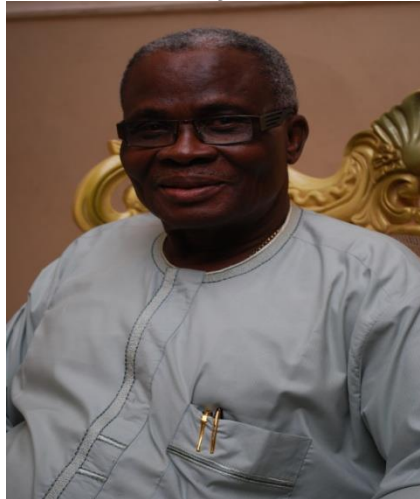


2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE BROADCAST MEDIA IN NIGERIA

by



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Now that there is a break, half time break, in political campaigns or a postponement of the elections by six weeks, it is time therefore to take stock of the various political activities, and possibly prepare for a more refined, purposeful and positive approach contrary to what some have taken as “do or die”.

My constituency is the media and that is the area I wish to address because I am genuinely concerned. We cannot sit back, arms folded, looking the other way, and pretending that all is well.

Let the truth be told, we have simply behaved as if there is no tomorrow for Nigeria. The campaigns or advertisements of mudslinging and derision which we have allowed to appear on the screens have not been helpful to the cause of this Nation. It has indeed helped to divide us as a people.

The media are expected to be the unifying factor for all interest groups but unfortunately some of us have come out to be brazenly partisan. When I see such, the question I ask myself is, are these media houses aware that they have viewership across the various political divides? What happens to their viewers who do not agree with their new position? It is only natural that they will switch

over to a more objective and balanced station. Has this helped the cause of the station?

The advertisements are to say the least, banal, puerile, uncultured and primitive. One of the greatest values the Nigerian is identified with is **respect**. Our morals, and indeed our religious institutions teach us to honour our elders and our leaders. The two major political party presidential aspirants fit very well into the category of those we should **respect and honour, as elders and as leaders**. The advertisements have not in any way reflected it. What examples are we giving to the younger generations? Aggression and abuse of elders would not earn votes. Rather, they evoke sympathy, and indeed a vote for the victim.

The National Broadcasting code has ample provisions for elections. Among them are:

4.2.2 **Broadcaster shall**

- (a) Not broadcast a programme which violates social values, shows disrespect for law and order or departs from an honourable life-style;
- (g) avoid the use of foul and blasphemous language;

5.1.6 Archival or library materials where used to illustrate a current event, shall be used with discretion and clearly identified to avoid confusion or causing emotional pain, offence, embarrassment or defamation.

5.2.5 Political broadcasts shall be in decent language

5.2.7 A broadcaster shall, in using a political material for news, avoid taking inflammatory and divisive matter in its provocative form;

5.3.6 A live broadcast shall take cognizance of the cultural and religious sensibilities of all Nigerians, and avoid offensive inputs.

What, in our coverage, commercials or news clips, have exonerated us as objective stations, and non defaulters in the provisions listed above?

The documentary that was transmitted in two major networks recently was, to say the least, in bad taste. Though designed to demonise a political opponent, its inaccuracies and the very obvious “**run-him-down**” line-by-line production, are

not only nauseating but could do the very reverse of the intention – evoke sympathy for the central character in the production, as an underdog.

One of the advertisements, in which the same presidential aspirant was transformed into a leopard was, to me, most despicable, and disgusting. This is a person running for the highest position in the land – **the Presidency**. That visual *nollywood voodoo* style production is an insult on our collective carriage of the presidency. Even if he were the least of all the aspirants in terms of followership, that office must be respected and the contestants given their due honour.

Permit me to ask if it is the vogue these days not to preview what is to go on air. Even if the producers come in with such raw and indecorous content, is it not the station's responsibility as professionals, to determine what will suit the sensitivities and sensibilities of Nigerian viewers by either editing the advertisement or out-rightly dismissing the producer to go and refine his production?

What has become of our ethical standards? If a poll is taken today, are these stations, in all sincerity, sure of retaining their level of audience or viewership. I very much doubt.

Another area that bothers me is the Outside Broadcast activities of the stations. There is undoubtedly a very pressing need for serious training of the crew ranging from the cameramen, the on-air presenters right on to the producers and directors. The earlier this is done against future events, the better it is for our profession and the viewers.

By the way, I want to believe the watchdogs or regulators of broadcasting – The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) as well as the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) have done and are seen to have done something by way of sanctions to these errant stations to serve as a deterrent against the second half of the political campaigns. Both stations and the regulatory bodies must be seen as a servant of all.

Elections will come and go but Nigeria will remain. Nigeria will remain as what – a nation infested with hatred, distrust and demagoguery? This is certainly not what we envisage for a country so heavily endowed by God to make us prosper as brothers, sisters and our brothers' keepers. How shall we see one another after an election campaign so richly studded with hate, bitterness and indeed venom, all in the name of winning the election? At the end of the day, only one out of the 14-contestants will be sworn in as the President, whose constituency is the whole of Nigeria.

This is the time to present an acceptable platform for some soft landing for both the winner and the losers.

The broadcast media has an immeasurable role to play in this. Though a lot of harm and hurt feelings have been engendered by various broadcast segments, this 'half time' is auspicious for us to mend fences and resolve to be better, fairer and more professional in the second half. If we preach hate, we shall reap hate and destruction. If we preach love and peace, we shall reap same. Let us endeavour to preach the latter with our media for the good of this nation and its wonderful people. Nigeria needs peace for progress and development. The broadcast media must be in the vanguard for its promotion.

God bless Nigeria.