

# Interrogating Mass Media Roles in Government Accountability and Responsiveness in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic

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## Abstract

*Twenty-three years after the attainment of democracy, Nigeria has continued to experience growth, seemingly, in various facets of her sociopolitical, economy and cultural spheres through various policies put in place by successive civilian governments. Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria empowered the mass media at all times to be free and to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in the chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people. This study, therefore, interrogated the Nigerian mass media roles in government accountability and responsiveness to the people in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic. The study is descriptive in nature with material generated from selected secondary material of textbooks, journal, articles and interviews of experts in politics and government. The findings revealed that successive democratic governments have impacted positively on Nigeria's growth in the area of promotion of policies for development, economic, sociopolitical reforms, exposing corruption, internet, evolution of citizen journalism and the passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 2011 by Goodluck Jonathan administration.*

*Keywords: mass media, political parties, electorates, citizen journalism*

## Introduction

The mass media can be described as a collective term for all media technologies, such as the Internet, newspapers, television, film and radio. They are used for mass communication by organizations that control these technologies. The term was established in the 1920 to describe the nationwide radio networks and mass-circulation of magazines and newspapers.

The mass media is a complex non-state actor whose activities have been made even more complex by massive advancement in technology. From the primitive gong of the village town crier, the leafleteering of anti-colonial movements, the bold headlines of the national dailies, the crystal-clear news footages of the cable television networks, to the internet blogs, no one can in any way ignore the contributions of the mass media to governance and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria, Section 22 of the Nigerian Constitution, under the Obligation of the Mass Media, states that "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass

media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives of the Constitution, and the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.” Also, Section 39(1) of the 1999 Constitution, it is stated that “every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to impart ideas and information without interference.” Thus, the press in Nigeria has constitutional rights to freedom of expression, and to provide information to the masses, to sharpen public opinion and also to impart the right information that could mobilize the people to concentrate their efforts in the direction of national development.

Mass media being a non-state actor is that in a way have become one of the strongest linkage institutions closing the gap between the state and the citizens.

The media provide the public access to any kind of information whether political, business or entertainment. The media report the activities of those who speak in the name of the state. It also criticizes the policies of government while suggesting alternative courses of action. It is also part of the duty of the media to bring to account the actions of state officials by exposing corrupt practices. The media serves as an effective check on those in power. They serve as the eye, ear and voice of the larger society. In short, the media upholds the right of the public to know. This is a very critical component of every modern democracy. This vital function is essential in compelling governments and those in power to function in an open and transparent manner.

However, the ability and willingness of the media to carry out this function depend largely on the form of the state in which the media operate and the character of the media itself. This is another way of saying that there is a correlation between the existence of a free media and democratic governance. As a matter of fact, one of the main distinguishing features of a democratic form of government is the existence of free and independent media. What follows then is that the advanced democracies without doubt, boast of freer media environment. In a general sense, the media in most developing democracies or transitional societies tend to enjoy less freedom.

Democracy, according to Samson (2008), apportioned some responsibilities to a group of people. First, the responsibility of the people to determine who should govern them. Second, the responsibility to confer legitimacy on such an elected government so as to function according to the rule of law. Third, such elected government is expected to serve the people and not self. In 1999, Nigeria tasted the sweet wine of democracy with the swearing-in of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. This event climaxed the Abubakar Abdul Salam ten months transition programme. Obasanjo thus emerged as the President of Nigerian fourth republic. Obasanjo was re-elected for the second term (2003-2007). Umar Yar’adua who succeeded Obasanjo was unable to complete his ten-

ure due to illness as he died in the office in 2010 and was replaced by his vice, Goodluck Jonathan who completed the tenure 2007-2011. Notwithstanding, there is seemingly stability in Nigeria's democratic with un-interrupted change of government from one civilian government to another leading seemingly to democratic consolidation.

According to Diamond, democratic consolidation involves “behavioural and institutional changes that normalise democratic politics and narrow its uncertainty” (Diamond, 1995). It requires the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training, and other functions that civil society performs. Democratic consolidation requires political institutionalization. Political institutionalization includes but is not limited to political education, political orientation agency, mass mobilization by government for citizen participation in politics and civics education in schools. Przeworski (1991) asserts that democratic consolidation is when the major political players recognize sufficient common interest in establishing electoral procedures and subsequently see that their interest in keeping to the rules of the game.

The 1997 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report rolls out a catalogue of what it takes to attain democratic consolidation. These include popular participation, democratic sustenance, transparency, observance of the rule of law and a service-oriented governance, among others (UNDP Reports, 1997). Beetham (2012), explains different criteria that determine democratic consolidation. One is the “two-election” test, or, more properly, the “transfer of power” test: when government that has itself been elected in a free and fair contest is defeated at a subsequent election and accepts the result. Part of the criterion is that it is not winning office that matters, but losing it and accepting the verdict, because this demonstrates that powerful players and their loyalties are prepared to respect the rules of the game. The whole study examined Nigeria's mass media Nigeria's roles in government accountability and responsiveness to the people especially during the 4<sup>th</sup> republic. Nigeria's 4<sup>th</sup> republic commenced in May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999 and has endured twenty three years experienced six uninterrupted elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019).

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Media are one of the catalysts of Democracy. Over the years, mass media have made presentation on national issues in their right perspectives to attain national integration. National integration implies the elimination of inner-ethnic tension and disharmony, promotion of national ideals and ethics and supporting the cause and the interest of the poor; as well as building bridges of unity across the nation. In the past 23 years of Nigeria's democracy, the Nigerian mass me-

dia had pursued the task of enhancing democratic principles. It had done this by creating awareness through mass mobilization, interviews and commentaries. Media organizations have trained their personnel in all fields of endeavours . Specializations in fields like law, politics, aviation, health, engineering, education, economics and finance as well as rural area correspondents promoting rural-urban integration.

Promotion of policies for National Development is another way through which mass media roles have manifested in government responsiveness and accountability to people. The most significant is the era of Obasanjo Administration during which the programme of development was anchored on National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The programme was described by the government as Nigeria's home-grown poverty reduction strategy, and was expected to eradicate poverty by turning the economy of Nigeria around within the years . Notwithstanding its limitations, the programme is said to involve a root and branch reform of the economy and its public service. The core components were described as follows: Streamlining the public service for efficient performance Improving transparency in the decision –making process'; Anti-corruption and the strengthening of Government and Social Institutions and accelerating liberalization and maintaining economic stability (NEEDS, 2004)

The mass media created awareness of these programme for the general public to get the necessary information. The media also sensitize the populace about where to access facilities provided by these programmes. The programme created “about 7 million new jobs over the period as reported by some media organizations” it reduced poverty and lay foundation for sustainable development.

Mass Media as vehicle for Economic and SocioPolitical Reforms in Nigeria is another area the mass media have impacted on the people. There have been several political and economic reforms that were intended to boost the economy of the country over the past 23 years. Such reforms include the emergence of the anti-corruption crusade spearheaded by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), in conjunction with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the National Agency for Food, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC).

Since press freedom is entrenched in the Nigeria Constitution, the performance of the media in Nigeria depends solely on the background of their type of ownership and their determination to actually practice professional journalism. This may be examined from three perspectives entertainment, information and mobilization on political activities and socioeconomic issues. In the opinions of Laswell (1948) and Wright (1960) in Asekome (2008), “one of the

key functions of mass communication is cultural transmission which they refer to as the ability of the media to communicate norms, rules and values of society.” Adeniyi & Bello (2006) in Asekome (2008), argue that as much as economy plays a major role in sustainable national development, other indices such as unity, education, mass participation in government activities, maintaining law and order equally have a tangible role to play in promoting the industrial state of a nation. A major weakness of the print media is that only those with western education can read as most Nigeria newspapers are written in English Language. Hence, Ott (2006) argued that “newspapers in Africa have traditionally been utilized primarily by the elite and urban population.”

Most mass media have relatively performed well in the areas of entertainment and they serve as conduit for passage of information, but cannot be said to have performed creditably well in imparting the societal norms and values which are fast degenerating in Nigeria. While the early newspapers performed well in “spearheading nationalism, that was both cultural and political and voicing against colonialism,” some of them however failed to contribute meaningfully to our political evolution and democratization process. Siddique (2000), observed that “during the 1964 Federal Elections,” the Western Regional Media played a leading role in sparking off the Western Regional Crisis, while the Northern media institutions also pursued regional agenda that heightened tensions of violence in the country.” Similarly, Jibo (2000) observed that “prior to the crisis that led to the collapse of the first republic in 1966, the Nigeria media had been transformed into agents of promoting ethnic and religious divisiveness” and political opportunism” which he attributed to the input of the Nigeria press.

Exposing corruption is another area the mass media have impacted on the citizenry. Nigeria media had been in the forefront in the reportage of abuse of office by political leaders. Example of such include the Alhaji Buhari case the former speaker of the House of representative who was exposed by the press on false claim on academic qualifications. As a result of persistent press exposure based on investigative journalism as well as critical public reaction, the speaker resigned his appointment the exalted position and was subsequently convicted. Similarly, the press exposes gross misconduct that led to the removal of the then Senate President, Chief Evans Enwerem (Asekome, 2008). The impeachment of Mrs Olubunmi Foluke Etteh as the Speaker of the House of the Representative were reported by the media. Etteh was the Speaker of the House of Representative between June 6, 2007 and October 30th, 2007 was impeached following accusation of corruption (Premium times, May 17, 2022).

There was the media coverage of the House of Representatives Committee on the Capital Market involving Arumah Oteh, the former Director General

of the Securities & Exchange Commission and the Chairman of the Committee, Herman Hembe representing (Vandeikya/Konshisha) Federal Constituency. Otey had accused Hembe of soliciting 44million bribe from the Security and Exchange Commission . The climax of the media coverage eventually led to the resigning of Herman Hembe as the Chairman of the House of Representative Committee on Capital market (Channels TV 2012). There was a scandal involving Farouq Lawan (Bagwa/Shanono) federal constituency) of the House of Representative and Femi Otedola, a business mogul about how importers of petroleum products were either inflating the figures of their manipulating the process by making false claims about imported products. Faruq Lawan was claimed to have demanded a bribe 500,000 dollars from the business mogul . The matter was taken to court and the Farouq was found guilty and sentenced to 7 years jail term. (P.M News,2021)

Revelation of intrigues and power play in between the Executive and the Legislature. There were lots of intrigues and power play in Nigeria just after the enthronement of democracy . It was alleged that money played a major role for many of the Senators who turned against Okadigbo on election day in 1999 . Okadigbo was accused of wrongful award of 44 contracts . The Senate constituted Senator Idris Kuta panel to investigate the allegation . he was found guilty and voted out on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2000. The removal of Okadigbo as the Senate President eventually led to virtually all Senators from South- East to which the Senate President was zoned undr the People's Democratic Party arranged offered themselves for election .Among the leading candidates were Senator Wabara, Anyim Pius Anyim, Jim Nwobodo and Ike Nwachukwu . . Anyim later emerged the winner . Indeed, prominent legislators such as Ike Nwachukwu, Jim Nwobodo, Idris Abubakar, Azu Mbata, Sensator Waku, kassem Isa Oyoyo,Idris Kuta and Mamman Ali made vital contributions at the parliamentary deliberation . (Vanyguard, 2009)

The Internet is another role of the press in the sustainace of democracy. Oghogho (2008) wh emphasized that there is great linkage between democracy and internet. While describing the internet as a vehicle for mass communication and political participation, he argued that information dissemination online can influence and has influenced the system user and citizen to participate in democratic process. He described the internet as the information super highway which involves interconnection of computers linked together by telecommunication infrastructure irrespective of cultural location or geographical location. Frassal, Ben (online) and Riley, (2007) in Oghogho (2008) explains that Fundamentals to the service application of internet are the emergence of Es concepts.

- E-democracy: relates to online activities of governance, elected representatives, political parties and citizens groups.
- E-voting: (or electronic voting) allows voters either to vote by computer from their homes.
- E-voting: (online) allows voters to cast their votes from anywhere there is internet access.
- E-government: refers to the conduct of government activities online. It involves the computerization of administration machinery vis-à-vis agencies of government.
- E-governance: has to do with responsibility and accountability to the people through computerized systems of information processing and delivery to the people.
- E-services: E-administration, health and so forth are part of a wider online related expression of internet utility value.

New Media technologies enhances democratic consolidation process. The media is conferred with the responsibility to inform, educate and entertain. However, for a nation which is desirous of achieving good policies for national integration and development, it requires well informed citizen through information delivering systems. The ability of the media to effectively carry out the three stated roles necessitate dynamic communication technology infrastructure. Today's technologies of the new media have brought information about political events, political actors and issues which are veritable to further consolidate democratic practice. The new media technologies include the social media where people especially Youths interact and access information about the government and also give their views on certain issues that consolidate deocracy.

Citizens participation in e-governance is another way the mass media have impacted on the citizenry. The Nigerian government SMS enquiry center is another evidence of promoting accessible information and contribution of the media to democratic consolidation. This center offers a unique opportunity to Nigerians about the activities and programmes of government. (Daily Independent, 2007). The SMS Technology vis-à-vis satellites, internet and cellular mobile technology as tool for information resource has helped to nourish and energize peoples' involvement in all aspects of democratic process and governance which has further consolidate Nigerian Democracy. With the advent of internert, most citizens now use their phones to get information and make it available.



The Freedom of Information Act is another dividends of democracy. The Freedom of Information Bill 2007 passage into law also contributes to Nigeria's democracy. The Freedom of Information Act 2007 is an act intended to make public, records and information freely available to the citizen. In a way, it is to provide for public access to public records; Project public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy; Protect serving public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing certain kind of official information without authorization; and Establish procedures for the achievement of those purpose and related purpose thereof. Idahosa (2008).

At this point, this paper revealed that unlike the military rules, democracy is gradually finding its feet. Each successive democratic governments tried to sustain it by providing a conducive atmosphere for it to thrive . Mass media has also contributed to the nurturing of Nigeria "s democracy through adequate coverage and reportage of the various electoral processes. Oboh(2004) reaffirmed this fact saying that the media played (both the press and electronic media) played great roles in democracy by monitoring the conduct of the election and provide substantial information on the events that occurred on the election days. Indeed, Oboh restated that the Nigeria's mass media position on most election days largely swayed the views of the members of the public on the credibility of the 2011 elections as well as other elections.

### **Methodology and Theory**

The study was a qualitative one and descriptive in nature with material generated from selected secondary material of textbooks, journal, peer review articles and interviews of experts in politics and government . The scope of the study revolved around 4<sup>th</sup> republic of the Nigeria democracy (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019) which had experienced twenty years uninterrupted electioneering campaigns leading to general election.

The study was anchored on development media theory and social responsibility theory of the press. The Development theory seeks to explain the normative behaviour of the press in countries that are classified as "developing countries" or third-world countries. Essentially, the major tenet of the theory as outlined by McQuail (1978:121) include the following:

- Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally accepted policy;
- Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities sand development needs of the society;



- Media should give priority in their content to national culture and languages;
- Media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically;

Journalists and other media workers have the responsibilities as well as freedoms in their information gathering and dissemination tasks; and in the interest of development ends the state has a right to intervene in; or restrict, media operation; and devices of censorship, subsidy direct control can be justified.

Again, the social responsibility theory is also pivotal to this study. The major thrust of this theory is to raise conflict to the state of discussion. The social responsibility theory postulated six specific function of the press (Siebert et al 1956:74, Kunezick 1998:48 and McQuail 1987:116). To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible; To inform the public to enable it to take self – determined action; To protect the rights of the individual by acting as watch dog over the government; To serve as the economic system, for instance by bringing together buyer and seller through the medium of advertising; To provide “good” entertainment, whatever “good” may mean in the culture at any point in time; and to preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interest and influences.

These two theories are related to the study in various ways. First, since the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria, the mass media have creditably performed her watch dog roles by exposing the ills of the executives, legislatives and the judiciary arm of the government. It has in so many ways expose the shortcomings of the ruling parties and government while also providing way out for them to address contending issues. The two theories also aligned with the thrust of the study which hinged on the need for media to be open to economic priorities sand development needs of the society. Mass media have columns for entertainment. Part of the genre of entertainment is the provision of cartoon at the back of newspapers. There are opinion pages in the newspapers which focus on issues of national growth and development. Mass media provide platforms for advertisers and other in the area of integrated marketing communication. The mass media have equally served as the agent of political, economic, sociocultural mobilization for the growth and development of Nigeria.

## Conclusion

The study revealed that to a great extent the impact of the mass media as vehicle for disseminating successive governments accountability and responsiveness to the Nigerians . The study further revealed the nuances and the power play among politicians, party leaders and chieftains and the garmut of election itself . Often times, the media position itself to reveal the structure of government at all levels as well as the various roles of the tiers of government in the continuous growth of democracy. The mass media due to the coverage and reportage of the electoral process revealed the actors in the political process and the process therein in capturing, consolidating and use of state power and how to enjoy the legitimacy of government (If elected into power)

The study also revealed that mass media and government are Siamese twins . Each time propose and implement public policies, the mass media are in the front burner of disseminating the information about the policies to the citizens. To this end, mass media were instrument to dissemination of information on 2006 Census, the Miillienium Development Goals of the government, the Freedom of Information Acts (2011) and other policies . Indeed the Nigeria Mass media could be considered as the lubricant of the Nigeria “s democracy .

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