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## **MEDIA OWNERSHIP, NATIONAL INTEREST AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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# CHAPTER NINE

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## **MEDIA OWNERSHIP, NATIONAL INTEREST AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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*Toyosi Olugbenga Samson Owolabi, & Tunde Musibau Akanni*

### **Introduction**

The concept of the 'national interest' is an ever-present feature of contemporary political discourse, and has been widely analysed by historians and political scientists. Although a country's national interest is expected to be a fulcrum of her overall national development agenda surprisingly, Nigeria's case appears to be a different ball game. Indeed, it is curious to note that national interest is not always clearly spelt out and this explains why the concept is prone to personalized interpretations, manipulations and distortions by the different government in power (Ajayi, Njoaguani, Olorunyomi and Folarin, 2016). It is a matter made worse when one looks at the Nigeria's plural-ethnic structure coupled with the fact of her being ruled by military regime for a long period.

Over the years, mass media, society and development are believed to enjoy a Trinitarian relationship. This is based on the understanding of the tenets of Development Media Theory as outlined by McQuail (2010) "that the media must give priority in news and information to carryout positive development task in line with nationally established policy". The Social Responsibility theory also added that the freedom and the position of eminence which the media enjoy must be used to be socially responsible to the society by setting high standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balanced reports of issues and events (Adejola and Bello (2014, p.109).The media possess the power and the tools to bring issues to the public domain through its information dissemination and reportorial functions while it also functions as the eyes and ears of the people. Under the emerging social responsibility of the media, the press is duty- bound not only to report on public affairs but also to embark on investigative reporting and analysis of issues of public importance.

To conceive and to achieve any goal that is of national interest, there has to be good and accountable governance in place. Governance which is the manner in which power and authority are exercised in the management of a country's economic resources presupposes that for administrative power and control to be exercised over a geographic area, there has to be information sharing between the governor and the governed. This is where the media become germane to function as watchdog, transmitter of value, link, mobilizer, advocate and guarantor of good governance.

In addition, the media that will effectively carry out such key roles in today's society must be sufficiently free and independent. According to Tejumaye and Adelabu, (2011), for media to be perceived as free, there must be atmosphere of independence void of restrictions and obstacles such as decrees, legal and social constraints, ownership control, government interference and harassment. The freedom of the press therefore connotes that media professionalism is guaranteed by giving journalists unfettered access to information, gather, process and disseminate same within the context of what is good for the mass audience (Ukonnu, 2006). In other words, if the freedom of the press is restricted, it invariably interferes with the citizens' rights to information enshrined in the constitution. This explains why Albert Camus (1954, p.291) submits that "When the press is free, it may be good or bad, but certainly without freedom, it can't be anything but bad".

Flowing from the logic above, the remaining part of this chapter will attempt to clarify the concepts of media ownership, national interest and good governance, trace the Trinitarian relationships amongst them and examine the potential challenges journalists often encounter to function professionally without compromise especially in a plural-ethnic nation as Nigeria.

### **Conceptual clarification**

**National Interest:** Each nation evolves its own national interest which it considered best for her. However, all countries have common security, economic, and ideological interests but these diverse interests change over time depending on situation and circumstances. The type and quality of each nation's national interest is dependent on the quality of political leadership. This is because national interests are usually defined by the country's leaders. Depending on the type of government that produced the leaders (military dictatorship or participatory democracy), every segment of the state contributes one way or another in determining a state's national interest. In most advanced economies, national interest usually emerge in the process of dialogue and contestations among diverse socio-economic groups, each with conflicting interests, struggling for dominance and for the control of state power. Conversely in Nigeria, under the successive military regimes in the past, national interests were generated among a few top military officers without welcoming any input from larger segment of the society. In the present dispensation, there is just a little dissimilarity. National interests are defined by selected elites no wonder the problem associated with indefinite and unintelligibility of its national interest.

Various definitions of national interests have evolved over the years. According to *Morgenthau*, (1978. p.5) national interest is perceived as the interest of a nation held to be an independent entity separate from the interests of subordinate areas or groups and also of other nations or supranational groups. Generally, it is the overall, long term and continuing purpose which the nation and the government believe are necessary for its security and the well-being of its citizens. These include: defense of territorial integrity, promotion of economic, military, diplomatic and strategic interests and all that a country considers as fundamental to its overall national interest (Folarin, 2014).

## Media Ownership Influence

There is no way the institution of mass media can be discussed without making reference to media ownership trends. Whenever the media attempt to carry out its statutory roles of informing and educating the society, a principle of Libertarian theory propounded by Siebert et al (1985) demands that the atmosphere must be sufficiently free of all kinds of interferences. One of the major sources of interference is through the media ownership. While defining the concept, Rauf (2003, p.49) views it as “the authority of an individual over a media outfit”. This infers that an individual or a group that establish a media organization can prevail on the management and interfere with the editorial content and managerial direction. In Nigeria as in some other countries, ownership structure is of different types. According to Warren (2007), there are seven forms of media ownership. These are: international corporations, national corporations, small scale organisations, government, community, individual and non-profit. However, the two most dominant types are the government-owned and privately-owned media. Whatever the ownership type, there are interests that must be protected. This could be economic, political, cultural and religious in nature. Whatever coloration it assumes, once it comes to play, the principle of journalistic professionalism which include: objectivity, accuracy and impartiality would normally have become compromised (Gulyas 2010, p.189). Williams (2003, p.73) also corroborates the above assertion by insisting that “ownership is not only an important factor in determining the structure, working and output of the news media but also in the production of meaning in the society”. For a government to own and control a media outfit, is an attempt not only to reach the populace and propagate its policies and programme but also to make the people believe that its programme is in the national interest and is the best for them. We can then infer from the above that there cannot be socially responsible media that are committed to public good in an environment where ownership influence looms large (Azeez, 2019).

## Governance and Good governance

The concepts of '*governance*' and '*good governance*' have been variously defined among the academics as well as development experts. It is therefore not surprising that the development literature is replete with such definitions.

Governance, either at the national, international or at the corporate levels, has been defined simply as the process of decision-making and implementation or non-implementation” (UNESCAP, 2016). At the national level, the government is the arrowhead of decision making. Others include elected and appointed officials at the three arms of government. In addition, the members of the ruling political party and the civil society may sometimes be involved in the process.

It is important to note that the decision made sometimes may be good or may be bad. If the decisions are good, we can say that we have good governance in place otherwise, it is bad. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2019, p.2), “good governance is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law”. The true test of "good" governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Good governance among other things “is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law” (UNESCAP 2016).

In view of the above, it has been observed that there is a significant degree of agreement among development experts that true national interest is a product of good governance and all institutional processes and outcomes that are germane to achieving development goals (OHCHR 2019). This must have been the reason behind Afamuefuna's (2006) view that since mass participation and consensus building form part of good governance and national interest, then, there must be constant information sharing between the government and the citizens which is within the ambit of the mass media responsibility. Both good governance and national interest warrant constant communication and feedback between the government and the populace. This will on one hand, enable the government to know how the people perceive its policies and programmes and on the other hand will allow them to be active participants in whatever decision the government takes about them.

By mass media, we refer to organs of mass communication such as radio, television, newspaper, magazines and the new media through which information, facts, opinion and idea are transmitted from one person to numerous heterogeneous populace that are dispersed by distance.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is based on Agenda Setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1973) and Social Responsibility theory by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956). Agenda setting theory is premised on the assumption that, the more emphasis placed on an issue in the media, the greater the significance and the more importance the news audience will perceive it. The theory had been recognized earlier for its explicit discussion on the roles of mass media in the society especially during election campaign (Cohen, (1963). It was thereafter popularized by McCombs and Shaw in (1972, 1973). McQuail (2005, p.548) defines agenda setting as a process of media influence (intended or unintended) by which the relative importance of news events, issues or personages in the public mind are affected by the order of presentation in news reports. McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1973) note about agenda setting that “in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important role in shaping political reality. Readers learn not about an issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine what is important- that is, setting the 'agenda' of the campaign” (McCombs and Shaw 2010, p.48).

Folarin (2005, p. 95-96) also maintains the position when defining agenda setting as “the powers of the media to predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a society”. While expatiating further on agenda setting, Folarin (2005, p. 95-96) identifies four interdependent elements which include the amount or regularity of reporting; status given to the reports through positioning of stories, headline display, picture exhibition and page layout in newspapers and magazines; as well as timing on radio and television; the extent of argument generated in the reports and; the aggregate of media specific effects over time.

It goes to show from the above characterization that by giving prominence to an issue in the media through the amount of coverage in terms of space and time devoted, the media can succeed in selling an idea to the public, either good or bad. If it is good, according to Mahatma Ghandi “it stimulates among the people certain desirable sentiment” but if it is bad, it creates fear and panic in the society.

Related to agenda setting is the theory of media framing, which media theorists believed to be the second level of agenda setting. From the two levels, it is observed that while the first level focuses on the degree of reporting and prominence an issue enjoys in the media, the second level focuses attention on the attributes and characteristic of an issue that people perceive as important. When journalists report an issue or write about a political figure, different tones and attributes are used to paint the picture in the public mind. This is what Scheufele (1999); McCombs et al., (1997) refer to as framing. The point is that the media as an important organ of communication is expected to be a market place of ideas where issues of national interests are presented in different perspectives by diverse social, economic cultural and political groups. Oso (2017, p.30) however notes that “some extant factors such as ownership influence, news values, power relations, availability of resources and inequitable access to the media, availability of social and cultural capital, some perspectives tend to gain ascendancy than others”.

The social responsibility theory, according to Anaeto, Osibajo and Osifeso (2008) is premised on the fact that the freedom which the mass media enjoy in a modern society must be used to benefit the society by carrying out certain essential communication functions. Mass communication scholars, policy makers and development thinkers have also supported the social responsibility theory by prescribing national development as obligatory functions for the media. By this, the media must be seen to advocate for and mobilize the citizens in active participation in the national development process.

While explaining the basic principles of social responsibility theory, McQuail, (1983, p.121) cited in Anaeto et al., (2008, p.57) also note that media must be socially responsible to the public; the responsibility must be based on truth, accuracy, objectivity and fairness, media must be self-regulating, it must not promote violence and civil disorder, the press must be pluralistic in giving equal voice to diverse groupings represented in the society, where the media become irresponsible, the society's interference can be justified to ensure public good; and although journalists must be accountable to their employers notwithstanding, they have superior loyalty to the public. Generally, socially responsible behavior in the media industry is to be premised on self-regulation; however, if the media are observed to be irresponsible as expected, outside interference such as government can then wade in. To avoid outside interference from the government is why the Press council, National broadcasting commission, Nigerian Guild of Editors were established to enforce strict compliance to professional ethics and code of conduct.

### **Media Ownership Influence on Governance and National Interest**

Media owners form a major definer of events that make up news packages. Although Carah and Louw, (2015) observe that ownership influence on the shapes and frames of news are often indirect and opaque, it is a key factor that constitutes the political and economic indices of news production. This, perhaps is the basis of Williams' (2003, p.73) claim that “ownership is not only an important factor in determining the structure, working and output of the mass media but also in the production of meaning in society”. The impression which media ownership gives is that there cannot be a compatible marriage of socially responsible media that are totally dedicated to good governance and national interest and absolute ownership of the press by a group of capitalists who have their personal, economic and political interests to protect (Azeez, 2019).

This is the basis of Owolabi (2014) observation that ownership influence erodes the robust democratic engagement that is essential for good governance and by extension evolving policies that are in tandem with national interest. It also cripples the media objectivity as it attempts to carry out its watchdog roles on the government. In this context, the most significant watchdog

role of the media in the society is to the political and the economic class. Mass media ensure openness and accountability in political and economic governance (Tejumaye and Adelabu, 2011). As the monitor of the society; media investigate the environment and report on the threats and dangers as well as on the prospects and opportunities inherent in a particular policy of the government. The media also set agenda for the government and people so as to take informed action about national interest.

The watchdog role of the media also includes making the business of government more transparent; stimulating debate on issues of national interest thereby creating understanding of the policies and programs of the government, encouraging the people to participate in the political process; providing surveillance and checkmating corrupt practices, abuse of power and violation of the social contract and most importantly, holding members of the political class more accountable (Azekome, 2008; Meijer, 2010).

The watchdog role of the media has again come under rigorous scrutiny by some media scholars who perceive this traditional role of the media as ambivalent. According to Curran (2000, p.122) cited by Kanyegirire (2008), the watchdog role is stale and not as straightforward as it presently appears in the prevailing socio-economic and political climate. The watchdog role was solely assigned to the media at a time the government was perceived as the seat of power and tyranny which the media must be able to checkmate. It has now been observed that the traditional estimation fails to consider the unlimited ownership influence of big shareholders in private businesses of which the private media have lately become a significant part.

Going by the above observations, the problem now is not that the media can be compromised by their relationship with the political and economic class. The main issue is that the media itself has become big business Empire that must be watched. Then, who watches the watchdog is the critical issue that remains to be determined. Opinions on this issue have been somehow diverse. While some argued in line with the principle of development media theory that “in the interest of national development, the state or a constituted body has the right to intervene in media operation” (McQuail, 2005), some others believe that doing so will restrict the press freedom and make a mockery of development idea. Instead, according to Wasan (2013) before an external force comes in, the press should look inwards to self-regulatory mechanism. However, this study believes that with the present structure of the media industry globally and Nigeria in particular, self-regulation might be an impossible task in view of various factors affecting the media operations such as ownership influence, personal opinion of the editors and reporters and economic motive. The responsibilities now rest on the civil society, NGOs and social activists to play watchdog role on the press using new tools of social media. According to Thomas (2013), Facebook and twitter can empower the civil society to join forces, coordinate and offer voice to the voiceless to expose and criticize any perceived unethical conduct of the mass media.

While contributing to the debate, Curran (2000) has called for immediate review of the perception that the media are watchdogs on both political and the business groups. The thrust of his argument is that since most media have turned to full profit-making outfits, their ability to carry out the traditional watchdog role remains doubtful. This is because; what they seek to correct in the society are playing out in most media organizations.

It has also been observed by media experts that mass media owners and those they appointed as gate keepers and agenda setters regulate and determine the volume of local and international information that gets to the people. This means, the more information is denied the populace, the

less power they have, therefore maintaining hegemonic hold on the people by presenting personal or sectional interest as national (Owolabi, 2014).

Gate keeping and agenda setting functions of the media have been criticized in contemporary times for introducing news slant and biases into report. McChesney (2000) identifies three different biases. The first is associated with story selection which most times regarded anything done by government official as newsworthy. Thus, conferring agenda setting power on political office holders by what they said or decided not to say. The second bias is tagged professional journalism tenet that based news reporting of an issue on news peg. By this, an issue is not considered newsworthy until there is a striking development. For instance some years ago in Nigeria, the need for constant and strict enforcement of aviation safety laws and professional ethics is not worth reported until such a tragic occurrence involving Dana aircraft 992 that crashed into the densely populated Iju-Ishaga, suburb of Lagos state and claimed 153 lives including some top government officials. Third, journalists usually allow commercial consideration and political interests of their owners to dictate what goes into their reports.

McQuail (1987) also argues that the media must contribute to the development status of the society by making the media contents to align with national interests. This view has been supported by some academics. Oboh (2004) reasons that the media can only contribute to the development status of the society if the media contents are made to align with national interests. A review of Oboh's argument has however, provoked some complex questions. How does one know when a goal is national and when it is sectional or even personal? How does a journalist know the difference between national interest and the interest of the government in power?

In a plural-ethnic society like Nigeria and some other African states where wrong mix of racial, ethnic, religious and political considerations are usually linked to every policy formulation and implementation process, how does one define national interest and who defines it? Besides, given that most African countries are either ruled by military dictators or military in civilian garb, only the few military officers and their civilian cronies usually come together to define and determine what national interest is. Nigeria is particularly very complex; with a population of about 180 million, 36 states, about 250 ethnic groups, and about 5000 dialects, three major religions and 82 political parties all working differently with diverse social, cultural, economic and political interests to protect (Owolabi, 2017).

According to Owolabi (2008), there are various issues that present itself as “national” but which affect a section or two of the country excluding others. These include the *Ruga* settlement issue which affects only Hausa Fulani states of the Northern Nigeria, the Ogoni and Oil derivation struggle in the eight oil producing states of the South and the issue of true federalism which is being advocated among the six states of the South West as well as several minority claims. Ask a Hausa-Fulani man, if *Ruga* is an issue of national interest, he will not think twice before answering in affirmation. Similarly, Ogoni and Niger Delta people will normally believe resource control is in national interest. Conversely, more than 120 million other Nigerians will disagree with them. Yet, the oil and gas that sustain the nation's economy are domiciled in their land. According to Duyile (1990), it is only through national referendum that issues of national interest can be determined. Surprisingly, each succeeding governments has been taking decisions on such issues which they wrongly assumed to be of national interest on behalf of Nigeria and her citizens.



National interest is subjective and is difficult to determine and it is only normal that Journalists will have moral and professional dilemma reporting such issues. The media are usually polarized based on ownership position and other factors when reporting such issues. It is an attempt to differentiate between real national interest and the government of the day's interest that some of the media are branded as rebellious and unpatriotic. It is not impossible that the government may make mistake while determining national interest, it will therefore be a mistake made worse on the part of the press to align with the government as Oboh, (2004) argued.

### **Interrogating the Trajectory of Media Ownership and National Interest in Nigeria**

Media ownership in Nigeria has recorded series of transformation over the years. The print media commenced with private ownership in 1859. The British missionary founder of the pioneer newspaper, *Iwe Irohin fun Awon Egba ati Yoruba*, Henry Townsend, wanted to use his publication to promote literacy alongside Christian evangelization although, it later got more renowned for politics than its original, primary mission highlighted above. The succeeding generation of newspapers, largely poised to pursue political independence for the Nigerian state, were also private initiatives concentrated in Lagos. Following in the strides of *Iwe Irohin*, they took on the colonial power. Politics was so much the concern of newspapers in Nigeria in the colonial era that although the early newspapermen in Nigeria were not trained, they established as many as 50 newspapers between 1880 and the outbreak of the Second World War to give maximum visibility to their sentiment. The main focus of the multiplying newspapers was unmistakable: self-governance. According to Omu (1996, p.2-3), the phenomenon "... encouraged a sense of political and nationalist awareness and involvement by providing the medium of criticism of the authorities, spreading disaffection with aspects of official policies and programmes and coordinating movements of agitation" (Omu, 1996, p.2-3).

The military years equally gave rise to the birth of several newspapers as a result of the protracted political struggle, this time for democratization and by extension, good governance. The campaign was for the print media genre as the broadcast media subsector then was the exclusive preserve of the government, at both the state and the federal levels. According to Olukotun (2002), it was the critical press that availed the interested section of the Nigerian populace with access to the world. Like the colonial power, the military government was not comfortable with the role of the critical press. Subsequently, law enforcement operatives were mobilised to harass newspaper vendors, thus seizing copies of various news publications in different cities around the country.

The editors and reporters of the offending press were also hounded around, some of them losing their lives. Both 1992 and 1993 were particularly traumatic for the media as several journalists were detained and printing premises were taken over to halt production of newspapers and magazines. As a result of this, 13 *Concord* newspaper titles and several others on the stable of *The Punch*, *The Sketch*, and *The Observer* were abruptly halted. Government even went further to promulgate five draconian decrees, each to formally proscribe each of the five concerned media. In what clearly presented a strong commitment to the enthronement of democracy and possibly good governance, some media companies like the publishers of *The News* magazine resorted to guerilla publishing. However, in the twilight days of the military era, government was under a lot of pressure as it made efforts to access some benefits from the international community thus forcing it to agree to some concessions. One of such was the liberalization of the broadcast media sub-sector in 1991 thus freeing it from being the exclusive preserve of government. Interested individuals and groups could aspire to own broadcast stations and were indeed licensed. Thus, emerged the pioneer, Africa Independent Television (AIT) soon to be followed by its sister radio

station, Raypower Radio, both owned by Daar Communication Company chaired by, Dr. Raymond Dokpesi.

The restoration of civilian administration in 1999 therefore came with some enhanced semblance of the rule of law a most fundamental variable in national interest discourse. Newspapers and broadcast stations multiplied and flourished. The history of broadcasting in Nigeria is remarkably different from that of the print media. Radio broadcasting to Nigeria from the United Kingdom commenced in 1932, but broadcasting in Nigeria began in 1957, three years before independence. Broadcasting from the United Kingdom to Nigeria was similar to that which was arranged for other British colonies beginning in 1920s. It was known as Radio Distribution Service and had no fewer than 4,562 subscribers by 1949. The burgeoning yearns for information coupled with political, social and economic development of citizens led to the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in 1957.

Nigeria's first television station, the Western Nigerian Television(WNTV), later came into being in 1959. By 1962, two other television stations, the Eastern Nigerian Television, belonging to the Eastern Regional Government as well as the Radio/Television Kaduna had been established. This gave a clear outlook of the constitutional administrative structure of the Nigerian Federation which then comprised three regional and the central governments.

In today's Nigeria of 36 states, radio broadcasting has three distinct tiers namely: the government owned broadcasters, commercial broadcasters (which may also include internet-based broadcasters) as well as community broadcasters largely exemplified by the campus broadcasters.

Although broadcasting seemed to have made substantial progress over the years availing Nigerians with multiple windows to ventilate their views, especially with the inception also of community broadcasting, the statutory challenges for it are not any less encumbering especially with regards to regulation. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), established by government to regulate broadcasting nationwide is largely run by government appointees who hardly reflect different shades of stakeholders of the broadcast media sub-sector. As if to ensure maximum hold on NBC, government appointees to the NBC board include representatives of the State Security Service (SSS), as well as those of the Information and Culture Ministry. Even at that, though NBC is the sole regulator for broadcasters, unlike its contemporary, the National Communication Commission (NCC), it does not have the power to approve license. At best, it can only receive applications and pass them on to the president. Yet, contrary to the philosophy of media pluralism supportive of democracy, Section 9 (1) of the NBC Act compels operators to ensure their stations uphold and advocate “national interest, unity and cohesion.”. The apogee of the democratization process in the media sector is the legitimisation of the community broadcasting in 2015 coming on top of the all-pervading technology of internet with all its radical influence across all the media genres with the magnitude of intensity never experienced before.

### **Mass Media in Nigeria's Democratization and Good Governance Mix**

The potency of the main content or output of the media, the news, is such that it is deemed as “a highly contested space by both the political and corporate elite for its propaganda and publicity value” (Oso, 2012, p.63). He continues:

It affords those with access, the power to define and frame public issues and did not only set agenda but also provide the interpretative and evaluative frameworks. Hence, it is argued that there is no neutral news; all news is ideological. Those who seek such access invest many resources to gain it and control or influence the pattern and substance of coverage.

Indeed, Cook (2005) says it all with the title of his book, *governing with the News*. The news helps to cultivate or prepare the cognitive ground for the active involvement of citizens in the political process. It is the intermediary institution among the different actors in the political system. Little then, one has to wonder how media organisations are hardly able to be apolitical if only for the much advertised value of objectivity.

Mainstream media organisations of the Legacy stock have always, substantially produced several political appointees and elected officials including party leaders especially for offices requiring media relations and related responsibilities. Most striking perhaps is the coincidence in the career trajectory of the current publicity officers of the two foremost parties in Nigeria, namely All Progressives Congress, (APC), and the People's Democratic Party, (PDP). The last media employment of the duo was from *Thisday* newspaper. Indeed, the current editor of the daily version of the newspaper, Bolaji Adebisi, was also a media aide to former president Jonathan while the chairman of the editorial board, Segun Adeniyi, was the media adviser to former President Umaru Yar'Adua. Both Adeniyi and Adebisi were staffers of *Thisday* newspaper before their political appointments. Both returned to *Thisday* after serving out their terms in government. For now, that paper appears to have the reputation of having produced far more political players across parties of varying persuasions than any other acclaimed national newspaper. However, journalists of only a few organizations do not fall readily for political appointments.

And although, the publisher of *Thisday*, Nduka Obaigbena, has always been politically active since 1993 botched presidential election in Nigeria, he still emerged as the leader of the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria afterwards. Although he never contested any political position, Obaigbena's political sympathy or affiliation is hardly ever hidden. Indeed, it will be a grave error to assume that he has any soft spot for the sitting Federal Government of APC with a major benefactor of his, Sambo Dasuki, in protracted detention at the instance of the same government.

It could be recalled that shortly after President Buhari commenced his first term in office in 2015, a major window of sleaze discovered was in connection with the Office of the National Security Adviser, ONSA, headed by Dasuki. It was discovered that a number of organisations and individuals collected money from that office unjustifiably but to help drive support for former President Jonathan. Among them was the Nduka Obaigbena-led NPAN which had collected N600 million. That money was collected in addition to the compensation Obaigbena had collected on account of a Boko Haram attack *Thisday* suffered previously. He was forced to refund the N600 million following government's insistence. Before and after that refund was made, the slant of lead stories of that paper had always been anti-Buhari government.

In a related context, privately owned broadcasters including the foreign ones have come to be preferred to government owned broadcasters even as entertainment constitutes the domineering contents of most of these (Olorunnisola and Akanni, 2004). The followership of the government-owned broadcasters has continually thinned out on account of the government media being found

to be too sheepish with the government of the day rather than reporting and analyzing issues with popular appeal or national interest issues.

Perhaps seemingly farther from “national interest” are the internet based media players. Following the inception of the world wide web, Nigeria-inclined online news websites have multiplied. Preferring to associate together, independent of the pre-existing Nigerian Press Organisation, (NPO), at least two distinct bodies have emerged namely, Guild of Corporate Online Publishers, GOCOP, and Online Publishers Association of Nigeria, OPA-Nigeria. Neither of the two advertises national interest in their missions. GOCOP claims to be a “Nigerian, non-governmental, non-partisan, non-profit making organization, borne out of the growing need to ensure that online publishers uphold the tenets of journalism in doing their jobs” (GOCOP, 2020). Both Premium Times and Cable are members of GOCOP.

The second body, which is barely nine years old now having been founded in 2010 describes itself as “...discerning group of trustees and founders 9who) recognized the shift in the mode and means of social engagement; and understood the shifts, disruptions and changes that may occur which would overlap with current laws and rules guiding conduct and practice and therefore sought to create a self-regulatory body that would provide the means tested standards for users and practitioners to operate by” ([https://onlinepublishersng.com/about\\_association.php](https://onlinepublishersng.com/about_association.php)).

Even then, the online media players reasonably displayed their loyalty to national interest with their .ng web addresses which, in addition to their nomenclature (for example Premium Times Nigeria) most of them adopted from their inception long before some government agencies switched to their official .gov.ng addresses from their .com and .org addresses in spite of repeated appeals from the Nigerian Internet Registration Association, NIRA, and even persistent government deadlines (Akanni, 2018)

Mischievously misinterpreting commitment to national interest on the part of online publishers, the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2009 announced a USD 5 million plan to support government-friendly news websites. In other words, this was to counter government critical websites from influencing public opinion. No fewer than 50 “patriotic” websites were planned to be launched before the 2011 general elections (Open Net Initiative, 2009).

The distrust for the entire media industry also appears to have accounted for the non-inclusion of any media-inclined body in the membership of the cybercrime advisory council provided for in the Cybercrime Prevention and Prohibition Act of 2015 (Oso and Akanni, 2018).

The media as the mirror of the society have had to undergo series of transformation largely resulting from the society which in-turn had received enduring impact from such phenomena as globalization. Indeed the yoke exerted on the Nigerian state and indeed all African states, or better still the entire global south, has turned out to be the new challenge taking the place of political servitude of the colonial days. Unfortunately, rather than work towards holistic emancipation, not a few media establishments and individual journalists are seeking individualistic succor via short cuts manifesting in corruption. Many now pander to power with less or no faithfulness to national interest at all. There is however no doubt to the fact that integrity is the strongest asset for any player in the media world and the evidence remains conspicuous with the tradition sustained by towering media institutions globally and locally.

## **Recommendations**

In closing, we recommend that the government should begin to see the media as partners in progress and therefore should get the leadership involved in relevant tasks of national building such as they may have exhibited profound knowledge and interest through stories, analyses and editorials. Also, the Nigerian Press Organisation, (NPO) should respond to global changes impacting on media industry by opening its doors to GOCOP and OPA-Nigeria and other relevant bodies for the sake of better media performance in the country. Finally, the government should repeal Cybercrime Act Prevention and Prohibition Act of 2015 to demonstrate commitment to inclusivity as preached by genuine democracy.

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