom, promoting the rule of law, ensuring accountability and upholding the principle of service delivery. The reverse can equally be valid. In democracies, "the media are closely tied to the political system; therefore, addressing the issue of the media must be done within the context of the political framework (McQuail, 2005).

Democracy is a form of government by means of which citizens, through free and open institutional arrangements are empowered to choose and remove leaders in a competitive struggle for people's vote. Diamond, (1999). Observed that liberal democracy is a representative kind of governance in which qualified adult members of a given society elect their representative through a periodic free and fair election. Democracy has recently become one of the fastest growing forms of government because of its ineluctable drive towards human freedom. It entrenches unlimited freedom and rule of law. Ideally, as a result of this, Media is a symbol of true democracy.

Politics and the media aim at promoting the individual and collective interests of the society. Thus, while politics serves as a route and means of uplifting the

society through good governance and protection and the advancement of people's right; the media on their part operate within the prevailing public sphere to expand the frontiers of freedom and facilitate the citizens' access to quality information that will influence their judgments and decisions in democracies. In the process, the media legitimize the actions of political leaders and institutions and promote the social system as well as challenge anti-democratic tendencies that can compromise democracy and good governance.

In Nigeria, the role of the media in promoting, defending and advancing democracy and good governance at Various periods in the history of the country from the colonial times has been widely documented (Omu, 1978; Ogbondah, 2011; Oso and Pate, 2011). At various times, the press had played a critical and an appreciable role to enthrone democracy or hasten the exit of anti-democratic elements and tendencies from the country's political landscape (Ogbondah, 2011). The 1999 Nigerian Constitution is emphatic on the responsibility of the media in keeping the government accountable to the people. Apart from their routine tasks of gathering, processing and disseminating information in the country; media organs are required to act as watchdog is weak or appears unable to act appropriately behaves in contrast to societal and profession able expectations or gets "mortgaged" to sectional, commercial and manipulative predispositions.

The implication of this section of the Constitution is that the media has been empowered to investigate and criticize poor and corrupt leadership and promote political stability, economic prosperity and social justice. In May 2011, the country enacted a Freedom of Information Act that compels agencies to provide information on demand from citizens and the media. The law was welcomed by the media as "as a significant development for widening the space for free flow of information, transparency and accountability in governance; and.....energize the fight against public corruption" (Media Review, August,2011).

However, there are many laws that are capable of undermining the above provisions on the freedom of the media. A number of laws (Official Secrets Act, 1962; Press Registration Act, 1933; Newspaper Act, 1917, etc) including the unlimited powers of the National Broadcasting Commission and the Nigerian Press Council, both of which are Federal Government agencies can, if inappropriately exercised, undermine the establishment and unrestricted operations of the independent media. Equally, the commercialization regime in the industry tends to restrict the participation of the independent media. Equally, the commercialization regime in the industry tends to restrict the participation of the majority of the people that are economically weak and, by extension, undercut the freedom for access to the media space.

Literature Overview

Media and Elections in Nigeria

Media in this paradigm is conceived as agents of information communicated to large group of people through a group of corporate entities, publishers, journalists, reporters, pressmen, newscasters and others who constitute the

communications industry and profession. It also includes the ability to inform, educate and entertain the populace. The print (in particular) and electronic media shall be focused on.

Basically, the media in Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, serve as a major medium of communication in the country. The different types of the media (print, electronic and now social media) create awareness and understanding of happenings among the 167 million diverse people of the country (Pate, 2012). These diversities cut across ethnic segmentation, religious affiliations, political orientations, social groupings and economic opportunities, among others. Nigerian media started as a forum for debate, education and discussion of public issues which was aimed at public enlightenment and entertainment.

The birth of Nigerian media as an institution that promotes public enlightenment through information dissemination can be traced back to 1859 (print media) and 1932 (electronic media) respectively (Nkwocha, 1999; Ojenike, 2005; Enemaku, 2005). The first print media-newspaper was established by Rev. Henry Townsend, with a publication called *Iwe-Iroyin*. The objective of this publication was to get its audience (people) to acquire the habit of seeking information by reading. With the upsurge in daily newspapers, the media became a platform for the expression of nationalists' consciousness. For instance, in 1880, a group of Nigerians established the *Lagos Times*, which immediately started as a series of confrontation with colonial forces. On the other hand, the first electronic media-radio station started in 1932 when the British Colonial Government opened a Radio Distribution Service (RDS) in Lagos to transmit British Broadcasting Corporations (BBC) programmes in Nigeria (Sulaiman, 2002). The RDS was later transformed into Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) in 1951 and by 1957, the NBS was changed to a corporation status called Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in order to shield it from government interference and undue propagation of the views of the ruling political party. Also, the first television station-Western Nigerian Television Service (WNTS) was established in 1959 by an opposition leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who was denied access to national radio (Ojenike, 2005).

Thereafter, each regional governments followed suit and established their own television stations. In this respect, the Federal Government in January 1st 1962 launched an interim service/a global network service which later matured into a fully-fledged government parastatal now known as Voice of Nigeria (VON) through Decree 15 of 1991 (Nkwocha, 1999; Ojenike, 2005). Thus, with the trends of time, many private and government-owned media sprang up for political purposes. Therefore, ownership of media industry was more for political asset to the politicians than for the monetary gains that might accrue from such investment. The ownership of the media which had become competitive among political leaders proliferated after independence, leading to the establishment of conglomerates with politicians and political groups investing in and sustaining, several publications within such conglomerates across the length and breadth of the country (Duyile, 1987; Uche, 1989). It must be noted that the Nigeria media have been squarely challenged owing to interplay of factors, such as inclination of the Nigerian state and its rulers/leaderships towards dictatorial tendencies, among others. But the proponent

perspective is that Nigerian media have been playing a very significant role in setting the agenda for public discourse and molding the direction of public opinions on vital issues in the country.

The power of information has taken over globally. Media through the use of telecommunications are changing how information and culture function globally. This has brought the identity principle to the fore, where individuals, groups and communities can adequately express themselves without borders. (Goldstein & Pevehouse 2011). Political possibilities have risen from these technological developments. Information travels through the media using television, telephones, films, magazines. And the media which are fast connecting the world more with political impact are television, radio, phones and the internet.

These go a long way to influence people on public activities, events and even public policies in governance. The media clearly acts in consent with other political, social, economic and educational factors to change attributes and behaviors of the audience at any particular time. Olusola and Suger 1970 in agreement with Mcquail 2000 see the media effect theory as being able to intensify socio-political conflicts and violence, most especially election violence.

Propaganda: At times the media information comes with propaganda, most especially in political campaigns and rallies to influence the audience. Propaganda which comes from the Latin verb 'propagare', means to reproduce, to spread or indeed to transmit, usually from one person to another. The literature on propaganda can be traced to Pope Gregory XV 1622, at this time propaganda was seen more as an object of faith dissemination or communication rather than an object of states craft. In the global contemporary relations, propaganda is seen as the deliberate effort by government to influence the attitudes and behavior of foreign population or specific groups within those populations in expectation that the influenced groups could in turn influence the attitudes and actions of their government.

Harold Lasswell also posits that propaganda means these symbols to influence attitudes in opinion management. According to Joan (2008) in Makodi and Nwanegbo (2014) in every country,

There are numerous groups that compete with each other for the sake of protecting and promoting other interests. They find that the most successful method to build up influence in the realm of public policy is to indulge in activities or propaganda. The newspapers, the periodicals, cinema theatre etc. all engage in propaganda activities.

This research sees propaganda to take the form in printed pages, films, or sounds transmitting over the air, including press releases, radio broadcasts, pictures, exhibitions and songs.

The roles of media in a society include that of creating awareness of political issues and agenda setting, education of the citizens on issues and serve the information need of the society (Akinfeleye and Okoye 2002, Moemeka, 1992. Onyisi, 1996). The media inform the citizens about local, foreign and global news affairs thus people tend to rely on media as their major source of news, particularly

news of events within and outside their immediate environment. Based on information gotten from their local media, masses create images, acquire knowledge, and form opinions about people, nations and their institutions. Therefore, the slants, language, manner and method in which the media significantly report events, issues, stories and politics in the world and especially in Nigeria has become a major topic for discussion in political science and administration. This concern and the aftermath of the dynamics on the behaviour of voters, the extent to which this sway the choices they make on who ascends to leadership calls for empirical inquiry and analysis.

Moreover, different views and submissions exist on the role media report play towards elections. According to Curran (2005) the slant, language and manner of media report is a determinant factor, Iyengar and Simon (2000), opined that the influence of the media are merely an occasional short-term attitude change which does not last for a long time. Consequently, the importance of media reporting and how it influences voting behavior to leadership ascendancy cannot be overemphasized. This makes a thorough study and understanding of this influence and role very important.

In modern times, the media is known to have featured prominently in the electioneering and democratic processes globally, it is not an overstatement that elections are synonymous with democracy, because democracy seems to be the only system that gives room for elections where the masses will exercise their franchise by electing their leaders at any level. Notable individuals within Nigeria and the international community have used the mass media to achieve noble objectives (Santas and Ogoshi, 2016). Democracy in Nigeria was possible because of the immense contribution of the mass media to its attainment. The colonial government gave way to indigenous leadership through the effective use of the mass media by the nationalist.

It is of no doubt that people are educated on the art of election and their rights to participate in electioneering process through the mass media. Among some of the responsibilities of the media is a presentation of an objective report on elections. The media convey their reports through headlines displays, pictures, advert layout in newspapers, films graphics and prime time on radio and television (Folarin, 1998:16 cited in Santas and Ogoshi, 2016). Similarly, citing the Media for Democracy Monitor, (M.D.M 2007), Santas and Ogoshi (2011) believe that mass media and democracy are inextricably linked. Thus they cannot be separated from the election process. They are of the view that the mass media is expected to mobilize the people to participate in democratic process. They also did not leave out the failures of the media in report objectively as they have seldom been influenced by a particular political party, this practice is more common with the media in Nigeria.

Another problem of the media in regards to elections is the inability of the media in some instances to make objective analysis on issues of government. With reference to the 2011 elections, as cited by Santas and Ogoshi (2016), the UNDP sponsored study uncovered that the media was not critical in analysing campaign promises of political parties, and their candidates, also, the media display weakness in investigative journalism, and in most cases they violate the professional

broadcasting codes. Opposition parties complain that Government owned broadcasting stations hardly play jingles and programmes of the opposition party on Television. In a country with many ethnic groups like Nigeria, ethnicity has continued to influence the media reporting on election and other political processes. This was evident in the media report of June 12 election, as it was observed that there was no uniform report on the issue as the reports were based on regional bias (Santas & Ogoshi 2016) security challenges and corruption are other problems that have prevented the media in some countries from effectively discharging their duties especially in counties like Nigeria where election grounds are often unsafe for effective news reporting.

The study conducted by Santas and Ogoshi (2016) made a scholarly input on the role of media in consolidating democracy, and one of the effective tools of democracy is election. Hence the role of media in election cannot be over emphasised, however the work attributes the function of mobilizing the people to participate in the democratic process as the roll of the media in elections. This role might not necessarily apply to that of the media in elections as it can be unethical for the media to take sides in political affairs, the media is more of a medium through which political parties could make their manifestos available to the public and so as to seek supporters. The role of the media in consolidating democracy does not go beyond sensitization and reporting objectively on election issues thus mobilizing people for elections might not necessarily be a major function of the media.

Similar to this view, Aghamelu (2010) in his own view on the role of mass media in the Nigeria electoral process opines that the central role of the mass media in political and social affairs revolves around its unlimited communicative strength and outreach. Citing Iredia (2007), the former Director General of the N.T.A. clearly asserts that citizens of a country must have all information needed to elect the right candidate who can ensure good governance (p.12). If on the contrary, such information are missing, then the media shares in the blame of failed election. This statement is hinged on the premise that every individual has the right to receive information, and also the right to express and disseminate his opinion. This right is embedded in the African charter on human and people right, adopted in 1986 and ratified in July 1990(Aghamelu, 2010). Furthermore Dukor (1999) places his assessment of the role of the media on the fundamental right to receive and send information. According to him in countries like Nigeria, citizens have a liberal background, and this enhances free flow of information, although the media in most instances perform with air of regulated freedom. He further asserts that the media is politically polarised in terms of axis, ethnic loyalty, sectional party and selfish interest (p.283).

Against the backdrop that the media is an institution that sustains democracy, it is observed that there is mutual distrust in the relationship that exists between the state and the media in most countries. In view of the constitutional roles of the media in democracy it is expected of the media to objectively monitor governance while remaining consistent. They are also expected to always be objective in their reports involving issues of governance, as a subjective report helps widen the gap

between the government and the society. Historically, the culture of imbalance and partisanship was introduced into the media as a colonial heritage when in 1953, the motion for self-governance was made by the action group, sir John MacPherson the colonial governor castigated the party in a radio broadcast and when the leader of the party sought a right of reply to the broadcast, the management of the radio services rejected the request on the directive of the colonial government (Aghamelu 2010, p.159).

Furthermore, Dare (1989) observed that the 1964 election results as announced by the government media was false as over 50% of the candidates of the ruling party was returned unopposed (P.16). Similarly in 1965, Okolo (1993) noted that different version of the results of the same election held in the western region in October of the same year were announced by different media houses operating in Ibadan. These media houses were the (ENBS) Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Services, the Western Nigerian Broadcasting services (W.A.B.S) and Radio Nigeria (p.16). This ugly trend of the media is what Mohammed called press partisanship. The outcome of these act in electioneering by the press is always accompanied with political instability for instance that of the 1965 led to the "Operation wetie", a process of setting properties ablaze with petrol, including federal television stations in Abeokuta, Ogun state to show public dissatisfaction with the state broadcast during the election. This led to the death of many citizens (Agba, 2007). This therefore implies that the media especially in Nigeria needs improvements on their performances especially on matters of elections. Aghamelu stresses that enlightenment is a precondition for free and fair elections thus the media could use its powers of mass information to solve problems of national cohesion and integration which are both critical to the growth of healthy electioneering campaign. The mass media would need to among other duties, clarify issues during campaigns, bring aspirants close to the electorate, educate the electorate to enable them make a wise choice. The media needs to take into cognisance the dynamism of societies in which they operate. Thus, Aghamelu opines "although media rules are the same everywhere, it cannot be performed in the same way in every society" (Aghamelu, 2010 p.4). Aghamelu in his article, critically assessed the role of the media in electioneering, but he placed much emphasis on inappropriate reporting of the mass media without acknowledging that pressure from political office holders may influence media reporting.

For this reason Chandrappa despite acknowledging the crucial role of media in elections through their dissemination of information on political campaigns, believe that there exists a cyclical relationship between the media, the public and government. As a result of this cyclical relationship, the media can shape public opinion because of its influence in communicating the voters. He further states that it is impossible to free political coverage's from bias because the media is forced to make decisions when covering politics about who to interview, what quote and facts to select and how to interpret information (Chandrappa, 2012). Although the media cannot influence what voters will think, it can influence what they should be thinking about. The media influences public perception on the viability of a candidate that is, if the media says a candidate is ahead in an election

it will definitely affect how the voters will cast their vote because most voters will not want to be associated with a losing candidate.

Discussion of the media's functions within electoral contexts as being inseparable, by Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (2011) sees the media as playing the role of a watchdog. This role is fulfilled by the media by intentionally monitoring elections, discussion, manifestos, and party candidates and informs the public on successes and failures in the system. They further advocate that this role makes the public have the opportunity of participating in the elections by contributing during debates and airing their view making informed decisions and educating voters on how to exercise their democratic rights. The media consequently scrutinizes the electoral process, its probity and fairness of process to make room for efficient evaluation developments on electoral campaigns. Though they are not the only source of information to the public but play a major role by determining the political agenda. The institute summarized their opinion as follows:

The media play a major role in keeping the citizenry abreast of current events and raising awareness of various issues in any society. It also has an extremely significant impact on the public's views and way of thinking. The media is the primary means through which public opinion is shaped and at times manipulated. If this is the media's role then in normal course of events, it becomes even more vital in exceptional periods, one of which is electoral junctures, when the media becomes a primary player. Elections constitute a basic challenge to the media, putting its impartiality and objectivity to the test. The task of the media, especially national media outlets, is not and should not be to function as a mouthpiece for any government body or particular candidate. Its basic role is to enlighten and educate the public and act as a neutral, objective platform for the free debate of all points of view.

On the other hand, Yaqub and Maikudi (2015) argued that the professional competence of the media as enshrined in their code of ethics was greatly flawed. This is because media bias, unprofessional behaviour, and their hate campaign are capable of derailing the populace in decision making during voting. They further insisted that media create much deception during election and quoted the following media report against president Buhari that nearly marred the success of the election. They insist that what came out clearly is the utter neglect of not only the cardinal principle of journalistic practice by all the stakeholders, the politicians and mass media institutions and their owners – but also there was a substantial, scandalous and unprofessional reporting capable of destruction, broadcasted, reverberated and/or subscribed to during the electioneering campaigns:

“Buhari is brain dead,” by Patience Goodluck Jonathan on a campaign trail;
 Buhari shall die in Office,” paid advertisement in a number of newspapers and other such provocative outbursts by the Governor of Ekiti State,

Ayo Fayose; “Buhari is a bloody dictator,” by Dr. Ahmadu Ali, the Director General of the President Goodluck Jonathan Presidential Campaign Organization; “Buhari Forged His Secondary School Certificate,” by Chief Femi Fani-Kayode, the Director of Publicity of the President Goodluck Jonathan Presidential Campaign Organization; and quite a number of advertisements were aired by such electronic media such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the African Independent Television (AIT) Network and in other television stations owned by the federating states that depicted General (as was then addressed) Muhammad Buhari in lurid and negative lights.

These authors concluded that mass media during election of 2015 posed as an agent of destruction to Nigeria.

Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) in the same opinion believe that social media and the manner of usage and language slant played a huge role in activating and powering violence. They argue that during the period of 2011 elections, many users of the Facebook pages were spreading rumors that actually heated up the polity and created unnecessary tensions. This made electorate believe that their votes did not count and that they were massively rigged. There was what Okoro and Adibe (2013) comments to as “social media war” on the various social media platforms, making use of all kinds of abusive languages, all manner of attacks and counter attacks among members and supporters of various opposition parties and groups.

In the same view, Okoro and Nwafor (2013) discussing on lapses and lesson from the political participation of social media in 2011 general election, opined that in as much as many used the mass media technology to make vital input in the political discourse, others used this platform to attack opponents, spread rumors that were false and destructive. They by their media prowls disseminated hate and inciting messages which were believed to have contributed in the violence and tensions witnessed before, during and after election in many parts of the country. They further explained that the massive growth of social media in the country and its use during election is responsible for the mayhem experienced in most northern states. Buttressing their point, they made reference to a Human Rights Watch report of April 18, 2011:

Although the April elections were heralded as among the fairest in Nigeria’s history, they also were among the bloodiest... a total of not less than 800 persons were killed, more than 65,000 others displaced and over 350 churches either burnt or destroyed in the violence that precipitated the announcement of the 2011 general elections results in the northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara by Muslim rioters.

On the contrary, Levitsky and Lucan (2010) see the reporting, posting and expression of varied opinion as media playing their role in elections. Both authors opined that the media play the role of providing a level playing ground for political

parties and their candidates which makes for the realization of contestants right to campaign. Therefore, to create thus level playing ground, they argue that equal access media should be given to parties and their candidates as lack of level playing ground will have a devastating impact on democratic competition. Therefore robust media monitoring and reporting is essential towards ensuring free and fair elections. Countries like Botswana, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, Singapore, Tanzania, and Venezuela, democratic competition was undermined and autocracy survived as a result of deficient robust media monitoring and reporting during elections.

The Challenges of New Media in Democratizing Nigeria

After independence in the 1960s, there was no favorable political philosophy and ideology among the new leaders to promote egalitarian and democratic ideals among the populace (Sadeeq 2003:248). Consequently, the marriage between politics and the media was broken by ethnic loyalties. For instance, Dr. Zik established the West African Pilot to fight for the rights of Eastern Nigeria, While Obafemi Awolowo established the Tribune at Ibadan to project the interest of the Yorubas (Obasanjo, 1992) The unstable political and economic climate that prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s coupled with idiosyncratic media policies and laws by autocratic leaders have led to a divisive disloyal, psychopathic praise singing, conscienceless and downright corrupt mass media in Africa. As a result, the politicians are able to use the media to remain in power rather than use it for mobilizing the people for national development (Ojo, 2003). Sadeeq (2003:248) and Edeani (1989:109) have identified factors in the African environment which constraint the effectiveness of the mass media in democratic consolidation. These include the low level of infrastructural development and essential facilities, pattern of media ownership and control, unstable socio-economic and political conditions, low level of literacy and political education, ethnicity, parochialism, unfavourable legal environment and lack of private sector involvement. Other factors include religious pluralism and military interventions as the case was in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, etc (Isola 2008).

The prevalence of government owned media is acting as a constraint to effective performance of the media as watchdog (Isola 2008:23). The mass media in most African countries are mostly government owned. The owners perform some gate keeping functions that are conditioned by political, parochial and economic interests. As a result, the media serve the interests of elites or the government in power at the expense of the majority. Consequently, the impact of the socialization and democratization function of the mass media is limited. This has served as a self-limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to positively champion the cause of democratic consolidation in Africa (Imoh, 1991:182). The low level of private sector partnership and participation in the media business has led to an imbalance as most media-hoti-ses -especially radio- and television are government-owned. The implication is that journalist must toe the line of government or be sacked by their employers. This way, the mass media is unable to monitor the activities of government (Ojo, 2003:5).

Poverty and democracy have an inverse relationship. In Africa, poverty is an all-consuming and multidimensional concept with multifarious causes and multidimensional effects that negatively affect the process of participatory democracy and decision making (Obasanjo, 1992:10). There are three broad types of poverty which may affect the sustenance of democracy. These are: Poverty of material wellbeing conceived as the lack of the basic necessity for the sustenance of life. Poverty of ideas among the leaders and the led resulting in lack of good judgment in supporting democratic processes in the society and Poverty of courage, typified by a situation where there is a timid citizenry very apprehensive and cautious in standing up against lapses on the part of those in power or telling the government what it has done wrong. In Africa, material poverty and the perpetual struggle for survival is overbearing and sets apathy into the practices of democracy. According to Obasanjo, when there is abject poverty, the masses are usually easily brainwashed and their rights of choice terribly manipulated. As a result, material poverty may lead to the poverty of ideas, and poverty of courage vitiates poverty of ideas especially among those the fringe of material poverty such as the members of the judiciary, the protector of human rights (Obasanjo, 1992:110). The harsh economic situation in Africa has made journalists to be vulnerable and dependent on government patronage and support. Evidently, government political parties and those in the higher socio-economic strata are the largest advertisers and this makes newspapers and electronic organizations to fall over each other. And this hinders the freedom of the mass media to criticize the government as criticism of government will send a newspaper, radio, or television station out of business (Ojo, 2003). The extent of economic improvement of the contingent could minimize the dependence of the media on government patronage and this would go a long way in expanding the ability of the media to curtail the excesses of the government and the ruling class (Isola, 2008:22).

Democracy relies on divergence of interests and opinions to survive in pluralistic societies. In Africa, however, the pattern of horizontal and vertical segmentation among the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilinguistic societies has given rise to familism, parochialism and chauvinism in the body polity (Imoh 2008). This segmentation has served as a self limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to effectively champion the cause of democracy. In Nigeria, for instance, the Tribune represents the Yoruba interest, the New Nigerian, the northern interests while the West African Pilot was used by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to promote the sociopolitical interests of Eastern Nigeria (The Ibos). (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992). The conflicting interests between ethnicity, politics and religion on the one hand and politics on the other hand has made the media and journalists victims of the endemic chauvinism, parochialism and sectionalism that now characterizes the media in Africa, most especially Nigeria.

Conclusion

The African environment has not been conducive for the mass media to promote democratic ideals among the people, because the laws and constitutions of the land have not allowed unhindered access to information by journalists, so as to promote accountability and transparency by government and public servants. Unfortunately many countries in Africa including Nigeria and a majority of the Arab states have failed to entrench press freedom in their constitution. For instance, Nigeria has just passed the Freedom of Information Bill. The legal mechanisms that could aid access to information in government institutions are not in place. (Isola, 2008:27). Several media establishments and journalists have been maltreated by the governments in power in several African countries for publishing the truth that puts the government in bad light. In Nigeria, for instance, the Zamfara state government fired the managing director of the state owned newspaper, Mallam Bashir Sanda Gusau for criticizing President Musa Yar'Adua (Vanguard August 18th.18). Similarly the National Broadcasting Commission suspended Channels Television license leading to the closure of channels television office in Lagos and Abuja and the arrest and detention of 5 members of staff of the organization. This was as a result of a broadcast report purportedly originating from the News Agency of Nigeria that President Musa Yar'Adua may resign on health grounds (Vanguard September 18th2008, P.1). In Egypt, the level of freedom for media practitioners is low. Journalists are constantly facing constant physical harassment, threat and assault by state agents. The same scenario exists in Algeria, Sudan, India, Morocco and Libya because there is no freedom of information law which could enhance media access to public information (Isola, 2008:26). Nigeria just recently passed the Freedom of Information Bill, thereby enhancing media access to public information and promoting accountability and transparency by government and public servants. However, the commitment of African government to liberalize media access to public information has been limited by the lack of growth of community media in Africa (Isola, 2008:28). Apart from few countries in Southern Africa, (Botswana, South Africa, Malawi, Namibia) and some countries in West Africa (Ghana, Senegal, Ma1Y'etc) the licensing process for community radio has been inhibited. Partly due to the rising wave of religious fanaticism, ethnic militias, international team/group, that can destabilize the state using radio.

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