



**ASSOCIATION OF  
COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS  
& PROFESSIONALS OF NIGERIA  
BOOK SERIES**



CANADA UNIVERSITY PRESS

# **PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MEDIA PERFORMANCE DURING COVERAGE OF THE 2014 NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN NIGERIA**

*ODOEMELAM, Chinedu Christian*

**To cite this article:**

Odoemelum C. C. (2018). Public Perception of Media Performance During Coverage of the 2014 National Conference in Nigeria in *Media Reflections on Governance and Development in Nigeria*, ACSPN Book Series 3, pp. 112—124  
Retrieved from <http://www.acspn.com.ng>

(Institutional or Subscribed access may be required)

Please note that this is an electronic, pre-print version of this article published by the Canada University Press, Concord Ontario, Canada for Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN).

The ACSPN Book Series is exclusive to the Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria.

ISBN: **978-1-989271-02-5**

Copyright © 2018  
Editor and Contributors

Layout/Design: Ashroph De Grafico

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form or any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.



## CHAPTER NINE

# **PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MEDIA PERFORMANCE DURING COVERAGE OF THE 2014 NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN NIGERIA**

*ODOEMELAM, Chinedu Christian*



### **INTRODUCTION**

**G**overnment-press relationship in Nigeria continues to be a contentious variable. This has largely been based on the role the press plays and the question of performance based on professional boundaries. This has not gone without instigating scrutiny from diverse quarters including from a wide range of communication scholars, political scientists, and independent research institutions. *Hanitzsch (2014) argues that* in journalism studies, no area of research has flourished more than inquiry into the professional roles of journalists. Recent scholarly debates such as (Okoro, 2013; Odozi, 2014) have shown that while perspectives and findings differ on the role of the press in the country as well as its relationship with government, there is a consensus that the concept of sustainable development and governance will be an unrealistic proposition without effective and uncontrolled participation of news sources in disseminating national and political issues. Within the broad context of the major issues facing Nigeria as a nation seeking unity and progress, this study focuses on the performance of the news media as an institution in addressing these challenges especially, journalists' social responsibilities in the coverage of Nigerian national conferences.

This is premised on the assumption that democratization in Nigeria may be unattainable if the media are not fully and actively engaged in the processes of governance of which successful discourses in national conferences is a key index. This goes without observing that national conferences per se, seek to provide a public sphere for addressing key problematic in the process of nation building. In particular, the citizens of Nigeria ought to be made to appreciate the importance of participating in the political process and challenging unpopular government decisions and actions. This can only be possible when the citizenry are well groomed by a very active media. It has been advocated that the national press and other news sources ought to play the crucial function of advocating for citizens' understanding of government activities, public policies, and development plans (Okoro, 2013). The responsibility of covering the Nigerian national conference presents such platform for weighing the professional performance of the media as related to governance.

National conference denotes a formal congregation of interest groups, including sub-nationalities and sectional representations in a polity. National conferences can be gingered by the imperatives of engineering a new constitution or as a way of forging common solutions to perceived national problems, particularly in divided societies such as Nigeria, where ethnic and other sectional cleavages have become constraints to the emergence of a sense of nationalism and national integration (Ajayi, 2006). Recent studies data have shown that clamours for restructuring secession, resource control, independence etc are major issues that have occupied the front pages of our national discourse (*Sahara Reporters*, 2017; *Vanguard Newspapers*, 2017).

Whether reform, constitutional, sovereign or national conferences, these deliberation spheres have been synonymous with the Nigerian entity. Studies have shown that they are borne of the circumstances that culminated in the Nigerian nation (Tenuche, 2011; Olukaju, 2014). According to Olukaju (2014) a cursory survey of the histories of nation-states which emerged from colonial rule reveals that, for heterogeneous multi-ethnic and/or multi-religious entities, the struggle for independence and the nation building process that followed involved consensus building and constitution making, which required the convening of conferences. Meanwhile, Tenuche observed, that the chain of conferences and constitutions that evolved under colonial administration, though largely borne out of the precarious balance of the polity, were however incapable of redressing the problem. Rather, they complicated it.

The context, within which journalists operate, provides the benchmark to evaluate their role and actual performance (Norris and Udegbami, 2009). Roles operate at both collective and individual levels. This report focuses more attention on *collective levels*, where roles determine the institutional practices, cultural values, behavioural norms, and the standard routines characteristic of the media system within any society (Norris and Udegbami, 2009). Norris and Udegbami, argue that the collective roles of the news media are arguably more important for the health of democratic governance and for human development than the individual role of journalists. For instance, effective democracies require a diversity of social and political viewpoints heard across all the airwaves and newspapers within any society, representing the notion of external diversity. This is arguably more vital to informed public debates than the need for impartial balance, or internal diversity, established within each media outlet, by each individual reporter, or in any particular story. Interventions designed to strengthen the role of the news media as an institution focus more broadly on the role of the state, markets and the journalistic profession. Typical strategies include strengthening rights to freedom of information, expression and publication in law, deregulating state ownership of broadcasting to facilitate a plurality of independent channels, investing in the infrastructure supporting diverse community radio stations, newspapers, and websites, and reforming professional journalistic training and accreditation bodies (Norris and Udegbami, 2009).

At individual-levels, roles determine the norms and values, standards of behaviour, and orientations shaping the job of individual news workers. This includes a diverse range of occupations in the communication sector, including writers, reporters and journalists, broadcasters and news anchors, editors and producers, analysts, experts, and commentators, press officers, public relations and market research practitioners, official spokespersons, as well as internet communicators such as web-editors and online bloggers. Journalistic roles are learnt from many sources, including from personal background and experiences, professional education, apprenticeship training, observation of media routines and practices, guidance from employers and co-workers, formal guidelines and standards of professional conduct, practical

job experience, organizational structures, and the incentives in the workplace. Interventions designed to strengthen the individual roles of journalists commonly focus upon establishing formal guidelines, expanding the institutional capacity of professional bodies (Norris and Udegbami, 2009).

### **National Interest and National conferences in Context**

Given the intricacies attached to the concept of national question, the notion of national interest becomes vague and difficult to give a precise definition to. In spite of that, national interest is defined as the general long term and continuing purpose which the states, nation and the government see themselves as serving. The national interest of a state is rooted in the social consciousness and in the cultural identity of a people. In other words, the national interest of a state is a product of social values which the people have. In practice, the national interest of a country is synthesized and checked by political leaders or policy makers (Lukpata, 2013), but not without strict consideration of the intricately intertwined concept of national question, especially in a pluralist entity like Nigeria.

The discourse on national question is serious in Nigeria, as it is in places with similar demographic variables. Onyeoziri (2002), (cited in **Tenuche, 2011**) avers that the national question “afflicts many political systems, hardly has a final solution, is complex or multi-dimensional in nature, and is historically contingent”. Despite this generalization, Tenuche observes that the national question may vary in its form and character among nations and within a nation. To fully grapple with the national question would therefore require a contextual analysis that emphasizes the particularities of the question in a given policy. At a general level, the national question connotes “the totality of issues that can take heavy tolls on national rebirth, integration and development” (Saliu and Omotola, 2006 cited in Tenuche, 2011). Within the Nigerian context, however, the national question has been defined as “the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have some rights and privileges, access to power and an equitable share of national resources” (Ajayi, 1992 in Saliu and Omotola). In a related vein, Albert (2001:272) defines the national question in Nigeria as primarily concerned with group rights, self determination, truth, Justice, fairness and respect for others”.

For Oyovbaire (1989; cited in Saliu and Omotola), the national question pertains to “the concrete problem of social existence arising from assertive competition among persons who possess multi-ethnic or multi-communal and regional consciousness, with which was created in its foundation by the turn of the 19th Century, and of its articulation since that time, by and under colonial domination” (Saliu and Omotola, 2006; **Tenuche, 2011**). The descriptions above hardly differ from the Nigerian scenario and reflect issues that national conferences wish to address (See Tenuche, 2011; and Olukoju 2014; for a detailed discourse on national conferences in Nigeria as well as the issues which such conferences are meant to address in the polity).

Dialogue, consultations or constitutional conferences are unavoidable in the construction of a heterogeneous country. High on the agenda of the citizens of Nigeria should be the twin issue of consolidation of participatory democracy and dispensation of social justice. The convocation of the National Conference in 2014 has been a culmination of various agitations to clearly define the basis of unity in Nigeria since amalgamation in 1914. From 1999, the agitations became loud and more vigorous with a twist on a Sovereign National Conference cutting across political and regional boundaries (Ibidapo-Obe, 2014). But how did the media perform during the conference and how is the performance perceived among Nigerians? To attempt an answer, this study is

framed by the press participation-based integrative model, which derives substantially from general system theory, and was developed as a constructive model for political governance shortcomings in the country. Implicit in this model is the idea that communication channels or news sources must be considered an integral part of development objectives in Nigeria for long-term growth and prosperity.

Further, the participation-based integrative concept substantiates the need for collectivity in the design and implementation of strategic development goals in a developing nation. The concept is not only concerned with the integration of the under-utilized Nigerian press in the pursuit of political development agenda, but is also concerned with the integration of all other national institutions and establishments in the country associated with making change toward sustainability of political governance and national unity. We hypothesize that given the problems associated with national conferences in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, the media would be very professional and guide the performance of their responsibility of informing, educating and mobilizing Nigerians. Our hypothesis further argues that media role conception and performance among Nigerians would be according to best practices and professionalism.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the twenty-first century information-rich society, news sources should be more analytical, proactive, and critical of strategic development efforts that impede or forestall constructive attempts at raising citizens' consciousness and patriotism beyond tribal sentiments. Consistently, historical and empirical studies of past decades (Obotette, 1981; Faringer, 1991; Mbayo, 2000, The World Bank, 2000) noted that Nigeria's development problem hinged on the relationship between the nation's news sources and political system and the ability of the press/news sources to contribute significantly to the bid for sustainable national development. In other words, communication channels, especially the media by virtue of their responsibilities and obligations, should be able to set the agenda for political and informed debates to guide the actions of the citizenry, electorate, and stakeholders in general. As echoed in The World Bank's reports (2009), sustainable democratic governance is critical for the emerging democracies and developing nations of Africa. Here we focus upon understanding how effectively media systems function in their roles as 'watchdogs', 'gatekeepers', and 'agenda-setters'. To clarify the core concepts, 'roles' are understood as a set of expectations governing the behaviour of persons and institutions holding a particular function in society. As a set of norms, values and standards that defines how persons and institutions should and do work, roles have both normative and empirical dimensions. But for the very few studies done on this issue, there seems to be lack of a clear and updated knowledge about role conceptions and performance of the media in Nigeria's 2014 national conference.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Ascertain the perceived functions that the media should perform in the society.
- ii. Determine perceived professional roles that dominated media coverage of the 2014 national conference.
- iii. Ascertain the extent the media were perceived as performing surveillance and watchdog roles in the reportage of the 2014 national conference.
- iv. Analyse the extent to which the media in their coverage of the 2014 national conference were seen as promoting good governance.
- v. Examine the extent to which the media were perceived as promoting national interest during the 2014 national conference.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the issues raised in the study, we ask the following questions

- i. What are the perceived functions the media should perform in the society?
- ii. Which professional roles were perceived to have dominated media coverage of the 2014 national conference?
- iii. To what extent were the media perceived as performing surveillance and watchdog roles in the coverage of the 2014 national conference?
- iv. What was the extent to which the media in their coverage of the 2014 national conference were seen as promoting good governance?
- v. What was the extent to which the media were perceived as promoting national interest during the 2014 national conference?

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

The study used the survey research design. Surveys are apt for studies where opinion is sought on certain phenomenon. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was adopted based on reviewed literatures on media role performance (Ajayi, 2006; Norris and Udegbami, 2009). The instrument comprised seven sections: Section one was socio-demographic characteristics of participants containing two items (Items 1 and 2). Section two had three items (items 3, 4, and 5) and it examined perceived functions that the media should play in the society. Section three comprising items 6, 7 and 8, examined perceived professional roles that dominated the media coverage of the 2014 national conference. Section four had three items (items 9, 10 and 11) comprising factors that indicated media watchdog and surveillance roles in the coverage, for instance monitoring of politicians and policy makers. Three items (items 12, 13, 14,) constituted section five and it focused on how media coverage of the 2014 national conference promoted good governance, such as, promoting equal rights of citizens. The last section, six, had three items (items 15, 16, 17) which focused whether media coverage of the 2014 national conference promoted national interest. In each of these sections 2-6, cues or indicators were provided that suggested the absence or presence of the variable of inquiry. Responses to questions in sections 2-6 were determined by a 5 point likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The total items included in the questionnaire were 17, with response options ranging from nominal to interval scales and the likert scale.

The results of nominal entries were determined by simple majority of the frequencies, while the likert scale options, which were used to address the research questions, were determined by statistical mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) values that were equal to or above ( $M=3.00$ ). This meant that the mean value, 3.0, was the acceptable benchmark. Two postgraduate students who served as data collection facilitators were recruited to assist the researchers during the field work.

### **Participants and Selection**

The study was carried out at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, South-East Nigeria. The population of study consisted of the University of Nigeria Nsukka community. A key justification for the choice of this population is the need to get an enlightened point of view. It is widely known that universities are citadels of learning and given the fact that the variables investigated in this study require some literacy to understand the concepts, it was assumed that the university community would be the location where to get such population. To ensure that



those that participated had the required characteristics, the researcher chose to study only staff and postgraduate population of the university of Nigeria. This limited scope was based on the variables of proximity, convenience and other factors. For instance, since the researcher is an academic staff of the university and resides within the university, this population was presumed to be most convenient and easily reachable. Data depended on a sample of 121 respondents from the population of the University community. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) note that a sample is representative of the population from which it is taken if the characteristic of the sample mimic those of the population. As a result, the study allowed for all the relevant categories or traits of the studied population to be represented in the final sample selected.

**Table 1: Population of each stratum**

University of Nigeria, Nsukka Community	Population
Postgraduate stratum	2200
Staff stratum	1010
TOTAL	3210

(Source: University of Nigeria Registry, 2015)

A four-stage sampling technique was adopted. Stage one involved the identification of the relevant strata in the community, which were: Postgraduate students' stratum and staff stratum. It is worth noting that only the strata relevant to the study's objective were studied and this excluded other strata like the undergraduate and business or artisan groups who make the university community. Given the disproportionate nature of the population, the study, in two different stages, adopted the Bowley's Proportionate Stratification Technique to select participants from each of the two strata. Studies (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006; Stat Trek, 2014) support the Browley's Proportionate procedure in heterogeneous and unequal population demography. See the procedure below:

$$n_h = (N_h / N) * n$$

Where  $n_h$  is the sample size for stratum  $h$ ,  $N_h$  is the population size for stratum  $h$ ,  $N$  is total population size, and  $n$  is total sample size (Stat Trek, 2014).

$$BPST = \frac{\text{Population Size}}{\text{Total population}} \times \frac{\text{Sample Size}}{1}$$

$N_h$  = Population Size = for each stratum

$N$  = Total Population = 3210

$n_h$  = Sample Size = 121

The sample size for each stratum was determined thus:

**Poatgraduate students' strata:**

$$2200/3210 \times 121/1 = 82.92834891$$

Approximately = 83

**Staff strata:**

$$1010/3210 \times 121/1 = 38.07165109$$

Approximately = 38

**Total =  $n_1 + n_2 = N$**

i.e.  $83 + 38 = 121$ .

It is important to note that the proportional sampling procedure makes room for a proportionate size to be selected from a non-homogenous population like the one in this study. Instead of quantity or size, the strength of this technique is that it ensures representation of an element from a non-homogenous group (Stat Trek, 2014).

In the third stage, each of the strata was selected using the stratification technique. The stratification used considered the following: postgraduates (faculty and then departments); Staff (academic and non-academic). In the fourth stage, with the aid of a sampling frame of 3210, the simple random technique was used to select each respondent from each stratum without criteria. Specifically, the sampling frame from each of the strata was determined. Similar methods have been used in selecting respondents in a stratified population (Tomjack, 2015; Mba, 2015).

### Findings of the Study

Data shows that males were  $n=57$ , 47.%; while females were: 64, or 53%;  $M: 1.609524$ ;  $Std. Dev: .4901969$ ). This indicated that females were in the majority among the study group. Level of education (SSCE:  $n=22$ , or 18% percent; NCE/ND:  $n=4$ , (3.3%); B.A /BSc: 76 (63%) Masters/PhD:  $n=19$  or 16 percent.

**Table 2: Frequency and mean distribution of Demographic Data**

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>SEX</b>				
Male	57	47	1.609524	.4901969
Female	64	53		
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
SSCE	22	18		
ND/NCE	4	3.3		
B.A/BSC	76	63		
Masters/PhD	19	16		

### Research Question One: What are the perceived functions that the media should perform in the society?

To address the research question, there was the need to ascertain perceived function the media should perform in the society. To do this, items 3, 4 and 5 in the questionnaire were used. The result indicate that, majority of the respondents perceive the major function of the media to be a voice to the voiceless ( $M=3.831776$ ). Other functions that the media should perform include challenging the powers that be ( $M=3.364486$ ) and setting the political agenda ( $M=3.579439$ ). See table 3 below.

**Table 3: Perception of the dominant function of the media in the society**

S/N	ITEM	Mean	Std. Dev.
3	Challenging the powers that be	3.364486	1.192686
4	Sets the political agenda	3.579439	1.165846
5	A voice to the voiceless	3.831776	1.161375



**Research Question Two: Which professional roles were perceived to have dominated media coverage of the 2014 national conference?**

Having ascertained the major role that respondents perceived the media should play in the society, items 6, 7 and 8 were used to examine the professional roles of the media that predominantly displayed in the coverage of the 2014 national conference. Table 3 above shows an upward trend with regard to the perception of media professional role in Nigeria's national conference. For instance, among other options, the option that indicated *media were objective reporters* received strong statistical support (M=3.757009, Std. D. .9401036), than other options such as (ii) *media were just disseminators of information* (M=3.579439, Std. D. 1.055421) and (iii) *media were neutral reporters* (M=3.490566, Std. D.9782909).

**Table 4: Perception of professional roles dominated media coverage of 2014 confab**

S/N	ITEM	Mean	Std. Dev.
6	Journalists were just disseminators of information	3.579439	1.055421
7	Journalists were objective reporters	3.757009	.9401036
8	Journalists were neutral reporters	3.490566	.9782909

**Research Question three: To what extent was the media perceived as performing surveillance and watchdog roles in the reportage of the 2014 national conference?**

To analyse respondents' perception of media surveillance and watchdog roles in the 2014 national conference, items, 9, 10 and 11 on the questionnaire were analysed.

The result in Table five below shows the extent of the surveillance and watchdog roles in performed by the media in the coverage of the national constitutional conference, *Journalists monitor politicians and policy makers* (M.=3.719626, Std.D. 1.044251), *Journalists decide what citizens heard during the national conference* (M=3.485981, Std.D. 1.312958) and *Journalists draw attention to what policy should be addressed in the country* (M=3.785047, Std. D..9812202). These shows that, *Journalists monitor politicians and policy makers*, had the ost extent

**Table 5: Perception of surveillance and watchdog role**

S/N	ITEM	Mean	Std. Dev.
9	Journalists monitor politicians and policy makers	3.719626	1.044251
10	Journalists decide what citizens hear during the national conference.	3.485981	1.312958
11	Journalists draw attention to what policy should be addressed in the country	3.785047	.9812202

**Research Question four: What was the extent to which the media in their coverage of the 2014 national conference were seen as promoting good governance?**

In order to determine the extent to which the media were perceived to have contributed to promoting good governance, items 12, 13 and 14 were analysed.

As the result show in table 6 below, the perception among the people with regards to media's performance in promoting good governance was as follows: *media promoted equal rights* (M=3.813084, Std.D..8256597); *media promoted transparency* (M=3.542056, Std.D..9740053); *media promoted due process* (M=3.542056, Std.D .7825689). This indicates that, *media promoted equal rights* had the highest perception among the respondents.

**Table 6: Perception of media coverage and the promotion of good governance**

S/N	ITEM	Mean	Std. Dev.
12	Media promoted equal rights	3.813084	.8256597
13	Media promoted transparency	3.542056	.9740053
14	Media promoted due process	4.028037	.7825689

**Research Question five: What was the extent to which the media were perceived as promoting national interest during the coverage of 2014 national conference?**

Items 15, 16 and 17 in the research instrument were used to determine the extent the media were perceived to have promoted national interest in the coverage of the 2014 national conference. As shown in table seven, *the media focused on sustaining unity*, had the highest extent of statistical value (M=4.028037, Std. D.1.239735). Other perceptions with regard to whether promoted national interest include: *the media focused more on regional issues* (M =3.224299, Std. D. 1.199909) and, *the media favoured regionalism* (M-3.009346, Std. D. 1.185568);

**Table 7: Perception of media on promoting national interest**

S/N	ITEM	Mean	Std. Dev.
15	The media focused more on regional issues	3.224299	1.199909
16	The media favoured regionalism	3.009346	1.185568
17	Focused on sustaining unity	4.028037	1.239735

**Correlation Test**

Since respondents' gender and level of education were important demographic variables in this study, it was imperative to examine how the two variables (gender and education) were related to how the respondents perceived the media's role in promoting good governance and national interest. See table 8.

**Table 8: Correlation Test Coefficients of Sex and Education against indicators of promoting good governance and national interest**

Variables	Gender	Education
Gender	1.0000	
Edu	0.2104	1.0000
Powers	-0.2735	-0.0034
Agenda	-0.0800	0.0640
Voice	-0.1009	-0.0484
Diseminators	0.0448	0.1251
Objective	-0.0445	0.0402
Neutral	-0.1906	0.0269
Monitor	-0.0505	-0.2576
Decide	-0.1585	-0.1669
Draw	-0.0040	-0.0315
Rights	-0.1368	0.0415
Transparency	-0.0826	0.1249
Due process	0.0745	0.1199
Focus Region	-0.0554	-0.1634
Favoured	-0.0177	-0.1672
Sustain Unity	0.0377	0.0140

The result in table 8 shows that, when respondents' gender and level of education interacted with indicators of good governance and national interest, a differential trend was observed, which indicated that there was strong positive association or correlation between gender and education and, respondents' perception of media promotion of good governance and national interest. In the same vein, weak and negative relationships were also observed in other variables. These relationships were indicative of none constant absoluteness in respondents' perception of the media as promoting good governance and national interest.

**Discussion of Findings**

This study examined how the media were perceived in the coverage of the 2014 Nigeria national conference. A total of 17 questions containing demographic and psychographic variables regarding how the media were perceived based on their professional roles, were determined. The study had five objectives, which focused on: Questions the dominant role media are perceived to play in the society, professional roles of the media that dominated the coverage of the 2014 national conference as well as the extent surveillance and watchdog roles of the media were performed. Also, the study determined whether the media promoted good governance and national interest. Findings showed that majority of the respondents indicated that media played roles in the coverage that were in congruence with those in the literature constituting mass media functions in the society (Okon, 2013). The mean values of all the parameters were above the benchmark mean value of 3.0. This was indicative of professionalism by the media in the coverage of the national conference in 2014 as is contained in the works of (Evetts, 2014).

According to Evetts, the mass media are expected to bring relevant and timely information necessary for citizens to make sense of the day to day happenstances that affect their life. Given this scenario, it is important to note that the issues discussed during the national conference had great importance for good governance and national unity.

Since role expectation differs from role performance, the second task of the study was to analyse perception of how the professional role of the media was reflected in the coverage of the 2014 national conference. Result showed that, the perceived professional functions of the media include: *media were just disseminators of information, media were objective reporters, media were neutral reporters*. This indicates that the media performed their professional roles according to role expectations as contained in McNair (2006). This is also reflected in Ekpu's view:

How they cover controversial issues such as ethnicity, religion, structure of government, resource control, fiscal federation, rotational presidency, devolution of powers, etc., goes a long way to determining Nigeria's existence as a country (Credited to Ray Ekpu in the *Encomium*, 2014).

Another task which this study engaged in was to determine the extent the media were perceived as performing their surveillance and watchdog role in the reportage of the 2014 national conference. Findings showed that, among the indicators for surveillance and watchdog role, the option that had statistical support was, was most prominent “the media drew attention to what policy should be addressed in the country”. This was indicative of media contribution to national discourse as the fourth estate of the realm by setting the agenda for policy action. This points to Bernard Cohen's (1964) debate on how the media set the agenda in the public space. However, (Jebril, 2013), in a study that examined media performance in the coverage of political issues, found dissatisfaction in public's perception of political coverage by the media.

Also, the study was concerned with ascertaining how the media were perceived with regard to promoting good governance. The study found that among others, such as, promoting transparency and promoting equal rights, the media were prominently seen as promoting due process.

Finally, the study was also burdened with the responsibility of ascertaining whether the media were perceived as promoting national interest as against other variables such as “the media focused more on regional issues” and “the media favoured regionalism”. However, the majority of the opinion was that the media focused on sustaining unity. This finding supports what is expected of the media in a plural society. In fact, extant literature such as: McNair, 2006; Ekpu, 2014; Jebril, 2013; Ndolo, 2006; and Moemeka, 2012; contend that the media ought to be partners in progress in mobilizing and uniting and integrating the citizenry. This is vividly captured in the admonition of Ray Ekpu to Journalists who had been invited to cover the national conference in 2014:

The general expectation was that democracy would rekindle generation of more wealth and more equitability of the national resources. The reason was that a more responsible and accountable political leadership would operate on the bases of consensus, consultation and ensure wider political participation, which is a virtue of citizenship as well. I would like journalists-*in covering the conference*-to show extreme sensitivity about the tough issues that this Conference will have to deal with

(Emphases mine) (Credited to Ray Ekpu in the *Encomium*, 2014).

He stated further:

Show a little more sensitivity to the wrangling, the flashes of temper, the disputations and the partisan oratory that you may experience in the coverage of the Conference. You will be contributing your own quota to the efforts that the Conference will be making to solidify the unity, cohesion and integration of the country” (Credited to Ray Ekpu in the *Encomium*, 2014).

Right from the onset of this paper, it has been established that the Nigerian national conferences were meant to address the issues threatening the Nigerian state and as result, they are important governance strategies. However, achieving a united and stable political system is still a serious challenge to the Nigerian state and all hands are required to participate in realizing this objective. The media's role is very vital to the process. As a divided society with multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, the task of nation building is quite daunting. The Nigerian polity has been inundated with complaints of marginalization, inequitable distribution of resources and power, and official injustice. The various outcries by several groups such as: Niger Delta Avengers, MEND, MASSOB, IPOB and the recent AREWA youth Ultimatum to Igbos in the North, all point to this fact. Consequently, various sub-nationalities, ethno-religious groups, opposition parties and other fringe interests have unrelentingly called for the convocation of national conferences to address the sectional grievances.

Given the issues discussed in this paper so far, it is clear that national conferences ought to provide the Greek-like-citizenry-forum for deliberation among the polity, while the media is expected to provide the modern public sphere platform for such discourses to thrive and be sustained. Hence, it is arguable that modern public sphere which strengthens contemporary forms of democratic governance requires widespread public access to multiple pluralistic sources of information and communication; and equal opportunities for inclusive participation and voice within civil society. The media fits so well into the narrative and frame of the institution to realize these objectives.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the media has a role to play in producing an informed public and an informed public is a sine qua non for actionable policies. In this study, it was shown that the media was perceived as fulfilling their expected roles in the coverage of the 2014 national conference. It is therefore important that the media continue in this light. Every aspect of the media discourse can be regarded as necessary although not sufficient pre-conditions for a flourishing public sphere. These debates are pertinent for the development of rational and informed public opinion. The findings of this study have overarching implications for the mass media social responsibility scholarship, especially in a pluralist society like Nigeria. The responsibility on the media is high. In very simplistic terms this paper recommends that the watchdog should continue to watch itself. Not so much as for self-censorship in fear of political backlash but for the sake that in watching itself the media institution ensures that they continue to be the agents of positive change in the society.

**Acknowledgement:** I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Jemal Ahmed of the Mekelle University, Ethiopia. My interaction with him at the time of researching and writing of this paper was quite enriching.

## REFERENCES

- Ajayi, K. (2006). From the demand for sovereign national conference to national dialogue: The dilemma of the Nigerian. *Studies in Tribes Tribals*, 4(2): pp. 123-130.
- Evetts, J. (2014). The concept of professionalism: Professional work, professional practice and learning. *International Book on Research and Practiced Based Learning*.
- Ibidapo-Obe, O. (2014). Resolutions of the national conference: panacea for socio-political stability and technological development of Nigeria. *Keynote address at the 2014 professor Barth Nnaji Biennial series at the Enugu state University of Science and Technology, Agbani, Enugu state*
- Jebril, N. (2013). Is watchdog journalism satisfactory journalism? *A Cross-National Study of Public Satisfaction With Political Coverage*. Reuter's institute for Journalism
- Lukpata, V. (2013). National interest and national development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research (ijpamr)*, 2 (1).
- Mba, C. (2015). *Credibility of social media as alternative news sources: An evaluative study*. Unpublished Masters Project, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
- McNair, B. (2006). *Introduction to political communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Ndolo, I. (2006). *Mass media and society*. Enugu: Genesis Books.
- Odozi, E. (2014). Journalism education and media practices in Nigeria: a conflict analysis. *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics, and Management Studies*, 2 (6).
- Okon, G. (2013). National security and journalism practice-emerging considerations for Nigerian Journalists. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (4): 1-5. December 2013
- Okoro, E. (2013). The media, development communication, and governance in Nigeria: the press for national integration. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences November 2013, vol. 3, no. 11*
- Olukoju, A. (2014). The national conference: The germane issues. *The Third Rufus Okikiola Ositelu Foundation (roof) Keynote lecture*. Saturday, March 1, 2014
- Orike, C. (2014). *The 2014 Nigerian national conference: Facts Nigerians should know*. [www.cdorike-oracle.com](http://www.cdorike-oracle.com) Retrieved 15-6-2015.
- Tenuche, M. (2011). Revisiting the national political reform conference (NPRC) (2005) and the national question in Nigeria. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(1): 37-48.
- Tomm-Jack, Y. (2015). *Influence of clinic matters (a TV drama programme) on health behaviour of rivers state residents*. Unpublished Masters Project, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

### **Online News Sources**

- Sahara Reporters (June 6, 2017). *Northern youths declare war on Igbos in the North: Ask them to leave within three months*. [www.saharareporters.com](http://www.saharareporters.com) Retrieved 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.
- Vanguard Newspapers (May 30, 2017). *IPOB sit at home order: Why I won't go out on May 30*. [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com) Retrieved 15<sup>th</sup> July 2017