

**COMMUNICATION,  
MEDIA AND POWER  
RELATIONS IN A  
MULTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY:**

**CONTEXT, ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES  
FOR DEVELOPMENT**

**COMMUNICATION, MEDIA AND  
POWER RELATIONS IN A  
MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY:**

**Context, Issues and Perspectives  
for Development**

*Edited by*

**Armstrong A. Idachaba, Phd  
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**ACSPN Book Series 8:  
Communication, Media and Power Relations in a Multicultural Society:  
Context, Issues and Perspectives for Development**

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**W**e acknowledge the support of the leadership team of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria led by Prof Umaru Pate for the opportunity given to the editors to edit this series of ACSPN books.

We also acknowledge the diligence of the authors who endeavoured to make necessary corrections based on the comments from the editors. Your cooperation enabled us to turn out a resource material which we believe would serve scholars and professionals in the field of media and communication in Nigeria and beyond.

We appreciate the diligence of the ACSPN Secretariat in meeting the deadline for this publication and the support of Prof Adebayo Fayoyin who further reviewed the material for quality.

We are hopeful that you will all find this material useful both in scholarship and practice.

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## FOREWORD

**T**his unique bundle of complex dissection and derivative solutions to many societal challenges could not have come at a better time than now. The tested and trusted team of academics, public and private sector practitioners did well by working together for impactful analysis, model application and continuation made simple for other willing researchers and users of such a rare print. It speaks directly with power.

Both chapterisation and sectional arrangement display a superior argument made up of understanding, wit to share and prowess to convince. It is a clearer layout of multi-variables condensed for joint defence against a variety of joint attacks challenging society. The 15 chapters showcase the impact of one variable against/and in favour of each other variable in addition to showcasing the totality of the contending variables in an attempt to unbundle multi-cultural society for a good treatment.

This work is a package of leadership and governance tools. Its heavy leaning on comparative leadership, governance and the global-village reality of living today is one of the daily doses of leadership-followership continuous interactions. The book remains one of the most needed for better mastery of leadership communication, followership reinforcement, power negotiation, culture dissecting, media husbandry and credible decision-making in any sphere or terrain. It is, no doubt, a portable change management resource for both individuals and groups when it comes to leadership, governance, entrepreneurship, global village engagement and corporate succession. It is indeed a global theatre of operational wisdom.

Aside from addressing the known oasis and valleys of media and communication challenges, a good deal of fight for human rights and fight against corruption occupy a good space. Readers and users will enjoy a lot of new ideas such as media literacy, spicing discourses, and practical cases with detailed information making the book different from prose or mere fiction.

I sincerely recommend the book to every Nigerian or at least a copy to every family. It will make us change to being better followers or leaders and of course global citizens. It is also a pathway to becoming communication coaches.

**Rotimi Oladele, PhD: FNIPR**

Immediate Past President, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR)



Today as ever, the ubiquitous nature of communication is a settled matter. The saturation of the media in our lives is no more open to debates. And we can all affirm that most modern societies are characterised by diversity and multiculturalism. In every diverse and multicultural society, power and power relations are witnessed or experienced, on one hand, for the collective growth, and mutual co-existence of different entities (cultural, ethnic and religious) within the geographical space. On the other hand, the instrumentality of power and power relations has also been witnessed in many diverse climes as the root that stemmed their discord, disunity, disintegration and retarded development. Beyond the national lens, the instrumentality of power and power relations also permeates the micro level of human existence as witnessed in several organisations, multinational corporations, government departments and agencies.

The Nigerian example of multiculturalism and power relations, with its consequential devastations, has been an issue of great concern since after independence in 1960. The country has witnessed heaps of upheavals occasioned by the inability to manage our diversity. Consequently, it has made our quest for development almost a mirage! Conversely, diversity, multiculturalism, divergence and heterogeneity should be seen as strengths and catalysts that propel development in societies. Unfortunately, Nigeria's experience has proved otherwise mainly for failure to manage power/power relations properly at both macro and micro levels of the leadership system. In managing diversity and multiculturalism within the purview of power relations for sustainable development in Nigeria, therefore, the place of communication and media is inevitable.

Communication, media and power relations in a multicultural society: Context, issues and perspectives for development, a new volume, released from the stable of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), in its book series mandate, is one of the pragmatic efforts of the Association to contribute towards national development. ACSPN has, once again, achieved a lofty height in releasing this fine volume, which reflects deep and robust scholarship from Nigerian teachers, scholars, researchers and professionals in the field of communication and media studies. A critical x-ray of the fifteen-chapters volume spotlights one major strength; divergent views and diverse opinions from the contributors who were drawn from all regions of the country.

Furthermore, the scope of the book, which was designed into four major sections, viz: (i) public relations and power relations; (ii) social media, politics and governance; (iii) media, power and gender representations; and (iv) media, ethics and cultural representations, and laid out through fourteen titles, enjoyed an in-depth treatment, contemporary arguments, critical thoughts and sophisticated analysis from each author. This effort will illuminate the mind of readers, who will be positioned to better appreciate the interplay of communication and power relations in a multicultural society like Nigeria.

The authors have adopted a scientific approach to dwell extensively on some of the issues addressed. These issues include but are not limited to, the place of public relations in power relations with a focus on the PESO MODEL, the explication of dominant coalition in power relations from the perspective of public relations, the interrelatedness of social media in promoting national integration in Nigeria and detonation of fake news embedded in photography through the application of media literacy. Both the focus and approach adopted by the authors are spices that garnished the contents of this book to the admiration of readers. Other issues, addressed by this volume, that readers will



particularly find interesting, are power relations on gender issues, the interplay of media ownership in power relations, the ethical dimension versus power relations in a multicultural Nigeria, and communication in power relations versus the dilemmas of one country, many voices and freedom of expression.

No doubt, the release of this book by ACSPN has filled an important gap in the pool of literature in the area of communication, media and multiculturalism as well as power, power relations and multiculturalism within the broad spectrum of Development Communication. Therefore, ACSPN is commended for yet another giant stride and congratulated, for being consistent with its vision, to support the process of shaping communication scholarship, training and practice in Nigeria whilst complementing the works of other bodies with similar aims and building on the potentials of the field of communication in Nigeria, conscious of the needs of the country for critical inputs from communication scholars and professionals to shape a future that will promote growth and development. h

With no iota of hesitation, I strongly recommend this book as a major resource for students, teachers, researchers in the field of communication and media studies and professionals in the media industry. This book will also be a valuable asset and a good companion to leaders/executives in corporate organisations and government agencies. With its lucidity and robustness, readers will have no regret they bought and engaged this book.

I profoundly thank the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN) for this rare privilege to pen the foreword for this book, a unique project in the book series of ACSPN as it marked its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

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# OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION, MEDIA AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

***Oludare Ebenezer OGUNYOMBO***



**T**he relationship between media, communication, and power is largely a result of how these three concepts are employed to convey power. The multiplicity of communication and media tools has given rise to a multitude of interactive communication as people use them more frequently to develop power relations by attempting to dominate communication and media narratives in favour of their position. More than ever, the diversity of our society has been highlighted, with more emphasis on having a multicultural mindset in our approaches to how we relate and communicate our ideas for coexisting peacefully in a society where there are rapid cross-cultural exchanges. According to Takwa (2017), multiculturalism is “the coexistence of diverse cultures, where culture includes ethnic, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, *cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles*” (p. 8). Therefore, conceptually, multiculturalism should provide the impetus for an expanded perspective on issues.

Unfortunately, there are indications that much success has not been recorded in this area due to a perceived lack of trust among the players. Particularly sad is the role of the media

which has often been accused as an amplifier of the discordant tunes being played by the power actors. As a result, ethnically motivated power struggles have pervaded many societies across the world. Power diversity, a component that has been largely championed to sustain societal harmony to some extent, is still far-fetched as existing actors seem to have perpetuated themselves in power. The rise of right-wing commentators, groups, and ethnic nationalities that make the most of media and communication tools to create a new public sphere where power struggles can occur reflects fears and leads to new conflicts over influence and control in a multicultural society.

Again, the 'giant strides' of social media have put many editors on their toes as they cannot afford to blink while citizen journalists take the floor in providing 'timely' information to the people, albeit, largely unprofessionally done. This new public sphere found across the different social media platforms has, expectedly, been the conversation space for citizens in a multicultural society who would not go to sleep without satisfying their thirst for information that soothes their cultural divide. Thus, ethnic nationalities and interest groups are gaining strength by utilizing the many communication and media outlets available for the promotion and protection of ethnic, regional, religious, and other minority interests- a dangerous place to be by all ramifications.

If the foregoing overview is allowed to subsist, then what appears a lofty description of multiculturalism by Ravi and Pallavi (2017) may be lost in our thinking. Ravi and Pallavi described multiculturalism as,

The cultural diversity of communities where two or more community merges with each other for establishing a new community. In this, the various streams of world cultures combine to form new currents of human interactions, a global perspective and the development of a multicultural person. The perspective and worldview of a multicultural person transcend the indigenous culture developed from complex social, political, economic and educational interactions. Such a person had an international frame of reference rather than specific knowledge or interest in global affairs. Here, cultural diversity can be understood by knowing the term global culture. An ideal global culture is one where the voices of all cultures and people are heard with equal clarity, where no culture should over-shadow one another and where pride in one's own culture only increases respect for the cultures of others; and the diversity of cultures would express different visions of the world (p.2).

The conversation around creating a *multicultural person* has led to more concerns raised on how power relations play out in the quest for balance in relationships. Although power relations have been described by IAC (2020) as “the interactions between different groups in a society (and) the ability of one group or a person to control others, and they exist at all levels of society”, hope should not be lost on the desired state of multiculturalism as processed by Ravi et al (2017). What that means is that there must be a level playground where *adult conversations* can be held by parties in play to significantly address social, political, economic and cultural issues. Such a playground is that presented by the media.

For instance, in an earlier work on new media, Chen (2012) stated that,

With its distinctive features, new media has brought human society to a highly interconnected and complex level, but at the same time, it challenges the very

existence of human communication in the traditional sense. New media not only influences the form and content of information/messages, but it also affects how people understand each other in the process of human communication, especially for those from different cultural or ethnic groups. (p.3)

Without a doubt, the media have wielded enough power in society and will continue to wield even more. If parties demonstrate a good understanding of culture as “a set of learnt or shared beliefs, traditions and customs which are common to a group of people living together for a long period” and “the total way of life of the people pinches majority on norms, values and the relationships they enter into the productions of their material existence”, they are more likely to use the media to communicate their issues responsibly because “the media have a significant impact on how culture is documented, serve as historical resources, give directions, and essentially act as socialization tools” (Aniekan, 2022).

In dealing with the media as a socialisation tool, Howarth (2011) explained that effective use of the media can endear social representation. In that context, social representation was defined as “a system of common values, ideas and practices that enable people to understand each other and communicate about similar issues. It also involves a degree of subjective interpretation that leads to differences in understanding, different readings of texts and therefore the motivation to communicate”.

However, perspectives on how the media plays this role leave more to be desired regarding people's expectations, particularly in a multicultural society. For example, Karikari (2022) reviewing the situation on the African continent observed that “though the mass media have generally been assumed to have contributed to social and political progress since their introduction into Africa, in most societies their function as institutions for community self-expression and cultural self-assertion appears to have been less than complementary”. Earlier, Owolabi (2017) advised that “the media, through its power of advocacy, can take the attention of the feuding parties away from issues that tend to divide them to those that bind them together and guarantee their joint future”.

One of the issues challenging the role of the media in a multicultural society as identified in some previous works like Curran (2002) is that of who and how the media is controlled. Curran in presenting a pluralist view of the media stated that,

The pluralists see society as a complex of competing groups and interests, none of them predominant all of the time. Media organizations are seen as bounded organizational systems, enjoying an important degree of autonomy from the state, political parties and institutionalized pressure groups. Control of the media is said to be in the hands of an autonomous managerial elite who allow a considerable degree of flexibility to media professionals...Audiences are seen as capable of manipulating the media in an infinite variety of ways according to their prior needs and dispositions and as a consequence of having access to what Halloran (1977) calls 'the plural values of society' enabling them to 'conform, accommodate or reject'. (p.108)

Suffice it to note that in the context of communication and messaging in a multicultural society, the intended meaning between the encoder and the decoder may suffer a significant loss in fidelity because individuals may have to interpret based on their cultural

inclination. These cultural inclinations are often entrenched and many have been sustained over the years thereby making a change sometimes difficult. Howarth (2011) noted that when messages are encoded in the symbols and nuances of one culture, such expressions may not be available in the culture of the receiver who is expected to decode and act on the message to satisfy the intention of the sender. This is because “when a message reaches the culture where it is to be decoded, it undergoes a transformation in which the influence of the decoding culture becomes a part of the message meaning. The meaning content of the original message becomes modified during the decoding phase of intercultural communication because the culturally different repertory of communicative behaviour and meanings possessed by the decoder does not contain the same cultural meanings possessed by the encoder”. (p.4) Such claims of cultural difference frequently elicit a variety of barriers to effective communication, including exaggerated claims of difference/similarity, anxious feelings regarding difference, and prejudiced views.

There must be some degree of knowledge and connection for communication to be effective. Understanding the intersubjective formation of cultural differences and how to use differences to forge common ground rather than create barriers to successful discussion and intracultural relationships are crucial skills in multicultural settings. We must familiarize ourselves with and respect the practices of other cultures if we are to accomplish this. Understanding what it's like to be in the position of another person and navigating the other person's emotional maze is a prerequisite for effective communication. Knowing others helps us understand ourselves better and lessens our tendency to denigrate other cultures. To reduce cultural generalizations, which are frequently problematic because all cultures are incredibly complex and diverse and because cultural identities are dynamic, longer interactions in multicultural settings have also been recommended. Therefore, effective communication requires a knowledge of the fundamentally intracultural nature of identity. (Howarth, 2011)

The fundamental knowledge needed for managing communication and power relations in a multicultural society cut across the activities of the media and it also includes that of individuals, government, non-governmental organisations, corporate and multinational organisations, civil society organisations, ethnic groups etc. This book has been sectioned into four thematic areas which address the context, issues and perspectives on the subject matter. Section one has two papers that treat how public relations has been deployed in managing power relations for private and public institutions in a multicultural setting. Section two has four papers that highlighted issues on social media, politics and governance within the context of national integration, government policies, power relations and media literacy in a multicultural society. Section three focuses on media, power and gender representation. The three papers in the section discuss harmful practices against women in power relations, perceptions of gender representation and communication cultural practices in a multicultural society. In section four, the focus is on media, ethics and cultural representation. The four papers under the section examine issues and perspectives on media ownership, media ethics, communicating separatist agitations, media acculturation and the dilemma of media and freedom of communication in a multicultural society.

In Chapter 1, a case of how multinationals handle power relations using public relations as a tool was examined. The author investigated how power relations in the MTN Nigeria SIM registration crisis were handled by interviewing public relations professionals who

managed the crisis and thereby served as key informants in the study. The application of the PESO Integrated Media Model was identified as a major intervention used in stakeholders' management planning, and to discipline and curate narratives on the crisis in favour of MTN Nigeria and toned-down negative narratives which occurred as a result of intense power relations. Although issues such as fixed mindsets, poor media literacy, source credibility and the nature of the fine faced challenged how the PESO integrated media model was applied, the author concluded that the success recorded with the fine reduction to the satisfaction of all parties involved made the application of the model reasonable.

The author in Chapter 2 examined how the power play of *dominant coalitions* which represent groups of individuals and top management in an organization interferes with the activities of public relations professionals in ministries, departments and agencies in Nigeria. The study concluded that the dominant coalitions do not allow for diversity in their approach to public relations as well as how they engage public relations professionals. The dynamics of social media engagement as a tool for the promotion of national integration was the focus of the discussion in Chapter 3. The authors, using Nigeria as a case study, investigated the social media platforms that are frequently used for promoting national integration, the elements of national integration that are frequently discussed on social media platforms among Nigerians and the social media messages that are predominantly used in promoting national integration. The consumption pattern and feelings of the users were also examined. The study found that WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter, in that order, are the top social media platforms used among Nigerians in the promotion of national integration. Political integration, followed by religious integration, ethnic integration, economic integration, and cultural integration are major aspects of national integration which are promoted on social media in Nigeria. However, the author's conclusion that the respondents do not find social media messages on national integration favourable and without positive influence in their view may be of interest to future studies.

In Chapter 4, the influence of social media on how people receive and perceive government policies was investigated. Objectives set out in the study include determining the level of audience exposure to social media content on government policies and activities, examining the nature of social media content on government policies and activities, evaluating audience perception of the influence of social media content on government policies and activities and examine the attitude of the audience towards the use of social media for building an inclusive and hate-free democratic society. The study concluded that social media platforms are popular means through which people are exposed to information about government policies and the platforms provide a veritable avenue for citizen-government engagement. Although it was noted in the study that often, information about government policies could be false vis-à-vis the seldom expression of hate speech by social media users, the platforms can be used to checkmate government excesses in terms of policy formulation and execution since the citizens are always kept abreast of the developments.

The authors in Chapter 5 carried out a critical discourse analysis of the relationship between social media and power relations using the Twitter ban in Nigeria as a case study. In their discourse, they were able to examine how some selected news sources use textual and linguistic clues to report the underlying debates regarding the Twitter ban in Nigeria and interrogate the discursive and social practices that influenced the news sources'



attitudes on the matter. The study found that both the local and international reports have been offered from some similar sociopolitical arguments, that the suspension was wrong and will have implications on political participation and freedom of expression. The discursive practice noted is that since the news sources are available online, it is not difficult to explain why all the analyzed news articles have been observed to have discursively described the Twitter suspension in Nigeria as somewhat excessive and authoritarian.

Given the challenges associated with social media as a tool for socialization, the author in Chapter 6 advocated for media literacy as a panacea for managing fake news online. The paper focused on media literacy for identifying fake pictures and other graphics that are often deployed by mischief makers to create doubts, ethnic bias and prejudice which sometimes lead to crises and conflicts in a multicultural society. The paper used the Bloom taxonomy to explain the levels of knowledge that can help social media users navigate the curve of fake pictorial representations, including the use of software.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 examined issues around power relations and gender representation in a multicultural society. Starting with harmful practices which expose female journalists to excessive dangers in their duty, the author in Chapter 7 was able to establish that many female journalists have demonstrated courage and diligently completed their tasks even in the face of serious issues such as covering the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria. The successes recorded in the opinion of the author should serve as a reference point in the argument that women can hardly survive dangerous terrain, particularly in a multicultural society. The author in Chapter 8 took the argument further by examining the extent to which media reports encourage general and gender stereotypes and discrimination. The paper also investigated if the macho-newsroom culture in journalism practice is the reason for biased media reports of females vis-à-vis the reason why fewer women practice journalism. Findings from the study showed that although the media partially accentuate stereotypes and discrimination against the female gender in society, the macho newsroom culture in journalism practice is not responsible for biased media reports against women. The paper also concluded that while the factors responsible for fewer women in journalism could differ among societies and cultures, the factors include culture, marriage, religion, career prospects, macho newsroom, interest, laziness, nature of work, stereotypes, poor remuneration, health issues, and internal politics. The case of widowhood communication which was explored in Chapter 9 gave insight into another class of gender representation that requires attention in a multicultural society like Nigeria.

The final section of the book discussed how media ownership and ethics determine the nature of power relations in the media vis-à-vis perspectives on what is right or wrong in media representation within the context of the many voices and media freedom in a multicultural society. In Chapter 10, the author subjected the interplay between media ownership and power relations to a critical review and concluded that the interplay of media ownership with a power play in a multicultural setting has become a major complication in the course of media effective arbitration to engender unity and progress. To ameliorate this challenge, the author in Chapter 11 strongly advocated for operational conditioning that would enable journalists to abide by the ethics of the profession to effectively play their role in a multicultural society that relies heavily on fair and balanced reportage from the media to operate. For instance, the authors in Chapter 12 explored how the “sit-at-home” messages of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in South Eastern Nigeria have

gained traction in the media and compliance among people living in the region. The paper concluded that IPOB's call for people to stay home had a real influence on the people of Southeastern Nigeria. It is plausible to argue that the message, in a wider sense, accomplished its intended purpose and that the Southeast's targeted population largely complied. While this phenomenon lies in the space of communication and power relations, the role of the media cannot be jettisoned.

Such a role, particularly in the area of acculturation is what the authors in Chapter 13 explored. While the media play a major role in providing entertainment for the people, the authors examined how such entertainment can become a tool in communicating culture vis-à-vis acculturation in a multicultural environment using the "Dance-Africa-Dance" reality show as a case study. The authors found and concluded that three themes viz cultural harmony, entertainment value and projection of African culture defined the perceptions of the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show among the respondents. They noted that the media narratives surrounding the "Dance Africa Dance", are an attempt to use a fusion of Indian and African dance styles as entertainment and a way of promoting cultural diversity. The last chapter could be described as a compendium of issues that must be addressed particularly from the African perspective. The author created a trajectory of African media and communities building on past experiences to relate today's perspectives on how Africans should communicate for progress and build an endearing comity of nations. In this discourse, the role of the media cannot be discarded although the author noted that the media has often failed to live up to the expectation of the people, particularly in a pluralistic context. The challenge however is for Africans to define their being in the comity of nations, decipher what works and what does not in the context of culture and the peculiar nature of the continent with the hope that they will communicate better for their progress, well-being and welfare.



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**SECTION 1:**  
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND  
POWER RELATIONS



# PUBLIC RELATIONS AND POWER RELATIONS MANAGEMENT WITH *PESO INTEGRATED MEDIA MODEL* IN THE CASE OF MTN NIGERIA SIM REGISTRATION CRISIS

***Oludare Ebenezer OGUNYOMBO***



## **Introduction**

In a crisis, power relations become an important component of resolution. For multi-national organisations that operate in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious or highly secular society, crisis management usually takes a multi-dimensional approach. It would not be out of place to agree that in a multi-faceted society like Nigeria, the public relations professional handling such a crisis must be vast, versed and nimble in making recommendations for intervention vis-à-vis strategically executing such recommendations to achieve the desired objectives and goals.

According to IAC (2020), “Power relations are the interactions between different groups in a society. Power relations are the ability of one group or a person to control others, and they exist at all levels of society”. Further operationalising the concept of power relations, Basden (n.d) explained that:

Power relations are relationships in which one person has social-formative power over another, and can get the other person to do what they wish (whether

by compelling obedience or in some less compulsive and even more subtle way). Relationships are the generated objects that result from social functioning. Power relationships are such social objects in which power is operative by the nature of the relationship; usually, this combines a measure of authority with the formative ability to have a desired effect on the other person.

Basden's description of power relations typifies what a public relations expert desires to achieve when handling a crisis. Since power relationships as a social object combine a measure of authority with the formative ability to have a desired effect on the other person, the ultimate goal of the strategic engagement of a public relations professional in crisis management is to influence the party or parties to achieve a positive effect in line with the set objective for such an engagement, which often is attaining an amicable resolution. Hallan (cited in Heath, 2013) agreed with this assertion in the classification of the seven paradigmatic models of processes presently used in public relations practice. The sixth category of the classification is the *social problems paradigm* which focuses on "public relations' response to political or sociological problems and/or opportunities and how practitioners deal with power relationships in society" (Heath, 2013, p.70).

All societies have power relations. Power relations occur in interpersonal interactions, within a group, and at greater sizes. They may also be connected to things like gender, social status, and political affiliation. The likelihood of one group controlling another increases if several groups coexist. However, there are many different ways that a group might influence others. A group may occasionally exercise power in an unclear manner, failing to explicitly demonstrate its dominance over a subordinate group or group (Reference, 2020). Essien (2021) agreed that "power relations refers to relationships in which one person has social-formative power over another, and is able to get the other person to do what they wish whether by compelling obedience or in some less compulsive and even a more subtle way". Notably, within an organisation, power relations impact both initial access and continued access in the context of what is being sought after. Most time, the more powerful the organizations, corporations, government agencies and higher levels of state and federal government, the more difficult it is to access them when there is a need for discussion (Manning, 2005).

These dynamics are what a public relations expert must fully understand, particularly when handling a crisis. In the case of MTN Nigeria, the crisis that followed the imposition of the SIM registration fine on the company by the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) and the dynamics of the power relationship that existed provide a good case study of public relations and crisis management in Nigeria.

### **MTN Nigeria SIM Registration Fine- The Issues**

The advent of mobile telephony brought diversity into the socio-economic activities of Nigerians. In terms of employment generation, there has been an expanded avenue for startups and growing businesses. Samaila (2013) agreed that the increased teledensity created by the GSM led to job creation with the upspring of many "umbrella entrepreneurs" (i.e. kiosks owners) who sell SIM cards and call cards across the nooks and crannies of the country. Unfortunately, the steady growth noticed in the telecommunications sector has not gone without some challenges.

Aside from the task of ensuring quality service control, there are challenges of telecoms-related crimes. Kidnappers and terrorists like Boko Haram have consistently used GSM lines to track their victims and send criminal videos online. To curb this criminal trend in the use of telecoms infrastructure and services, the federal government of Nigeria directed that the various service providers must capture the biometric data of all telecoms subscribers. The Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), based on the recommendations from the Office of the National Security Adviser gave the directive in 2008. (Odunsi, 2015). Eventually, the process was launched in 2010 and to serve as a deterrent, a sum of N200,000.00 was agreed as the fine to be paid on each unregistered GSM line at the expiration of the deadline (The Report, 2016).

As of 2013 and months after the deadline for the SIM registration exercise, the telecom operators had not fully complied. Consequently, a combined fine of N53.8 million was imposed on the four mobile network operators (MNOs). MTN Nigeria received the highest fine of N29.2 million based on 146 pre-registered SIM cards that were found on its network at a fine of N200, 000 per user, based on the Telephone Subscribers Regulation (TSR) agreement (Oluoch & Motsoeneng, 2015).

Unfortunately, further development in June 2015, indicated that another 38.87 million users have not been adequately registered as directed by the NCC. Another round of registration was ordered, but this time with more stringent measures. An ultimatum of August 31, 2015, was given for all MNOs to comply. By early September 2015, another N120 million fine was imposed on the mobile network operators (MNOs) for failing to comply, with MTN Nigeria expectedly, having the largest percentage of the fine. However, the inability of security agencies to uncover the identity of the kidnappers of a former Federal Minister of Nigeria, Chief Olu Falae on his farm on September 21, 2015, became the last straw that broke the camel's back. Security investigations revealed that the kidnappers used an unregistered MTN SIM card because MTN Nigeria was unable to provide the data of the SIM card owner (Oluoch & Motsoeneng, 2015).

Disappointed at the negligence of MTN Nigeria on the SIM registration processes, the NCC on Monday, October 26, 2015, announced a fine of N1.4 trillion (US\$5.2 billion) to be paid by MTN Nigeria. The fine was for the 5.2 million improperly/unregistered subscribers found on the MTN network despite the twelve months extension. Other matters brought against MTN Nigeria by the NCC were the refusal of the company to give full access to its backend to ascertain compliance with the SIM registration exercise; the company's nonchalant attitude to attending NCC meetings in which it sends "low cadre" staff; partial attempt to bar unregistered SIM cards; and persistent violations of NCC directives. (Adepetun & Nelson, 2015; Odunsi, 2015; Opeyemi, 2015)

By the fine, MTN Nigeria became the telecommunications company with the largest single fine as of 2015. The others before them were Intel fined US\$1.45 billion in 2009 by the European Union for breaking competition laws and SIEMENS AG fined US\$1.6 billion by the United States and German government for bribing government officials (Plunkett, 2014).

The sequence of events that followed the imposition of the fine on MTN Nigeria depicted all the dynamics of power relations required to pull out an organisation in crisis. Analysing the political economy of the situation, it can be concluded that MTN Nigeria and its public

relations team would have a lot to deal with in the context of the crisis. Such political economy approaches include political dynamics to understand legislative politics, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, fiscal and monetary policies, international relations, ethnic conflict, decentralization and democratization (Acosta & Pettit, 2013); all of which transpired in the MTN Nigeria SIM registration fine case at one point or the other.

The immediate economic power effect took an international dimension with a drop in MTN Group shares at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) in South Africa. The next was a political move by MTN through a letter dated November 2, 2015, in which the Company admitted guilt and pleaded for leniency. The Chief Executive Officer of the MTN Group, Mr. Sifiso Dabengwa became the first major casualty as he resigned from his appointment on November 9, 2015, due to what he referred to as “the most unfortunate prevailing circumstances occurring at MTN Nigeria”. MTN's biggest shareholder, Investment Corporation has 16.6% shares and indeed other minor shareholder expressed their regret that MTN seems to have failed to anticipate the fine and take preventative actions (Adeyemi & Nelson, 2015; Odunsi, 2015; Ohuocha & Motsoeneng, 2015).

The situation delved into further political bereavement when the Nigerian Governors Forum (a body comprising the 36 state Governors in the Federal Republic of Nigeria) on November 19, 2015, declared its support for NCC's move to sanction MTN Nigeria for failing to disconnect the unregistered lines. They insisted that MTN Nigeria must pay the full amount and charged the Federal Government to ensure the full execution of the fine (Ugwuanyi, 2015).

Another twist as the event unfolds was the distrust expressed by shareholders and other stakeholders towards MTN South Africa when the Nigerian Chief Executive Officer, Mr Michael Ikpoki and the Head of its Regulatory and Corporate Affairs, Mr Akinwale Goodluck were “forced to resign”. The replacement of the CEO by Mr. Ferdi Moolman a non-Nigerian was perceived as a deliberate move by the South African company to reduce the chances of Nigerians in favour of non-Nigerians at the top positions in the company (Van Zyl, 2015; Okunola, 2015). However, because of overtures from MTN Nigeria, the NCC announced a reduction in the fine from \$5.2bn (N1.04trn) to \$3.2bn (N674bn) while it gave a deadline of December 31, 2015, for the payment to be made (Tijani, 2015).

The power tussle later took a legal dimension following the reduction with a class action instituted in a suit at a High Court in Abuja by a group of Nigerians led by a legal practitioner and civil rights activist, Barrister Timipa Okponipere claiming that the NCC erred by reducing the fine. The group asked the court to declare the decision as a breach of the trust of Nigerians (Udo, 2015). In another development, members of the House of Representatives of the Nigeria National Assembly raised concerns about the authority of the Federal government to reduce the fine without recourse to the NCC, the regulatory body that imposed the fine (Ndiomewese, 2016; Opejobi 2016).

Despite the reduction of 25%, MTN Nigeria also challenged and sued the Federal Government and the NCC stating that the fine although reduced, will diminish the profit of the company. The Company claimed that NCC as a regulator, cannot assume all the functions of the state on its own, considering that it made the regulation, prescribed the penalty and imposed the fine, payable to the commission and not to the federal government. MTN also claimed it was not afforded its constitutional right to a fair hearing



before a court of competent jurisdiction and, more importantly, it had not been found guilty of any offence that would warrant it to pay such “an outrageous fine”(Momoh, 2015; Ogebeche, 2016).

While MTN Nigeria's court case was going on, the Federal Government through the Attorney General of the Federation in another suit sought to restrict MTN Nigeria from transferring funds outside the country while the initial suit lasted. The plea of the Federal Government for a Mareva injunction [a request for a court order to freeze the assets of an organisation or individual] was granted on January 12, 2016, but with a caution that the initial suit should be quickly dispensed (“MTN Barred...”, 2016).

Eventually, on January 22, 2016, it was announced that MTN would have until March 18, 2016, to reach an out-of-court settlement with the Federal Government of Nigeria (Lefifi, 2016). On January 26, 2016, the Federal Government of Nigeria gave a condition for an out-of-court settlement to MTN Nigeria. The government requested that MTN Nigeria should withdraw its case against the government from the law court while hoping for President Muhammadu Buhari to approve a new deal for settlement (Amaefule, 2016). In compliance, MTN Nigeria, on February 24, 2016, withdrew the case from the law court and announced the payment of \$250 million (N50 billion) as an advance payment towards a reduced settlement. (“\$3.9bn Fine: MTN Pays”, 2016; “MTN Drops Lawsuit”, 2016; “N780 billion fine: MTN Pays”, 2016).

While many thought that a diplomatic intervention would immediately save the situation, the opposite became the case after the meeting between the President of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma and the President of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari. In a twist of political power relations, the meeting held on March 8, 2016, at the Federal Capital Territory Abuja unwittingly generated some controversies that the media immediately seized to create some sensational reports.

During President Zuma's visit, President Buhari noted that the non-compliance of MTN Nigeria with the NCC directives on SIM registration has contributed to crime, particularly the activities of terrorists in the country. President Buhari expressed his disdain at MTN Nigeria's court suit against the Federal Government rather than seeking further negotiation with the concerned agencies. (Tukur, 2016). The reaction of President Buhari may be seen as an action aimed at enforcing the sovereignty of Nigeria to protect its interest. Abia (2000) noted that “in the contemporary international political system, most of a nation's collective domestic and external goals (national interests) cannot be defended or achieved without influencing the behaviour of other states. This indicates that achievement of national interests is contingent upon the reactions and actions of other nation-states”.

Eventually, on June 10, 2016, MTN Nigeria and the NCC announced a final resolution. The fine was reduced to N330 billion. The reduced amount included the initial payment of N50 billion earlier made by MTN Nigeria to the government while the balance of N280 billion was made in six tranches within three years till May 31, 2019. Other conditions for settlement were: an apology letter from MTN Nigeria to the Federal Government of Nigeria and Nigerians within one month of the execution of the agreement. MTN Nigeria's subscription and compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance for the telecoms industry and MTN Nigeria listing on the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) as soon as it is commercially and legally possible (Okonji *et al.*, 2016).

After the resolution, media reports indicated that major stakeholders were satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations. The Chief Executive Officer of MTN Nigeria, Mr. Fred Moolman expressed the “apologies of the company for the series of unfortunate events that led to the imposition of the fine” given the importance and benefits of the ICT industry to all stakeholders and socio-economic growth in Nigeria. The MTN Group Executive Chairman, Mr Phutuma Nhleko “thanked the federal government for the spirit in which the matter was resolved”. Nhleko noted that the negotiation and its outcome are the best for the company, its stakeholders, the federal government and Nigerians, as MTN strengthens its relationship with the federal government and the NCC. The Executive Vice Chairman of the NCC, Prof. Umar Danbatta, also admitted that “the NCC was careful not to take decisions that were likely to cripple the business interest of the operators. The reduction of the fine is also informed by the downturn of the global economy that has affected every sector hence the need to be sensitive and flexible on matters regarding the fine” (Okonji *et al*, 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Between October 2015 and June 2016, cumulating nine months, stakeholders of MTN Nigeria and indeed the media were sceptical about what may become the outcome of the crisis. A pilot study conducted by the researcher showed that at some point, there were insinuations that the fine was orchestrated by a group of influential Nigerians to frustrate MTN Nigeria out of doing business in Nigeria. Another thought has it that the fine was a harsh but subtle way of neutralizing MTN Nigeria's dominance of the telecoms industry since the company has over half of the total subscribers in Nigeria. Yet, other indications suggested that the fine was imposed to make MTN Nigeria succumb to the authority of NCC that hitherto has accused MTN Nigeria of insubordination. The dynamics of conversations around the crisis reflect the elements of strong power relations aimed at controlling and influencing either party.

Despite these insinuations, it is of interest that the crisis was resolved without MTN Nigeria closing its business operations in the country. By the media reports, all parties involved were satisfied with the outcome of the resolution. The dynamics of power relations as earlier defined and conceptualized all played out as individual, political, legal, economic, social and legislative interests and power play existed. To manage its reputation and communications during this period, MTN Nigeria employed the services of three public relations consultancy firms in Nigeria. Aside from developing strategic public relations documents for stakeholders' engagement during this period, the pilot study showed that the agencies also used elements of paid media, earned media, shared media and owned media in their various crisis mitigation activities.

Dietrich (2014) articulated these various forms of media intervention as the *PESO* integrated media model for public relations and communication management. While it could be assumed that other factors may be identified in the resolution of the crisis, how the internal communication units of MTN Nigeria and the public relations consultants used the elements of the *PESO* integrated media model to manage communications vis-à-vis the interplay of power relations to advance the interest of MTN Nigeria is the crux of this study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- i. Examine how the *PESO* integrated media model was applied in managing communications on the MTN Nigeria SIM Registration fine crisis.



- ii. To investigate the extent to which the application of the *PEsO* integrated media model influenced communications on the MTN Nigeria SIM registration fine crisis.
- iii. To identify the challenges in the application of the *PEsO* integrated media model in managing communications on the MTN Nigeria SIM registration fine crisis.

### **Public Relations and Power Relations in Context**

Communication is a dialogic encounter that involves making meanings, sharing meanings and interpreting meanings. Such engagements are often intertwined within a context. In effect, communication cannot occur outside a context. (Asemah and Obukoadata, 2021). Public relations play a crucial role in deciphering the context in which communication takes place, particularly when power relations are imminent. Power relations often require that a public relations professional is grounded in the thoughts surrounding the context in which the phenomenon in question is created, generated or played out by the power actors. William Nielander and Raymond Miller's 1951 definition of public relations as "the gentle art of letting the other fellow *have your way*" (Turney, 2020), provides a basis for understanding why a public relations professional should be familiar with such requirements of his/her practice.

Emphasising the role of public relations in power relations as established in the foregoing, Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (2013) referred to David Finn's four realities of the contemporary public relations practice. The first reality is that "resolving conflicts may require modifying many opinions including that held by the public relations consultant and the client". The second reality is that patterns of communication are increasingly revolving around smaller groups while the third reality is the growing increase in the random benefits of public relations activities which are not directly connected to corporate interests. The fourth reality deals with the fact that new methods of research are becoming exceedingly relevant in situations where opinions are spontaneous.

Akinwalere and Oyeniran (2021) noted that in both public and private organisations, public relations requires an amalgamation of specialized skills which makes use of systematic approaches and philosophies that are within the context of creating meanings, such as what happens in a crisis. The existentialists of power relations in such a context cannot be denied by a public relations professional because, at that moment, public relations is needed to protect the institution's reputation while maximising the opportunities to communicate and drive home the desired leadership position of an organisation. In this context, the organisation may be an individual, an organisation, a state or a country. The objective of public relations in this instance is "to achieve true dialogue, consent, mutual understanding and harmony in a complete openness" (p.32).

Where power play exists with a multiplicity of interests, such as what an organisation may experience in a multicultural society, the comprehensive definition proposed by Harlow (cited in Akinwalere and Oyeniran, 2021), may provide a context for engagement. Harlow described public relations as:

A distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps keep management informed on and responsive to public

opinions; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound ethical communication (p.303)

Operationally, in the context of power relations, what public relations seeks to achieve is in sync with the objectives of the power players. Either in the context of social, economic, political, legal or legislative bickering, the desired result is to advance an interest that, to an extent, would be mutually beneficial to the actors. For instance, within the context of national power and goal achievement, Abia (2000, p.104-105) noted that “the achievement or projection of a nation-state's national interests in the international political system depends upon the actions and behaviour of other nations displayed through various techniques of diplomatic bargaining, ranging from oral efforts at persuasion to use of force”.

Public relations in the context of power relations is to influence. Influence refers to “the ability to get others to act, think or feel as one intends” (Abia, 2000, p.106). Such prospects of influence are very visible in the context of international relations or international diplomacy for which the principles of public relations are highly expectant. Richard Weiner's 1990 definition of public relations as “the activities and attitudes intended to analyse, adjust to, influence and direct the opinion of any group or groups of persons in the interest of any individual, group or institution” (Weiner, 1990), sets this assertion in motion. For instance, Abia (2000, p.109) explained that for nation-states to achieve their national interests, they engage in “various acts or actions towards others, and an act is essentially a form of communication intended to change or sustain the behaviour of those upon whom the acting state is dependent for achieving its national interests”.

Power relations require efficient trend analysis which is of great interest to public relations in whatever context. For instance, governments invest millions of money to gather intelligence reports which help them to strategise in communication and engagements. Multinational organisations, with offices outside their headquarters, are interested in the interplay of power in the host countries of their subsidiaries. Therefore, they invest in trend analysis by professionals who give them reports on the social, economic, political and legislative trends and power play that is of interest and may impact the activities and interests of their subsidiaries. David Finn in 1995 underscored these perspectives on public relations and power relations when he averred that “philosophically, public relations is all about the activities by which an individual or an organisation seeks recognition; presents its interests and perspectives to various audiences and establishes its integrity and credibility” (Dokumentips, n.d). In the context of the expectations from the level of relationship management that is involved, establishing integrity and credibility makes the role of public relations stand out in power relations.

In summary, effective public relations breeds meaningful communication in any context of power relations. Meaningful communication influences and interchange of thoughts, opinions and information that may be crucial in resolving issues, conflicts or crises. It aids attempts towards resolving issues because it serves as an avenue for the exchange of views which are implicitly relevant in the context of the discussion (Abia, 2000).

## PESO Integrated Media Model

Dietrich (2014), a public relations and marketing communication specialist, created the *PESO* integrated media paradigm in her book *Spinbucks*. The *PESO* integrated media model is an acronym for the various degrees of media involvement in all aspects of public relations, including crisis management and communication. *PESO* stands for *P- Paid media; E - Earned media; S- Shared media; and O- Owned media*. It is referred to as the four "quadrants" of public relations media by Macnamara, Lwin, Adi, and Zeffass (2016). The need for PR communication measurement and the development of communication technologies are the driving forces behind the *PESO* integrated media model (Iliff, 2014).

According to Dietrich (2017), the *PESO* model demonstrates the interdependence and reliance on the communication activities necessary for a successful digital communications program. By questioning the importance of data in PR communication and the necessity of acquiring new skill sets and competencies in PR communications, Iliff (2014) concurred that these rapid advances have prompted public relations professionals to re-think and reframe how to approach the discipline.

The whole communications strategy of an organization can be significantly influenced by public relations experts that use the *PESO* model. To take advantage of the numerous opportunities offered by the *PESO* model, public relations professionals must move beyond their "media relations -only" mindset and adapt to contemporary communication trends. When communication is done cohesively, what begins as a simple press release to produce industry news can develop into a campaign that reaches the target audience where they are consuming material, at a time that works for them, and in a way that resonates with them ("The *PESO* framework...", 2016). PRA-Public Relations (2015) also stated that:

*PESO is an acronym for the big-picture-all-channels-inclusive way of communicating that is truly the only method in which a company, entrepreneur or cause can earn the attention of those stakeholders that matter...If there is a discussion about the intersection of public relations, social media and digital, PESO is a concept that needs to be part of the conversation.*

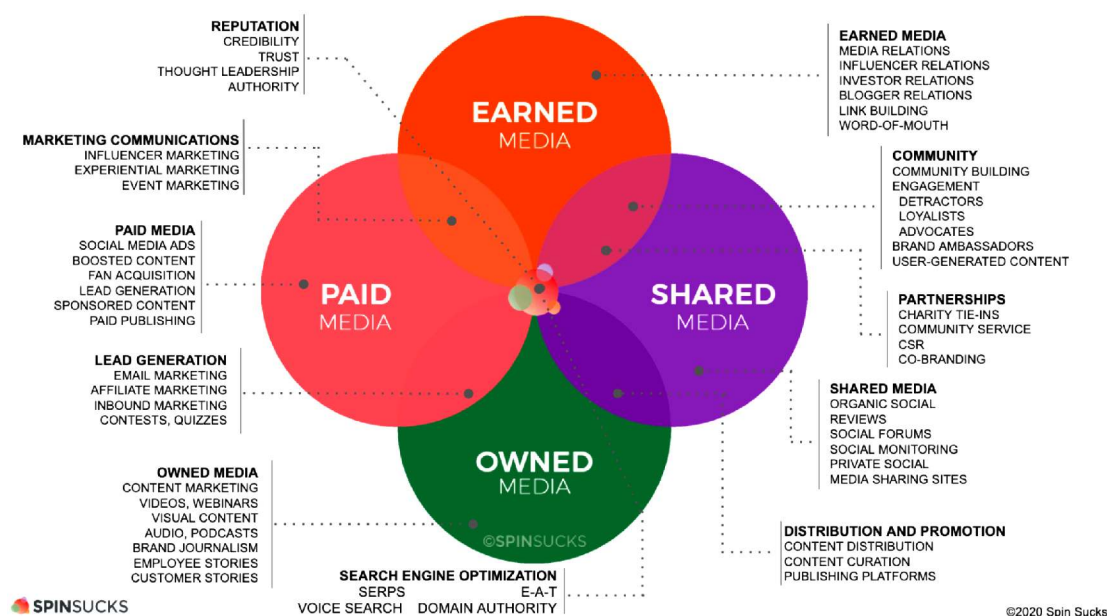


Figure 1: Screen Shot of the *PESO Integrated Media Model* Diagram. Source: Gini Dietrich, Spin Bucks (2020)

**Paid Media:** Dietrich (2023) described paid media as social media advertising, sponsored content and email marketing and not necessarily the big, fancy commercials and highly creative print advertisements. Robinson (2016) earlier explained that when money is exchanged for the distribution of either an advertisement or content, it is referred to as paid media while Hunt (2016) took it further to include all paid forms of digital advertising, marketing, and public relations contents and includes digital forms of affiliate marketing, paid influencers and paid content promotion, digital press releases and sponsorships. Marx (2016) agreed that paid media is important because it appears effective when searching for new buyers or creating awareness for an idea and it reaches a wider audience.

**Earned Media:** Dietrich (2023) explained that earned media involves publicity and media relations and stated that “it's getting your name in print. Having a newspaper or trade publication write about you. Appearing on the noon news to talk about your product. Appearing on podcasts. It's what the PR industry is typically known for because it's one of the few tangible things done”. Earned media include online word-of-mouth usually seen in the form of 'viral' tendencies, mentions, shares, reposts, reviews, recommendations or content picked up by third-party sites (Garman, 2023). An earlier description by Sietel (2014) said “Earned media represents the legacy public relations values, which is the “third party endorsement.” Earned media is 'earned' because objective reporters are persuaded to write favourably about an organisation such as the organisation's CSR activities. Earned media combines strong organic rankings on search engines and content distributed by organisations some of which may be achieved based on the cordial relationship an organisation may have established with reporters, editors, bloggers and other neutral reporters who share the organisation's messages through their platforms (Marx 2015).

**Shared media:** Shared media connotes social media which Dietrich (2023) agreed that is evolving as “organisations have begun to use it as their main source of communications internally and externally. It includes not just social networking, but community, partnerships, distribution, and promotion”. An early description by PRA (2015) explained shared media as “the pass along sharing and commenting upon your message by the community through social channels”. A more vivid analysis of shared media by King (2016) described shared media as a collaborative effort with customers or stakeholders of an organization who are actively commenting as well as taking part in the communities of the organization. In these shared communities, these individuals are openly sharing their opinions and feedback on the subject at hand. These dialogues include both messages from the organization and those of the participants (stakeholders). Shared media gives a great opportunity to interact, learn and forge deeper relationships. Such relationships help in building trust with the people who will advocate on behalf of the organisation. They engage in dialogue and relationship-building by crafting well-written, relevant and tailored content. They unlock significant opportunities and stories by liking, commenting on and sharing posts that are linked to the communication objectives that grow organically (Baduel, 2016).

**Owned media:** Owned media are contents owned by an organisation that is presented on the organisation's owned medium such as websites and blogs. With owned media,



organisations can control their messaging and tell their own stories in a way that they want them told. In other words, owned media are articles that were produced or commissioned by a company. They are the editorial materials and messages that a company or its public relations professionals create, disseminate, and manage on their own private blog or through other channels (s). By giving potential customers access to a frequently free source of information that is in line with the interests of the business, this type of media enables the company to function as its own publisher and draw in potential customers (Baduel, 2016; Bergen, 2015; Dietrich, 2023& PRA, 2015).

Owned media has emerged as a brand-new area for the profession of public relations, providing an excellent chance for social media-savvy public relations writers to succeed with their strategies. Owned media is a cost-effective communications option because of its adaptability in helping organizations reach specific audiences. An organization can use owned media to tell a variety of narratives and see which ones connect with their audience. An organization can employ a variety of material aimed at addressing diverse audience interests to interact and more fully engage with them because it has total control over the owned media (Dietrich, 2015; King 2015; Sietel, 2014). Building audience trust is the main issue for any organization or public relations specialist employing owned media. If a company's tweet inspires others to join the cause or support the campaign, it has successfully transitioned from owned to earned media, earning it coveted credibility. Turgeon (2023) summed up that "PR and marketing teams can pinpoint their exact messaging, especially when it comes to thought leadership and content focused around corporate social responsibility, to ensure that campaign themes are hit and brand reputation is managed".

To drive credibility with owned media, Bonchek (2014) proposed that the strategy for a PR professional must revolve around the content, community and context. The organisation must create engaging content that is relevant and valuable to the targeted stakeholders, using all available data to personalise the experience for the users. The organisation must be familiar with the community where its target audience connects and engage seamlessly with each other either offline or online. To use owned media in context, the organisation must be able to capture data and turn such data into value for its stakeholders. Along with effectively expressing the organization's messages, these three strategic measures will assist to create a connection that draws prospective customers and clients to what is of interest to the business (Bonchek, 2012).

## **Methodology**

This study used a qualitative case study. A qualitative case study is a research methodology that aids in the exploration of a phenomenon within a specific context using some data sources. The exploration is done through a variety of lenses to highlight the phenomenon's many features. In a case study, a real-time phenomenon is investigated within its naturally occurring context, keeping in mind that context will affect how something occurs (Rashid, *et al.*, 2019). The MTN Nigeria SIM Registration crisis was chosen as a case study due to the extensive impact which the resolution or otherwise of the case might have had on the socio-economic well-being of over 65 million Nigerians who were subscribers of MTN Nigeria's services at that period. The researcher considered the ripple effect of whatever happens to this significant percentage of the population on the general social, economic and political well-being of the country important, hence the choice of study.

The purposive sampling was used to select the 3 external PR consulting firms and 1 internal PR manager in MTN Nigeria because they were extensively involved in managing the MTN SIM registration crisis. Purposive sampling was also used to select the senior project managers who were directly responsible for handling the crisis within the PR firms that were contracted by MTN Nigeria. According to Talabi *et al* (2016), purposive sampling is the most effective when studying issues involving experts. It is a technique widely used in qualitative research for “the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources that involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (Palinkaset *al.*, 2015, p.2).

The key informant interview (KII) protocol was used to gather data from the respondents. According to (Gabor, 2017), the key informant interview is “a method of data collection that involves verbal interactions between a field researcher and a local informant who has specialized knowledge that would otherwise be unavailable or difficult to access (and) defines what is important for the investigator to find out”. The KII was found useful because it helped to gather information from individuals who have in-depth knowledge about the MTN Nigeria SIM registration crisis and are willing to share such knowledge, their opinions, feelings and experiences during the crisis.

The instrument for the key informant interview conducted with the PR Consultants was the interview guide drawn based on the conceptual delineations and metrics for the engagement and measurement of the *PESO integrated media model*. The interview guide had 13 questions, which were designed to address the research objectives of this study. The interviews were conducted at different times with each of the key informants for 4 weeks.

The thematic analysis was used in analysing the data generated from the key informants. Thematic analysis suits questions related to people's experiences or people's views and perceptions and it allows the researcher to group and distil from the texts a list of common themes. It helps identify patterns of meanings across data sets to give expression to the community of voices across the interviewees and provide answers to the research questions being addressed (Aluko, 2017; Meribe & Oke, 2017). First, recordings from the interviews were transcribed for data familiarisation and to get the accurate expressions of the interviewees for coding in developing the themes. This process brought the researcher closer to the data to develop consistent phrases, expressions or ideas that were common among the study interviewees. The responses were further categorised such that two or more themes were aggregated under each research question.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The key informants for the interview were selected from MTN Nigeria Limited and the 3 public relations consulting firms. The average number of years of operation among the four organisations is 16 (as of 2018). The gender distribution of the interviewees was 3 males and 1 female. Their average age was 49.8 years while the average years of work experience as a public relations professional was 17. The interviewees have degrees in history, international relations, economics, business administration and mass communication. They are members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria, the Institute of Chartered Economists of Nigeria; Chartered Institute of Marketers, UK. Names of the interviewees were

pseudonymized with four codes viz: **SIM-A**, **SIM-B**, **SIM-C** and **SIM-D**.

### **Research Objective 1: Application of *PESO* Integrated Media Model in Managing Communications on the MTN Nigeria SIM Registration Fine Crisis.**

**Concerns for divergent local and international media reportage necessitated the need for an integrated media model.**

The first reason for applying the components of the *PESO* integrated media model was the need to address the divergent views expressed in local and international media about the SIM registration issue. For instance, **SIM-A** stated that internationally, there was a measure of objectivity in the coverage as they focused more on what the fine would do to the business, “but locally we did not have that kind of luxury. The local reportage was to kill and was not fair because MTN Nigeria was perceived as a South African company, vis-a-vis the issues about the quality of service. The link with South Africa and the perceived economic hegemony was a challenge because “they (some Nigerians) believe that MTN Nigeria seems to be above the law in its business activities, a perception fueled by the South African roots of the company and the frequent xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa (at that period). So, we did not get much sympathy in the media locally and that affected a great deal”.

**SIM-B** agreed that largely, the media reportage victimized MTN Nigeria because “the issues were linked to apartheid, staff treatment and so on. So many negative narratives came up on tax, income etc. Whether it was in deeds or truth, *the reporting of the crisis took a lot of dimensions* and it was spiralling out of control”. **SIM-C** in explaining the power relations noted that “there were many narratives locally and internationally which sent signals about an uncertain environment to do business in Nigeria. The government was driving a narrative that MTN Nigeria had engaged in an activity that led to a breach of security arrangement in the country while MTN Nigeria felt that given their contribution to the Nigerian economy, even where there are breaches, it should have been managed less harshly”.

The sentiments of **SIM-D** reflected the perspective of SIM C. SIM-D alluded to the sensationalism enjoyed by both the local and international media. He stated that “there was a scampering for every strand of information whether true or false at the local level while there was no control on how information was passed. As such, it was a free for all. There was also the issue of 'quiet' apathy for the MTN brand based on the impression that the company lacked empathy and was only about its interest and taking advantage of Nigerians, MTN was perceived as a foreign company that is here to exploit the average Nigerians”. SIM-D thereafter create a scenario of what eventually became the nature of reportage despite the sensational tilt by explaining that “locally it was quite negative due to the sentiments aforementioned. However, on the international scene, the news was more tempered and measured to focus on the effect that the punitive action would have on the company's share profile at the JSE and Global office”.

It can be concluded from the foregoing that the need to harmonise or at least have some control over how information about the fine was being disseminated at the local and international levels to limit misrepresentation and misinformation and handle the social power relations. Social power relations are defined as “the asymmetries between two

actors in their relative ability to exert power (for ends such as resource acquisition, goal achievement, and so on) over others” (Gülgöz, 2015, p.6). There was a need to manage the socio-economic damage of the negative narrations.

### ***PESO* integrated media model was engaged at the point of stakeholders management planning.**

Due to the divergent narratives, the communication strategy was to align the stakeholders as much as possible through a central source of information across the various media which the components of the *PESO* integrated media model offer. The stakeholder mapping and message mapping afforded MTN Nigeria and its public relations consultants found a basis for applying the model because the communication need of each stratum of the stakeholders is taken care of by one or more elements in each of the components of the *PESO* integrated media model. For instance, **SIM-A** explained that “we felt we needed to be measured in our communication because you cannot be appealing to someone in terms of business and the media, you are saying something entirely different. We needed to maintain a balance between what we were saying in the media and what we were publishing. Therefore, we relied a lot on what we called “third-party advocacy” because we felt at this stage all we needed to concentrate on was to let the government and Nigerians realize the importance of MTN Nigeria (to the people and Nigeria's economy).

The views of **SIM-B** align with that of **SIM-A** as she agreed that” first, we itemized the stakeholders involved in the matter and tried as much as possible to keep the best scenario that addressed the different possibilities. **SIM-C** further confirmed that “currently, where you have disintermediation in the media, you cannot but apply the *PESO* model. Whenever you have any communication challenges, and planning appropriate tools, you have to look at the *PESO* model. In certain cases, you may emphasise a certain aspect of it more than the other...but you cannot get away from it...especially as an integrated approach...particularly with social media”. In summary, **SIM-D** said, “There was a need to align globally on an objective and a communication strategy to control communication”.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that the need for measured communication, which addresses the different segments of MTN Nigeria stakeholders especially as an integrated approach necessitated the application of the *PESO* integrated media model. More so, because the media is now disintermediated particularly due to the presence of social media, there was a need to meet the stakeholders at a central point of communication to manage the perspectives and in the interest of MTN Nigeria.

### **The strategy for engaging *PESO* integrated media model was situational and systematic.**

The interviewees revealed that the engagement of the *PESO* integrated media model was situational and systematic particularly due to the peculiarity of the stakeholders' profile of MTN Nigeria. **SIM-A** stated that “we engaged *PESO* at the point where we realised the enormity of the fine...when the issue was not going away and we needed to tackle it head on”. **SIM-B** agreed that “as soon as we were doing the scenario planning and stakeholders scheduling...we needed to be on the stakeholders' management using different aspects of communication”. While **SIM C** described the *PESO* model as a “transmedia” that was adopted from the planning stage, **SIM-D** also agreed that “*PESO* was adopted at the point of engaging our external communications strategy as a need to cross the stakeholders'



bridge and the different interest lines”.

Regarding the tactical approach for engagement, the interviewees explained that it was systematic, often overlapping, and determined by the characteristics of each component in the *PESO* integrated media model. **SIM-A** explained that “(since) no one wanted to know if it was true or not... the best thing to do was to apologize through paid advertorials and even through our owned media, which are our website, social media handles etc. In terms of sequence, I would say paid and owned came out first before we started leveraging on earned”. On the rationale for earned media, he added that “We realized that for our messaging to be credible, it should not be us talking about ourselves lest it would be seen as chest-beating and arrogant. So, we needed to push it out through earned media channels and not just say what we have done”.

**SIM-B** further explained that “paid media was used with online influencers. On radio, we leveraged on-air personalities who had very strong programming and a lot of these were paid for. However, in the print media, we had to leverage it by identifying those who were friends of MTN in the media, using columnists who had strong opinions. (On) owned media...if you wanted information about the crisis real-time when you go on the MTN website and the *Twitter* handle, the news was right there”. **SIM-C** reiterated these points and added that the use of the components overlapped although “you can say we started a bit with earned media, it was easy to do so. You needed to make sure that the key reporters get your perspectives so they were the first to talk to, but it was all overlapping”.

**SIM-D's** explanations presented a few more perspectives that further show how the characteristics of each component of the *PESO* model became a major consideration for engagement. For instance, he stated that “we commenced with owned media, as the need to do some housekeeping was paramount. We had to engage on our internal social platform to update staff on happenings and calm the internal storms with a series of emails and HR memos as well as departmental Heads' memos to teams. This gave perspective to the issues, the handling of it and also limited the unwarranted rumours and managed conversations”. Owned media was seen as a potential stabilizing tool for controlling the narrative inside-out.

Moving to earned media next and the specific nature of engagement, **SIM-D** explained that “we identified the strongest partners in the media through relationships and media spend and reached out with our own angle to the issue, throwing more light on agreeable engagements. The narratives reflected MTN's contribution to education and social investments and the contribution to government, which focused on the contributions to employment and its multiplier effect on the larger communities”. The advocacy positions were further amplified on shared and social media platforms/channels while paid media was introduced to support as partners in terms of reflecting the advocates' positions on these paid platforms.

Deductions from the foregoing indicate that the peculiar nature of the stakeholders created a situation that required that communication should be systematic. Thus, in systematically engaging the *PESO* media model, the strength of each component formed the basis for engagement. The experiences of the consultants at different levels of engagement reflected an overlapped use of the components. Although the factors responsible for their lack of agreement on the sequence of use may be further examined, the interviewees were

united on the fact that different situations and the targets at different times determined the interplay of the usage.

**Research Objective 2: The extent to which the application of the *PESO* Integrated Media Model Influenced Communications on the MTN Nigeria SIM Registration Fine Crisis.**

**The components of the *PESO* integrated media model made it easy to mix and convenient to use.**

To examine the influence of the *PESO* integrated media model on communications about the crisis, the interviewees explained that the mix of the model made it convenient for them to use. SIM-A explained that “to a larger sense when you do a breakdown or an analysis of what each element represents, you would see that the totality of it made us get out our messaging to the right audience and at the right time”. According to him, leaving out any of the components “would have had a negative impact on the overall strategy combining the four really helped. It was very useful as each had its own application and usefulness and I think the combination of the four really helped us a lot”. About the overlapped usage of the components of the model, SIM-A further said “What was really important was not putting one before the other for the fact that it is integrated and has all the part you need, so that speaks a lot about its efficacy in managing the narratives around the fine...We found out that all were quite useful”.

**SIM-B** agreed that using the model was “very convenient because MTN already has some of their owned channels. They needed their own platforms to start getting things done. The existing social media handles (@mtnnigeria) made it easy and it meant that the PR Consultants were doing a very good job”. **SIM-C** maintained that “for want of an expression, the model was very convenient while **SIM-D** enthused that “asides from being the strategically effective thing to do, there was also a fluid flow in the use of this model as well as the success it recorded”.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the *PESO* integrated media model provided the users with a mix that allowed some level of fluidity in handling the narratives on the crisis from the perspectives of MTN Nigeria. In what seems to be a parallel application of the elements of the model at every point, the interviewees agreed that they were able to deploy the components strategically to address the communications appetite of the different segments of MTN Nigeria stakeholders.

***PESO* integrated media model was used to “discipline” and curate the narratives on the crisis.**

Concerning the effectiveness of the *PESO* integrated media model, interviewees agreed that the model was largely used to curate narratives in the media significantly. A mix of the components of the model as earlier noted, made it an interesting exploration. For instance, **SIM-A** explained that “we realized as part of the strategy that it was not enough to push (place) full pages of fantastic editorial or opinion piece (in the newspapers) because it is not everyone that reads such things, as they are not interested. However, when you have a pictorial on a spread on what MTN had supported or projects done by the MTN Foundation in pictures across national newspapers in the form of advertorials, some people would see

it and say, “Wow, so MTN did this”? Hence, for us to dilute the negativity in conversations despite what has happened, we showcased what the business too has done to positively impact Nigeria. Whether it is paid, shared, earned or owned, you just have to maintain a balance and get out your information on the platforms you want”.

**SIM-B** was confident in her assertions and agreed that “definitely, the model helped us to maintain the same information across the media platforms and align both the internal and external stakeholders to avoid variance in the outputs and expected outcomes. It was so good to see the truth when it comes to reporting while understanding that MTN Nigeria is hiding no information”. **SIM-C** further explained the chronology of how the narratives were curated for 'discipline' stating that “initially, the narratives were negative against MTN. However, as we deployed through the components of the integrated model, it started changing and needed to shift. Therefore, the narratives were no longer lopsided and there comes a bit of a balance. We somehow 'disciplined' the narrative since we know there will always be negative comments. As the negotiations went on, the media narratives were changing because we were deploying information through all the channels”.

On the effectiveness of the model in disciplining communications, **SIM-D** further emphasized that “the target audience (the public, policymakers, regulatory, lobbyists, competition) caught on to the message and started to shift in opinion due to superior arguments from the sustained lobbying and advocacy positions through the various media channels. These messages linked the several layers of the economy and benefits of MTN Nigeria's operations”.

In addition, the interviewees were able to identify specific instances of how they monitored the communications across the various media to ascertain if they were curated as expected to meet the objectives. **SIM-A** explained that “in pushing some of the contents on our platforms, we were able to track sentiments, comments and tones of the publics while using avatars (influencers) to weigh in, shaping the arguments without necessarily linking it to MTN Nigeria. This helped us to give more knowledge to the public while the discussion is trending on those platforms. Therefore, we were able to inspire discussions and provoke thoughts on all those platforms, giving us a full view”.

Another unique application of the *PESO* model was blending thought leadership into the process across the relevant components. **SIM-A** informed that “for thought leadership, we identified some of our executives who are knowledgeable about things like technology and development and the platforms on which they could speak. They spoke on the steps taken by MTN Nigeria to develop Nigeria and their comments were amplified on all the platforms. With that, we discovered that when we tie messaging to a credible person, the chances are that people will listen more than when you have despairing voices saying so many things”.

In curating the narratives that were generated due to apathy against MTN Nigeria vis-à-vis the perceived influence from upcountry, **SIM-B** explained that “at the initial stage, the apathy was very strong against MTN Nigeria as people queried if they would commit such infractions in their mother country (South Africa). Nevertheless, people forgot that about 80% of MTN Nigeria's management were Nigerians. Hence, by the time the implications of shutting down the business were pushed through the media, people began to understand that it would affect everybody including MTN's social services responsibilities, employment and those connected to the employed staff of MTN Nigeria and taxes and levies accrued to

the government. So, when the issues dropped, we used the influencers through the e-PR platforms where people could slant for/against the messages”. **SIM-C** added that “since communication has to communicate something, particularly in a situation of multifaceted stakeholders, we must be interested in what is communicated. The ability to get the influencers (both online and offline) to understand our messages helped change the narratives and their own perception on the matter”.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the *PESO* integrated media model allowed for a significant level of control of communications. The model contributed to changing the narratives from that of apathy to empathy based on what the interviewees described as “disciplining the communications”. In disciplining the narratives, communications through the components of the model espoused the negative effect of the fine on the socio-economic wellbeing of MTN Nigeria, which in effect would affect the socio-economic wellbeing of many of the company's employees who are Nigerians and their families. The approach aligns with the summation of Turgeon (2023) that with the *PESO* media model “PR and marketing teams can pinpoint their exact messaging, especially when it comes to thought leadership and content focused around corporate social responsibility, to ensure that campaign themes are hit and brand reputation is managed”.

### **Research Objective 3: Challenges in the Application of *PESO* Integrated Media Model in Managing MTN Nigeria SIM Registration Fine Crisis Communications.**

#### **Fixed mindsets, poor media literacy, source credibility and the nature of the fine were challenges faced in applying the *PESO* integrated media model.**

Applying the *PESO* model has its challenges. The interviewees agreed that the challenges encountered in applying the *PESO* integrated media model during the crisis were not principally due to deficiencies in the components of the model but the fixed mindsets among the publics coupled with the issue of source credibility. Regarding the challenges faced using each component, **SIM-A** explained that “some perceived our messaging through the paid media as bragging. For the paid influencers, they believed we have simply paid them to speak in our favour. In terms of earned media, particularly in the print media, media literacy level and economic limitations meant not too many people were able to read the newspapers where such narratives were published. Even with the model, I still feel that we were still not able to reach a large chunk of Nigerians; but I am reluctant to take that as a shortfall to the model”.

In the same vein, **SIM-B** agreed that “the major challenge was reaching out to people who were bent on writing and posting negative comments about MTN Nigeria and the issue at hand. It was challenging facing people who were practically faceless because they can only be reached through their handles for explanations and to consider the facts of the matter.

For **SIM-C**, the peculiar nature of the social media, which largely formed the shared media, presented some challenges because some members of the public constantly query the sincerity of MTN Nigeria, their proponents or sympathizers. He emphasized that “one of the major challenges was that of fake news as believability in social media keeps dropping. Many people are not sure of what to believe because of the multiple and increasingly hard-to-verify sources of news...Hence, even though social media has become pervasive, there

are questions about whether all information on social media can be trusted particularly in a crisis. So, believability was a major challenge”.

The nature of the fine, being the first of its kind in Nigeria and Africa was also a major challenge. **SIM-D** agreed that “prejudiced contributors; divergence of purpose; internal aloofness and cynicism and the novel nature of the fine were major challenges in implementing the model. By the nature of the fine, this is the first time such an amount will be charged on a single company for an infraction in Nigeria and that got everyone interested, albeit with very divergent views”.

In summary, the responses from the interviewees reflected challenges that are entrenched in prejudices held against MTN Nigeria as a foreign organisation with a history of violating the laws of the host country. More so, the huge sum involved in the fine generated interest that at some point created opportunities for negative vibes. Unfortunately, the opportunities created by the workings of the paid, earned and owned media in shaping the narratives were seen by some stakeholders as bragging on the part of MTN Nigeria. However, in all, **SIM-A** affirmed that “overall and collectively, I think the model was quite an effective model because it had its different uses and varied applications and it yielded successful results”.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded from the study that when organisations find themselves in crisis, they must be deliberate in their approaches to managing communications, particularly where power relations become tense as noticed in the case of the MTN Nigeria SIM registration crisis. The background to the crisis showed that in a multicultural society like Nigeria, organisations and multinationals such as MTN Nigeria cannot hide from the different narratives that may follow issues concerning them at both the local and international levels. In the case study examined in this paper, it can be concluded that the *PESO* integrated media model offered MTN Nigeria and their consultants to manage communications vis-à-vis the power relations were noticed in the context of the narratives about the SIM registration fine crisis.

Components of the *PESO* model were used systematically and interchangeably at various times to address the communication needs of each stratum of the stakeholders in the crisis; they were used to curate the narratives in a disciplined manner that helps to reduce counter-narratives some of which bore out of apathy against MTN Nigeria. Although preconceptions about MTN Nigeria as an unfair entity, vested interests and low media literacy were challenges encountered in applying the *PESO* model, the flexibility provided by the model in navigating the communications helped to address issues around the social, economic and political power relations that emanated in the process of managing the crisis as reflected in the final analysis of all the major stakeholders. According to Emmett (2022), “The key benefit of planning and implementing an integrated campaign using this (*PESO*) model is that it helps you to connect to your target audiences with the right content via the right channel at the right stage of the customer journey”.



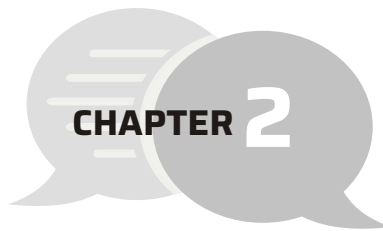
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# DOMINANT COALITION, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND POWER RELATIONS DYNAMICS IN MINISTRIES, DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES IN NIGERIA

***Gloria Eberechukwu NWODU & Camilla Nkiru EMECHEBE***



## **Introduction**

In mainstream public relations practice, the concept of the dominant coalition is pivotal in organizations' decision-making process (Bowen, 2015, Berger, 2005). It also helps in the advancement of public relations status in the hierarchy of functional areas of an organization's management. Arguably, it is the inclusion of public relations practitioners into this group that allows them to solve organisational problems and at the same time make them more socially responsible (Achor and Nnabuko, 2019). In exercising their function or power, members of the dominant coalition relate with their subordinates and other stakeholders; this exercise of power may come in different ways: coercion, threats, and plea. This explains power dynamics that is how power affects a relationship between two or more people in a workplace and other aspects of social and political life (Dunbar and Burgoon, 2005)

In bureaucratic organizations like ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), power or authority to perform roles are derived from the organization's structure. It is this

hierarchical structure that assigns or prescribes functions to members of the dominant coalition. However, the way the roles are performed in a multicultural society like Nigeria portends some problems, which could jeopardize the ascendancy into or progress of public relations practitioners in the organization's dominant coalition. Nigeria is a multicultural society whose diversities are manipulated through religion and ethnicity to the detriment of national cohesion and progress. This attitude of projecting ethnic chauvinism and religious bigotry seems to have been introduced in the recruitment and allocation of duties in government MDAs. This is done without recourse to the principle of federal character as enshrined in the 1999 constitution as amended, and principles of equity, fairness, and justice. Public relations support diversity and promote strategies that will help to harness its benefits in the achievement of local, national, and international goals or organizational goals.

Viewed from the lens of ethnocentric and cultural determinants, and religious affiliations, the legitimate distribution of power and power dynamics in the MDAs' public relations or information departments seem to exclude diversity promotion among those who influence the organisation's decision-making process. Beyond the traditionally expressed notion of power being the influence that one or more entities exert on other entities, the need to determine who are the legitimate participants in defining, brokering, and utilizing power resources in public relations departments in government MDAs becomes necessary, particularly in a multicultural society, like Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, the objectives of the paper are to: (1) examine multicultural influences on power relations dynamics between public relations practitioners and dominant coalition in MDAs, (2) examine how cultural diversity can engender effective power relations among PR practitioners and dominant coalition in MDAs, (3) examine the use of cultural diversity in brokering and utilizing power resources in MDAs for national cohesion.

### **Research Questions**

**The following research questions guided the study:**

- i. What are the multicultural influences that affect power relations dynamics between public relations practitioners and the dominant coalition in MDAs in Nigeria?
- ii. In what ways can cultural diversity engender effective power relations among public relations practitioners and dominant coalition in MDAs in Nigeria?

### **Conceptualizing Dominant Coalition, Power and Power Relations**

The dominant coalition represents a group of individuals, specifically the top management, in an organization who set organizational goals and values, and whose decisions shape organizational behaviour. Organizational theorist, James D Thompson (cited in Berger, 2005) refers to this group of influential people as an 'inner circle'. Grunig (1992) cited in (Bowen, 2015) defined it as, "the group of senior managers who control an organization" (p. 5). They can further be referred to as chiefs of a functional area or those who wield strategic decision-making power (Bowen, 2015). The structure and complexity of organizations require specialized teams and joint decision-making processes that will inwardly and outwardly lead to effective control of an organization. This means that the dominant coalition shapes organizational actions more than the environment, and those who belong to his group derive power from different sources expertise, authority, coercion, information, charisma, sanctions, and reward. Public relations is a support function and its source of power within the organization is its expertise in communication. Major studies on dominant coalition in public relations practice and management sciences focus on the

relationship between practitioners' role and inclusion in decision-making (Berger, 2005; Grunig, 1992; Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier, 2002; Wilson, 2016; Bowen, 2015).

In its wider view, it anchors on the power-control perspective of members of the dominant coalition in various organizations (Berger, 2015). Other research efforts examined how dominant coalition members' values and perceptions influence their perceptions of public relations participation in organization-level decision-making ((Berger, 2005). It has been argued by some scholars and exponents on the inclusion of public relations practitioners in the dominant coalition, that, the roles played by practitioners in their organizations may constrain or propel their inclusion in the decision-making process. Public relations practitioners perform different roles: the technician role, the manager's role, and the advisory role (Achor and Nnabuko, 2019; Grunig 2002). Organisations differ both in structure and purpose, and this impacts greatly how practitioners carry out each of these roles. It also underpins power relations between members of the dominant coalition and public relations practitioners.

However, in activist organizations, the public relations role goes beyond offering information as a technician, a manager, or an advisor to playing an activist's role. This activist role seems to "...force us to render more transparent the realities of power relations in dominant coalitions and other organizational structures and processes that touch the practice from virtually every side" (Berger, 2005, p.25). It has been argued that the activist's role as a public relations practitioner might help to alter relations of power within dominant coalitions and at the same time influence the general public's perception of the practice (Wilson, 2016; Berger, 2005). Such an activist role suggests challenging existing or prevailing power structures or a kind of resistance, and depending on how modest or futile the resistance is, influences those structures and relations of power. Another argument that seems to resonate across public relations circles is the redefinition or expansion of public relations roles as a path towards changing power relations (Health, Motion and Leitch, 2009). Such thought is conceived due to the power that organizations hold over public relations practices and possibilities, including how compliance to and exercise of this power is enforced. Hence, an alternative conception of public relations seems helpful if the perceived imbalance in power control and relations is to be addressed. Perhaps, one pathway towards actualizing this is, to make public relations a strategic or functional role within an organisational structure.

### **Power and Power Relations Dynamics**

The concept of power is explained under two basic assumptions or perspectives. The first perspective describes power as the ability to influence others to get them to do what you want (Nye and Myers, 2004). Secondly, it is conceptualized as "the degree of control over the material, human, intellectual and financial resources exercised by a different section of the society". More importantly, power is dynamic and relational; it is not absolute and is exercised in social and political relations between individuals and groups. Three ways can be used to activate and influence compliance: through threat (stick), inducement/payment (with carrots), and attracting or co-opting people so that they can do our bidding. Power dynamics explains how power affects a relationship between two or more people in a workplace, home front, and other aspects of social life. In this paper, we are concerned with power dynamics in a workplace how those within the dominant coalition relate with others outside the group, as they exercise their legitimate or arrogated power. It is important to note, that, the way those who wield power or are vested with power in the organization



relate with those who have little or no power affects productivity and defines organizational internal (employee) relations. (Nye and Myers, 2004)

The degree to which power is exercised by an individual or group depends on the kind of resources they have access to and control. This makes power unequally distributed: some groups and individuals have greater control over the source of power while others have little or no control (Veneklasen and Miller, 2002). In different spheres of life, “different degrees of power are sustained and perpetuated through social division such as gender, age, caste, class, ethnicity, race, north-south; and through institutions such as the family, religion, education, media, the law, etc” (Veneklasen *et al*, 2006, p. 1). In some jurisdictions, ethnicity and religion play dominant roles in power distribution and control; many powerful people and institutions sustain their influence by controlling individual who gets to the decision-making table and what becomes part of an agenda. Unfortunately, such attitude by these influential people excludes and devalues the interest or talents of other less powerful groups or individuals within the organisational setting. These power dynamics play out in organizations that are yet to understand the role of public relations in their corporate existence. Those who are privileged to be part of the dominant coalition blur the visibility of public relations practitioners by not allowing them to perform their legitimate corporate role. When power dynamics tilt towards domineering features, it prevents important voices and issues from being heard or expressed, while policy decisions are skewed to favour a few individuals at the expense of the organization or majority (Veneklasen and Miller, 2006). This perspective also leads us into the realm of the dominant coalition and the expression of power relations.

Power relations or relations of power in the dominant coalition can be expressed in four different models/ways: power over, power with, power to, and power within (Burger, 2016;). In the 'power over scenario', power is seen as the traditional dominance model where decision-making is characterized by control, instrumentalism, and self-interest. It also depicts a win-lose kind of relationship and having power involves taking it from someone else, and then, using it to dominate and prevent others from having it. In this power relations model, public relations is an “influence variable in this view” (Berger, 2005, p.6). In the “power with relations scenario”, power is seen as an empowerment model that expects dialogue, inclusion, and negotiation, and the power guiding the decision-making. Public relations' position in this model is that of a relational variable it tries to find common ground among different interests and builds collective strength. Power to relations takes the forms of activism or resistance strategies that PR practitioners could adopt to oppose a dominance model. It also acknowledges individual unique potentials that can be channelled to open up possibilities in an organization.

### **Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity and Power Relations**

The term multiculturalism has different normative ideas that are conceptualized to align with different disciplines or fields of study. In political philosophy and contemporary political discourse, multiculturalism focuses on responding to and understanding challenges associated with cultural diversity in terms of ethnic, religious, and cultural differences (Bachvarova, 2014; Arneil and MacDonald, 2016). In sociology, multiculturalism is conceptualized as a concept that describes how a given society deals with cultural diversity, both at the community and national levels (Longley, 2020). The International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences (2001) refers to multiculturalism as



“the state of a society or the world in which there exist numerous distinct ethnic and cultural groups seen to be politically relevant, and a program or policy promoting such a society” (p.10169). The common denominator of these interdisciplinary conceptualizations is that multiculturalism depicts cultural diversity and the harnessing of diversity for the benefit of all in a multicultural society.

Opponents of multiculturalism argue that it fuels identity politics or the formation of socio-political movements, whose focus is to foster group identity or “further the interests of its group members and force issues important to their group members into the public sphere”( Eagan, 2019, p 7). Beyond this notion, multiculturalism has raised questions about how citizens and political leaders, and public administrators balance a group's social interests with that of national interests. Multiculturalism seeks the inclusion of the views and contributions of diverse members of society while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into the dominant culture. In Nigeria, many ethnic groups and minority cultural groups have opposed their exclusion in the national scheme of affairs and denigration of their contributions and identities to national development in the past. One of the banes of the development of Nigeria is the failure to harness the benefits of its cultural diversity. Instead of leveraging on diversity, ethnic chauvinism, nepotism, and religious bigotry are promoted.

The public relations position concerning the views and counter-views on multiculturalism is a call to leverage the cultural diversity of a country and the total inclusion of every ethnic nationality in the affairs of the nation. The exclusion of diversities in the sharing and distribution of bureaucratic and political offices causes power imbalance, which breeds disaffection. The power-control perspective in this scenario is that of subjugation that ensues in the master-slave relations; hence a master dictates to the servant and enforces compliance through intimidation, coercion, and denial (Nye & Myers, 2004). This kind of power relations dynamics does not promote public relations' principle of peaceful and harmonious co-existence and mutual understanding.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Several theoretical frameworks are used to explain multiculturalism. Given the nature of this paper, the melting pot theory is adopted as its theoretical foundation. Originally, the melting pot theory of multiculturalism was meant to describe the assimilation of immigrants into a dominant culture of a state or country. Its proponents assume that “various immigrant groups tend to melt together by abandoning their individual cultures and eventually becoming fully assimilated into the predominant society” (Longley, 2020, p.3). It can be modified in varying contexts to explain other aspects of multiculturalism within a country. For example, its epistemic ideology can be applied in public service organizations, where employees are drawn from different cultural and religious backgrounds these diversities can melt into the established rules and regulations (e.g., Principle of Federal Character in Nigeria) guiding the operation of such organizations (e.g. MDAs). The epistemic values of the theory metaphorically can help in harnessing the cultural diversity of a country and the promotion of national integration and cohesion.

However, it is assumed that the melting point theory may be difficult to apply in Nigeria where ethnocentrism, religious bigotry, hegemony, and loyalty seem to be ingrained in people's consciousness. This scenario is different from the argument of the opponents of the melting point theory. They opined that it reduces diversity, and causes people to lose

their traditions; particularly when the government has enforced the model as a state policy. The spate of agitation for separation from the Nigerian state, coupled with toxic social media content against a perceived ethnic group believed to have caused other ethnic groups/nationalities pains and agony in the federation speaks volumes. Unfortunately, ethnocentrism and religious bigotry have crept into federal ministries departments and agencies (MDAs) and have caused a conflict of interest and division among employees. The applicatory and epistemic values of the melting pot model of multiculturalism can also be explained in terms of diversity and its inclusion in the public relations profession or practice. Diversity in public relations entails understanding or acknowledging and harnessing the differences in human demographics, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, status, and physical abilities (O'Donoghue, 2019) to achieve public relations and corporate objectives. Inclusion can be explained in two folds. Inclusion can be a culture or environment that is collaborative, supportive, and respectful for all or addition or acceptance into specific organizational roles. Public relations represents different brands and also serves different clients, the publics, and stakeholders who are culturally diverse. Therefore, it is important, that public relations practitioners understand and practice cross-cultural communication in their workplaces.

Having employees from diverse backgrounds helps an organization solve problems that have to do with cultural/ethnic issues, gender, religion, race, and social orientation. Clients and brands who present problems relating to any of the above-mentioned diversities require solutions from a well-diverse public relations team. Some PR practitioners believed that diversity is lacking in public relations firms and PR departments of organizations, particularly government ministries and establishments (Author's Personal Communication, March 2022). For this reason, "PR firms will lose clients and employees. Also, this lack of diversity creates an echo chamber where ideas become uninspired" (O'Donoghue, 2019, par.6). The ability to blend diverse abilities of the PR team helps in cultivating a culture of diversity and inclusiveness in a work environment; when such a situation is assured, the organization, in the opinion of Grunig (2001) achieves excellence.

### **Methodology**

The survey research design was adopted. The method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to map the variables that impact the phenomena (power relations and diversity) under investigation. The survey research method helped to select samples that reflect dominant features, characteristics or indices of the entire population. The survey research also helped to pinpoint the key variables that improve or undermine power relations and diversity in MDAs, in a multicultural society.

### **Population**

The population of the study comprises public relations practitioners who work in selected MDAs in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This category of people was purposively chosen because they are the implementers of information and communication decisions of the MDAs and other decisions by members of the dominant coalition. Three ministries, three agencies, and three departments were purposively chosen. For ethical consideration and request for anonymity by the MDAs, the names of the ministries were anonymized and denoted as A, B, and C, the names of the departments are denoted as D, E, and F, while those of agencies are designated G, H, and I respectively.

## **Sample Size**

An invitation to participate in a national survey was sent to WhatsApp groups of the public relations and information officers of select MDAs. They were given a week to indicate whether to participate or not. At the expiration of the one week, a total of 150 PR practitioners indicated interest to participate.

## **Instrument, Method of Distribution and Collection**

The research instrument used in the study was a set of questionnaires containing closed-ended questions and structured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, and 5= strongly agree). The questions focused on power dynamics between heads of public relations officers/executives or information officers and the dominant coalition in the MDAs. The questionnaire was distributed electronically via a WhatsApp group created for the survey. The participants were provided with a link to access the Google form, complete the questionnaire and submit it. Completed forms were also retrieved via a link or an email address created for the study.

## **Validity and Reliability of Instrument**

The instrument was subjected to content validity using public relations experts while the reliability analysis of the variables yielded a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.852, which is a valid, reliable, and accepted measure.

## **Findings and Analysis**

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, tables, percentages, mean and standard deviation, etc.). For further analysis and decision-making, the five-point Likert scale was used as shown thus:

Strongly disagree	=	1
Disagree	=	2
Undecided	=	3
Agree	=	4
Strongly agree	=	5
<b>Total</b>	=	<b>15</b>

A cutoff point was determined by finding the mean of the nominal value assigned to options using the formula below:

$$\text{Mean } X = \frac{\sum f}{n}$$

Where: X = mean,  $\sum$  = summation sign, n = number of items, f = frequency

The mean =  $15/5 = 3$ . For decision making, values above 3 were accepted as agreed while values below 3 were rejected.

Demographic data analysis indicated that there were more male (100 or 66.6%) than female (50 or 33.3%) respondents. Ethnic nationality distribution of the respondents showed that 55 or 36.6% are from Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, 40 or 25.6% are from Yoruba speaking ethnic group, 35 or 23.3% are from Igbo ethnic nationality, while the remainder of 55 (36.6%) are from other minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. The distribution of educational qualification shows that more than half (80 or 53.3%) of the respondents are degree holders or its equivalent, 25(16.6%) hold a second degree, 17(11.3%) hold PhDs, while the remainder of 28 or 18.6% holds a professional diploma in communication or public

relations.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents in the MDAS**

Ministries	Heads PR Unit/ Information officers
A	18 (12%)
B	17 (11.3)
C	15 (10%)
<b>Department</b>	
D	17(11.3%)
E	18 (12%)
F	15 (10%)
<b>Agency</b>	
G	16(10.6%)
H	17 (11.3%)
I	17 (11.3%)
Total	150 ( 100%)

**Source: Field survey, 2022.**

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents in the MDAs. Ministries A, B and C had 18(12%), 17(11.3%), 15(10%) respondents respectively. In the three departments of D, E, and F, the distribution of respondents is as follows 17(11.3%), 18(12%), and 15(10%) respectively. Respondents in Agency Y G, had 16(10.6%), Agency H, had 17(11.3%), and Agency I had 17(11.3%) respectively.

**Table 2: The Multicultural Influence of Power Relations Dynamics**

Multicultural Determinants/Influences	Mean	StD
<b>A.Race</b>		
Race determines the dominant coalition's use of force to exert control over PR executives/information officers in MDAs	3.22	1.794
Race determines the dominant coalition's use of threats to exert control over PR executives/information officers in MDAs	3.28	1.811
Race determines the dominant coalition's use of persuasion to exert control over PR executives/information officers in MDAS	3.33	1.824
<b>*Grand Mean for Race</b>	<b>3.27*</b>	<b>1.808*</b>
<b>B.Religion</b>		
Religion determines the inclusion or exclusion of PR practitioners into powerful positions in MDAs	2.97	1.72
Religion plays a dominant role in the dominant coalition's exertion of power over PR executives/information officers in MDAs.	3.37	1.835
Religion determines the dominant coalition's use of threats to exert control over PR executives/information officers in MDAs.	2.95	1.71
Religion determines the dominant coalition's use of persuasion to exert control over PR executives/information officers in MDAs	3.2	1.788
<b>*Total Grand mean for religion</b>	<b>3.12*</b>	<b>1.76*</b>
<b>C.Ethnicity</b>		
Allegiance to perceived superior ethnic group influences positive power relations among the dominant coalition and between PR practitioners in the MDAs	4.04	2.009

Hatred toward a lowly-perceived ethnic group negatively affects power relations between the dominant coalition and PR executives in MDAs	3.22	1.794
Ethnicity determines the inclusion or exclusion of PR practitioners into powerful positions in MDAs	3.33	1.824
<b>*Total Mean score for ethnicity</b>	<b>3.53*</b>	<b>1.878*</b>
<b>D.Culture</b>		
An individual's way of dressing negatively impact power relations between coalition and PR executive in the MDAs	2.57	1.60
Hatred for one's culture influences how dominant coalition exerts their power over their subordinates(PR practitioners)	2.46	1.568
<b>*Grand mean for Culture</b>	<b>3.8*</b>	<b>1.9*</b>
<b>E.Gender</b>		
PREs & Info officers' gender influences how the dominant coalition exercise power over them in the MDAs	3.34	1.832
<b>F.Language</b>		
Language spoken by a certain ethnic group determines the dynamics of power between the dominant coalition and non-members of the group	3.33	1.824
The ability for one to speak a major language within the work environment negatively or positively influence power relations between the dominant coalition and subordinates PR executives/officers	3.35	1.835
<b>The grand mean of language</b>	<b>3.34*</b>	<b>1.827*</b>
<b>G.Education</b>		
The level/quality of PR practitioners' education influences how their superiors exert power over them	3.34	1.832
Educational experiences in the work environment determine power dynamics between PREs/officers and the dominant coalition	3.28	1.811
<b>The grand mean score for education*</b>	<b>3.31*</b>	<b>1.819*</b>

**Source: Field survey, 2022.**

Multicultural determinants that influence power relations dynamics between members of the dominant coalition and public relations executives/information officers in Nigeria's MDAs range from race, religion, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, and education. From Table 2 above, race had a total mean score of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 1.808; religion had a grand mean score of 3.12\* and StD. = 1.76; ethnicity had a grand mean score of 3.53 and StD=1.878; gender had a mean score of 3.34 and StD = 1.832. Other variables such as language had grand mean scores of (3.34 and StD = 1.832), and education had grand mean scores of (3.31 and StD = 1.819) respectively. These results indicate that race, religion, ethnicity, culture, language, gender and education highly influenced power relations dynamics between the dominant coalition and public relations executives /information officers.



**Table 3: Cultural Diversity and Effective Power Relations Among PR Practitioners and Dominant Coalition in MDAs**

<b>Variables/Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>StD.</b>
Integration of all races in the work environment is a major way to engender effective power relations in MDAs	3.38	1.36
Avoidance of discriminatory practices based on one's religion/faith in MDAs can result in effective power relations	3.33	1.824
Tolerance and respect for religious affiliation /faith will improve power relations between PR executives and the dominant coalition	3.27	1.807
Integrating people of diverse talents into organizations' wheel of progress without favouritism promotes effective power relations.	4.12	2.029
Assigning roles/authority to individuals based on their capacity to perform irrespective of their culture, and state of origin can enhance effective power relations	3.35	1.878
Proper recognition of one's educational level & placement can enhance effective power relations	3.34	1.832
Openness in the delegation of duties among workers of diverse cultures and ethnicity may engender effective power relations in the MDAs	3.38	1.843
Non-allegiance to a perceived superior ethnic group in work delegation can engender effective power relations between the dominant coalition and PR executives/officers in the MDAs	4.02	2.009

**Source: Field survey, 2022.**

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of cultural diversity and effective power relations among PR practitioners and dominant coalition in MDAs. All the eight statements used in seeking opinions of the respondents (PREs and Information officers) had high mean scores and standard deviations, this indicates acceptance of the statements.

### **Discussion**

Data in Table 2 were used for the analysis of research question 1, which sought to find out the multicultural influences that affect power relations dynamics between public relations practitioners and dominant coalition in MDAs. Seven multicultural influences were identified: race, religion, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, and education. Each of the variables had statements that were used to elicit the opinions of the respondents. Data showed in Table 2 that race determines the dominant coalition's use of force, use of threat and dominant coalition's use of persuasion to exert control over PR executives/information officers in MDAs. Religion determines the inclusion or exclusion, of PR practitioners into powerful positions in MDAs. Religion plays a dominant role in the dominant coalition's exertion of power over PR executives/information officers in MDAs it also determines the dominant coalition's use of threat and use of persuasion to exert control over PR executives/information officers in MDAs.

Allegiance with a perceived superior ethnic group influences positive power relations among the dominant coalition and between PR practitioners in the MDAs (hatred of a lowly-perceived ethnic group negatively) affects power relations between the dominant coalition and PR executives in MDAs. Ethnicity and people's way of dressing negatively impact power relations between the dominant coalition and PR executives in the MDAs, while



hatred for one's culture influences how the dominant coalition exerts their power over their subordinates (PR practitioners). Gender influences how the dominant coalition exercise power over them in the MDAs, while the language spoken by certain ethnic group determines the dynamics of power between the dominant coalition and non-members of the group.

The above results seem to give credence to communal and exchange relationship orientations (Torelli and Shavitt, 2010). The results show that the dominant coalition in the MDAs are exchange-oriented individuals, disposed to give favour to persons of a particular ethnic origin, with the hope of receiving comparable benefits in return. Unfortunately, this kind of communal-oriented people creates division with their power, which is in contrast to the ideal, communal-oriented people found in age-grade organizations and communities. Furthermore, one's ability to speak a major language within the work environment negatively or positively influences power relations between the dominant coalition and subordinates (PR executives/officers). The level/quality of PR practitioners' education influences how their superiors exert power over them. Again, educational experiences in the work environment determine power dynamics between PREs/officers and the dominant coalition.

Data in Table 3 were used for the analysis of research question 2, which sought to identify ways cultural diversity can engender effective power relations among PR practitioners and dominant coalition in MDAs. The result indicates that integrating people of diverse talents into organizations' wheel of progress without favouritism promotes effective power relations while non-allegiance to a perceived superior ethnic group in work delegation can engender effective power relations between the dominant coalition and PR executives/officers. Also, the integration of all races in the work environment could be a major way to engender effective power relations in MDAs while assigning roles/authority to individuals based on their capacity to perform irrespective of their culture, and state of origin can enhance effective power relations. The respondents also believed that openness in the delegation of duties among workers of diverse cultures and ethnicity may engender effective power relations in the MDAs. According to the respondents, proper recognition of one's educational level and placement can enhance effective power relations. Avoidance of discriminatory practices based on one's religion/faith in MDAs can also result in effective power relations. It was also reported that tolerance and respect for religious affiliation or faith will improve power relations between public relations executives and the dominant coalition.

### **Practical and Theoretical Implications of the Study**

This study has both practical and theoretical importance. Its practical importance hinges on a renewed call for the inclusion of public relations in the organisation's dominant coalition. Power relations within the MDAs are determined by the bureaucratic rules and organizational culture and structure, but not by ethno-religious affiliations or ethnic interests as depicted in this study. This study has shown that in a multicultural society highly polarized, and demarcated along ethnic and religious divides, and chauvinism hardly utilises or harnesses the values of diversity. Diversity improves the quality of the decision-making process and decision outcomes and the implication of this fact is that it reduces the arbitrary power of those who are inclined to promote their selfish or ethno-religious interests over those of the organization. Previous research that has focused on power relations within the dominant coalition impacts the public relations functions,

however, when public relations is assigned less organisational power and authority, its influence over strategic decision-making becomes minimal (Grunig, 2015).

Theoretically, this study has expanded the frontiers of power relations studies in organizational settings, particularly in bureaucratic organizations such as ministries, departments, and agencies. This study has shown other dimensions inherent in leadership practices of members of the dominant coalition that create disunity among employees in the workplace. The implication of this scenario to organizational employee relations practices is that it cripples strategic internal communication, employee satisfaction, and transformational leadership expected to drive cultural diversity (Men, 2014). Again, practically, this undermines the behavioural approach to leadership in public relations; PR leadership is defined as “the process of influence which leads to organization-wide collaborative endeavours to achieve public relations goals” (Choi and Choi, 2007, p. 2)

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of this paper, cultural diversity in its real sense is not promoted by the dominant coalition in the MDAs. Edward and Hodges (2015) explored ways to address the lack of diversity in public relations without offering suggestions on how to deal with those organizational structures or cultures that practically do not allow diversity to thrive. Diversity as opined by Edward and Hodges (2015) “emerges as a product of the dialectics between occupational structures, norms and practitioners' reactions to those constraints; it follows that improving diversity is best understood as an exercise in democracy, where all practitioner voices are heard, valued, and encompass the potential for change” (p.5).

The beauty of public relations practice in a multicultural society hinges on harnessing cultural diversity, which will help to actively engage both the organisations' internal and external stakeholders. Cultural diversity promotes togetherness, enhances performance, and gives an organisation an edge over competitors in terms of talent mix in meeting organizational goals and vision. In harnessing cultural diversity, public relations practitioners should avoid acts that encourage nepotism, ethnic chauvinism, and/or acts that subvert the truth and becloud understanding. Several studies have explored the need to have diversity in the public relations profession or departments and firms. This paper acknowledges that, but further introduces another dimension to it which calls for how diversity is harnessed by the dominant coalition in the exercising of their power in the organization vis-à-vis dominant coalition power control dynamics in MDAs.

The power-control perspective that defines power relations dynamics in mechanistic organizations does not provide a better lens through which excellent public relations practice is viewed, rather it adds to the prevailing posture of the dominant coalition. Building on the Excellence model of public relations, public relations duties and responsibilities are better appreciated when the practitioner is a member of the dominant coalition. However, its exclusion from this decision-making circle based on ethnicity, religious affiliations, culture, and gender is highly regrettable and calls for a re-evaluation of the understanding of public relations among those that occupy functional roles in the MDAs in Nigeria. Though studies have investigated what constitutes the actual roles of public relations in organizations (Wilson, 2016; Gregory, 2008), however, there is a need to specifically understudy public relations roles and how those that occupy a seat at the dominant coalition in the MDAs view or understand public relations, particularly in a highly polarized and ethnoreligious society like Nigeria. As commented by Grunig (1992) cited in

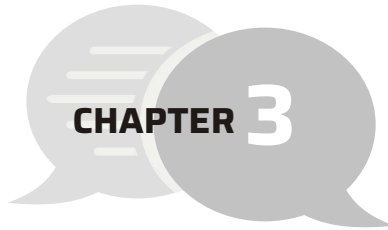
Edwards and Hodges (2019) “Public relations contributes to effectiveness by building quality, long-term relationships with strategic constituencies. Public relations is most likely to contribute to effectiveness when the senior public relations manager is a member of the dominant coalition where he or she can shape the organization's goals and help determine which external publics are most strategic”. (p.2).

Berger and Reber (2006) use power relations theory to discuss how the use of power can make public relations units more active, and effective, and contribute to ethical decision-making in organizations. Essential in the power relations theory is the assumption that public relations by nature are political and that practitioners “...can increase their influence if they become more politically astute, employ more diverse influence resources and tactics, and exert greater political will in organizational arenas where decisions are shaped through power relations” (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 2). This assertion emphasizes the leadership position of public relations professionals in the organization. To reduce the inherent subversion of organizational goals promoted through ethnoreligious interests and bigotry in the MDA, heads of public relations units should have communication skills, and diverse experiences, be proactive, build relationships, and network among diverse groups of stakeholders (Health, Motion and Leitch, 2009). Furthermore, public relations professionals can change the culture of promoting ethnocentric interests within the dominant coalition in government ministries, departments, and agencies by playing the activist role. As they exercise power and influence within the organization and dominant coalition, they become activist change agents on behalf of the organizational and public interests (Berger & Reber, 2006, cited in Bowen, 2015).

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**SECTION 2:**  
SOCIAL MEDIA, POLITICS  
AND GOVERNANCE



# SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PROMOTION OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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## **Introduction**

**T**he struggle to keep Nigeria as one indivisible nation over 60 years ago since Independence in 1960 has been with a lot of challenges. It is widely believed that the composition of the country as a multi-ethnic, cultural and religious entity with over 200 million inhabitants has made the task of achieving national unity and integration even more challenging (Auwal, 2018; Chukwurah, Nwachukwu, Desmond & Okeke, 2020; Kusugh, 2018; Ahamefule & Onozie, 2020). Joshua (2017) discloses that:

Nigeria is a country blessed with multi-ethnic diversity, which would have been expected to lift her through the strength they possess together, and by managing their potentials in such a way as to make room for national unity capable of creating sustainable development and peace in the polity. But their ethnic diversity seems to be somewhat of a curse and a point of discord in the polity. Since the inception of the federation, several signals of disunity had emerged that pointed to a difficult marriage between three major hostile



kingdoms. But somehow, the nationalists ignored these warnings and opted to live together, which brought more pain, destruction, retarded development and discord than necessary. It is now being considered whether or not this union is tenable in light of these disloyalties (p. 88).

National integration is achieved when the people have feelings of togetherness and unity on one hand and a desire to build a strong and united country without undue emphasis on one's cultural, social and economic interests on the other. It means the congruence of diversities leads to a unity in which all the varieties and peculiarities are preserved. The preservation task is to be done in the wider national interest (Maniram, 2015). By structure, Nigeria has opted for a stable multi-ethnic nation. Unfortunately, the complex nature anchored on ethnic diversity, uneven distribution of resources without accountability due to institutional arrangements and a quest for leadership baton has relegated national integration to the background (Chukwurah, Nwachukwu, Desmond & Okeke, 2020). A clear picture was painted of the fact that:

Today, rather than integrating into a cohesive community with a common sense of national identity and destiny, citizens of Nigeria are returning more and more to primordial affiliations for identity, loyalty and security. Instead of forging a united front and presenting a concerted effort to face the challenges of development in an increasingly competitive and globalised world, Nigerians are busy waging ethnic and religious wars.... (Ekanola, 2006, p. 280).

Irrespective of the fact that the journey towards national rebirth and integration amidst diversity is quite challenging, constant efforts at ensuring the country's indivisibility have subsisted. (Edosa, 2014). National unity and integration are aspirations all nations strive for. Not only is national unity associated with peace, harmony among citizens and national stability, but it is also considered a catalyst for economic development (Arina, 2019).

In all the efforts, the contributions of the media at different times have been recognized but with mixed feelings (Madu, 2021; Mufutau & Olusegun, 2022; Oluwakemi, 2021; Onobe & Kente, 2020). In particular, the advent of social media, and its acceptability and usage by many groups in different areas for different purposes has since been recognized. However, previous theoretical and empirical works by other scholars also acknowledge the successes and otherwise of social media in achieving the desired goals (Okafor & Onyenekwe, 2020; Ugochukwu, Obiajulu & Nnabuiife, 2021; Uwalaka, 2021). As Iroye (2020) observes current events have proven the efficiency and acceptability of the usage of social media for easy and quick information dissemination, Therefore, studying how social media platforms are used among Nigerians in the promotion of national integration amidst the nation's ethno-religious and cultural diversity is imperative.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study is to achieve the following:

- i. To identify the social media platforms frequently used for promoting national integration among Nigerians.
- ii. To identify the components of national integration frequently discussed on social media among Nigerians.
- iii. To examine perceptions on how favourable social media messages are in promoting national integration among Nigerians.

- iv. To examine perceptions of the positive influence of social media messages on national integration among Nigerians.

### **Research Questions**

- i. Which social media platforms are frequently used for the promotion of national integration among Nigerians?
- ii. Which components of national integration are frequently discussed on social media among Nigerians?
- iii. What is the perception of how favourable social media messages are in promoting national integration among Nigerians?
- iv. What is the perception of the positive influence of social media messages on national integration among Nigerians?

### **National Integration- Concept and Context**

National integration is an important factor in achieving the desired development in any nation. By connecting as one, the system is stronger and can overcome its challenges and by extension, attain greatness and development. Edosa (2014) affirms that a united country and its people are in a better position to ably confront its crises of development, nationhood and stability. The desire and consciousness of the political leaders and the entire citizenry to do this with the appropriate frame of mind and instrumentalities as Edosa (2014) maintains, is imperative for a successful and durable result. It could be remembered that national integration is a process of achieving national cohesion, stability, prosperity, strength and feelings of being united as a nation (Mirza, 2008). It is argued that national integration in the Nigerian context has been an attempt to forge “unity in diversity”, seeking to wish away socio-cultural differences and imposing uniformity despite complex cultural diversity (Edewor, Aluko & Folarin (2014). However, it has been observed that the realisation of genuine national unity within its ethnically diverse society has always been the primary challenge facing Nigeria since its Independence in 1960 (Ahmed, Afida, Zalina & Chan, 2021).

Interestingly, ever since, there have been concerted efforts by relevant stakeholders at different times in achieving national integration of which the media is part of such efforts. Importantly, previous scholars have examined the relationship between the media (including social media) and national unity and integration in different places (Aborisade, 2015; Agwuocha, 2019; Ahmed, Afida, Zalina & Chan, 2021; Jibril & Simon, 2017; Oluwagbohunmi, n.d; Samsudin, 2018). For instance, a study that was conducted by Kusugh (2018) has acknowledged the great contributions of the broadcast media in the integration of Nigeria by raising public knowledge and understanding about the need for political, sociocultural, economic and religious harmony for overall peace, unity and national integration but it, however, saw such contributions as not being genuinely enough or adequate to take the nation to the desired level of integration that will subsequently lead the country to the destination of sustainable and sufficient peace, unity and development.

The study by Onobe and Kente (2020) has shown that discussions on politics are usually centred either on the commission or omission of government and are hardly cultivated around the norms of the peoples' heritage. It pointed out that the concerns of national integration among youth have not been made an agenda by the producers and presenters of Kakaaki. Nwafor and Ogbodo(2015) found in their study on media frames of group identities in the 2014 national dialogue in Nigeria by *The Daily Sun* and *Leadership*

newspapers that the majority of the editions carried stories with sectional undertones and many of the reports showed unsupportive slants to opposing ethnic groups' viewpoints on the Conference; while dominant frames were issues of sectional interests such as power rotation, creation of additional states for equity, religion, state police, security and secession. Osabuohien (2005) opines that the activities associated with the communication of national integration must be seen as an all-encompassing task that transcends official speeches in attempts to persuade a disparate population to cultivate national consciousness. Such activities, as he noted, must encompass efforts to persuade leaders to eliminate policies that seek to promote spatial dislocation and cross-cultural interaction, and to arouse the audience to pay closer attention to integrative messages disseminated through the mass media.

In particular, the advent of social media has made the goal of national integration more demanding as the platforms have a lot of both positive and negative contributions to make, depending on the usage. The use of the platforms has increased significantly with over 32.9 million active social media users in Nigeria as of January 2022, with WhatsApp being the most popular platform used in the country, with over 90 million users. Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram followed as the most used social media platforms in Nigeria with a growing projected 103 million users in 2026 (Statista, 2022). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Another group of scholars argues that "social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content" (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Iroye (2020) acknowledged the fact that the advent of social media has created a means of easy and faster access to information which helps to create wider coverage and prompt responses on all matters of life as posted or reported on the web. The Internet, as underscored by Samsudin (2018), allows latitude of expression to be shared across the ethnic divide and creates critical debates and discussions. This was not possible before because most ethnic issues were confined to discussions in ethnic media among their readers. There are now more frequent debates and critical comments on major issues, whether social, economic or political. Young people are making their viewpoints known in public and are ready to be criticised and debate to defend their viewpoints (Samsudin, 2018).

The high penetration of information and communication technology among the young generation, as a study by Samsudin (2018) indicates, provides an opportunity for active citizen participation that could lead to a better understanding of the citizens' rights and responsibilities, which can form the basis for bridging the ethnic divide. According to Lessing (2004), the Internet has created a 'creative common' where people, for various reasons and agenda, contribute their views, skills, resources and time to issues of special or public interest. This development sort of creates a 'marketplace of ideas' that should be a catalyst in forging the ethnic divide ..., especially among the young generation (Samsudin, 2018). For Agwuocha (2019), friendship, reunions, growth of the business, awareness, communication, knowledge, etc. are all positive gains accrued to the use of social media. Negatively, the area of information sharing has constituted problems which are a result of the intent of the person sharing the information as well as the perceived interpretation of the message. Oftentimes, we witness social media content generating reactions, counter-reactions, sentiments and arguments among users (Agwuocha, 2019).

Similarly, two critical challenges, as Ogunyombo (2017) observed, faced by any nation are the challenge of nation-building (or the creation of unity among heterogeneous members of the polity); and the challenge of participation which refers to the extent to which people influence decisions which affect their lives. In terms of creating a forum of cohesion and active participation on issues of common interest among the citizens, social media have been found very relevant (Ogunyombo, 2017). Jibril and Simon (2017) found that the online media platform has offered opportunities for media audiences to be active participants in the media-making process; a viable and powerful access that has no regulation, which renders the gatekeeping process a very weak one. Concerns here are on the inappropriate use of the media by the active audience to disseminate hate messages, lies, insults and other messages that are destructive to the much sought-after unity of the country. These negative penchants of destruction by some irredentists and ill-informed Nigerians, by implication, define followership as one lacking in loyalty, mutuality, national interest and unity, which by extension threatens the already fragile unity (Jibril & Simon, 2017).

A study conducted by Madu (2021) has shown an impressive growth rate of smartphone ownership, internet access, and social media use in Ebonyi state and that through social media, they make friends from a clan, tribe, ethnicity, state, or even country other than theirs. Ugochukwu, Obiajulu and Nnabuife's (2021) findings indicate that the growth of social media in Nigeria has birthed the emergence of fake news as a bane to its effective deployment for promoting security awareness. According to their study, social media users spread fake information on the platform to gain more followers; also, people do not unfollow social media platforms for reporting fake stories or news and the fake news spread on social media creates panic and tension when rapidly shared by a multiplicity of the audience. Ogunyombo (2017) recommended the deliberate adoption of social media by development and socio-political agents as a major element in the social system to achieve social bonding among the citizens when engaged in matters that require collective responsibility to achieve peace and security and avoid national failure.

Amid the social media revolution, a study by Agwuocha (2019) revealed that prevalent issues such as crime, violence, conflict, elections and insurgency are discussed online. Accordingly, there are predominantly hate speeches, especially in reaction to issues of national interest. Most of such discourses are laced with inappropriate use of language exposing the lack of communicative competence amongst users. Auwal (2018) corroborated that owing to the freedom associated with the use of social media, Nigerians tend to politicise, 'ethnicise' or even 'religionise' public discussions on the social media space. This trend continuously generates controversies among the diverse population, particularly on Facebook. On the debates that surrounded a female graduate of the University of Ilorin, *Amasa Firdaus* who was denied being called to bar by the authorities of the Nigerian Law School for refusing to remove her *hijab*, Auwal (2018) found in a study that users of Facebook were polarised along ethnic and religious lines in their comments, posting negative and injurious statements capable of reducing the platform into a chaotic and indiscreet battlefield where Nigerians engage in a war of words. Mutiu, Umar & Muhammed (2021) study acknowledged an increase in the spread of fake news on social media and also established how it was a threat to national unity and integration in Nigeria.

Onoja, Bebenimibo and Onoja (2021) examined Facebook audiences' comments on herdsmen attack news in Nigeria and their implication for national unity and security and



found that many online commenters believed that political conspiracy, “Fulanization” of Nigeria, poor leadership/poor security, and terrorism were responsible for the herdsmen attacks. According to the study, more comments were calling for war or reprisal attacks than those calling for peace and resolution of the conflict. The study concluded that audience comments on herdsmen attack news in Nigeria were laden with negative frames which could worsen the security situation in the country.

Tajuddin, Bahari and Nordin's (2018) findings suggest four types of frames – nationalistic frame, political frame, cultural identity frame, and episodic frame. These frames were used by audiences in their interpretation of PSAs promoting unity and social cohesion messages. This study thus not only expands the work of PSAs within the Malaysian multicultural context but also contributes to framing theory by examining the consumption of meaning in the digital age.

Jibril and Simon (2017) studied Online Readers' Comments and National Unity in Digital Media and found that online readers' comments platform no doubt creates an avenue for the audience to react to mass media messages. This platform provides readers with the opportunity to interact and discuss issues published in the media, thus putting such issues into proper perspective. This is indeed a positive development. However, the way readers were polarised along regional lines in their comments, posting negative and injurious comments, has the capability of reducing the platform into a chaotic and indiscreet battlefield where readers engage in a war of words. This can further weaken the already epileptic unity of the country. Given the nature of the readers' comments that the presidential media chat received on the online news sites, this paper submits that the platform has the potential of intensifying the divides that characterise the Nigerian state. The realization of the much-desired unity in diversity in the country via this platform is not only far from reality, but also endangers national peaceful coexistence.

A study by Ahmed, Afida, Zalina and Chan (2021) revealed that in the name of promoting unity, private individuals and global conglomerates utilize pseudo acts to boost profits, enhance customer index, and construct their corporate image in the eyes of the ruling regimes and the general public in their host communities. It was also found that the envisioned future of the country as a united reality appears to contradict the common perception and lived experiences of the people. This study is meant to highlight the way certain ideologies are promoted and further interests are realised through the print media in the name of pseudo-patriotism. Anyanwu (2018) concluded in a study that the issues of national cohesion, unity and peaceful coexistence are a matter of choice and the media can help the differing ethnic interests to make this choice.

Mufutau and Olusegun (2022) and Oluwakemi (2021), in their separate studies, envisaged a lack of a legal framework to check and prevent threats to national unity and integration posed due to the activities of the social media and recommended holistic legislation derived from the Constitution, strengthening of the judicial system, socially responsible media practice and citizens' ethical revolution to check hate speech which is a major threat to national unity and integration.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the agenda-setting and agenda-building theories of the media which deal with the influence of news media on the salience of events in the public mind or



how traditional media agenda influences the public perception of issue salience (agenda setting) (McCombs, 2004) and how some topics become a part of media agenda when others do not (agenda building) (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Media dynamics in recent times which popularized the use of social media among individuals across groups have necessitated the use of both agenda-setting and agenda-building in anchoring this study. This observation was made earlier in 2001 by Chaffe and Metzger (2007); when they opined that “the key problem for agenda-setting theory will change from what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about” (Delwiche, 2005). Asur, Huberman, Szabo, & Wang (2011) amplified this when they posited that “when topics originate in media outlets, the social medium acts as filter and amplifier of what the standard media produces and thus contributes to the agenda-setting mechanisms that have been thoroughly studied for more than three decades.” Besides, digital media have given citizens a more active role in the production, distribution and consumption of news (Singer, 2014; Trench & Quinn, 2016), thereby creating a two-step gatekeeping process involving news visibility and value (Singer, 2014).

A study conducted by Mohamed, Abdul Manan and Wan Ghazali (2021) has revealed that reading news on Facebook changes the agenda-setting role of news media by enabling readers to join a dialogue in which they can also become meaning-makers. This, according to the study, implies that the role of the news media has evolved to the point where they are no longer agenda setters, but rather discourse centres, which means that the news media is no longer as powerful in shaping public opinion as readers' sentiments are now influenced by the discourse that goes on in the news comment sections (Mohamed, Abdul Manan & Wan Ghazali, 2021). Results in a study conducted by Kushin (2010), however, demonstrate that the news media agenda and social media agenda are often similar, questioning notions of audience fragmentation as a casualty of the news media's agenda-setting ability. How salient public issues or topics are built or discussed in social media and the impact of such discussions on national unity and integration is what this study is interested in investigating.

### Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research method using a survey. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection and was conducted on 22,166,893 population of social media users comprising 9,113,605 social media users in Lagos, 3,652,000 in Abuja and 9,401,288 in Kano respectively. The sample size of the study was 601 which was determined using an online sample size calculator, *calculator.net* under the confidence level of 95%, margin errors of 4%, population proportion of 50%, and population size of 22,166,893. Respondents were sampled proportionate to the population size of each of the areas selected, using the statistical formula thus:

$$\frac{S \times n}{N}$$

Where;

S = Size of State

n = Sample Size

N = Total Population

The proportionate sampling was done using the above formula thus:

$$\text{Abuja: } \frac{3652000}{22166893} \times \frac{601}{1} = 99$$

$$\text{Lagos: } \frac{9113605}{22166893} \times \frac{601}{1} = 99$$

$$\text{Kano: } \frac{9401288}{22166893} \times \frac{601}{1} = 99$$

Therefore, through a proportionate sampling technique, 99 respondents were sampled from Abuja, 247 respondents from Lagos and 255 respondents from Kano respectively, giving us a total of 601 respondents that were sampled in the study. The data collected was analysed through the use of descriptive statistics such as multivariate frequency distribution tables and percentages.

### Findings and Analysis

A total of 601 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents using an online administration method but only 579 representing 96.34% were returned and found usable for analysis while 22 representing 3.66% were not usable because of multiple completion by the respondents. The breakdown of the returned questionnaire indicates that Abuja has a 95 (95.96%) return rate with a margin of error of only 4.04%; Lagos was 239 (96.76%) with a margin of error of only 3.24%; while Kano was 245 (96.08%) with 3.92% error margin. Therefore, since the return rate of the questionnaire by far overwhelmed the non-return rate, our analysis of the data is based on the rate of the questionnaire which returned and was usable while the error margin of 4% was deemed insignificant to affect the validity of our data in the study.

**Table 1: Social Media Platforms Frequently Used for Promotion of National Integration among Nigerians**

Response	No. of Respondents							
	Abuja	%	Lagos	%	Kano	%	Total	%
Facebook	15	15.79	46	19.25	57	23.27	118	20.38
WhatsApp	22	23.16	58	24.27	76	31.02	156	26.94
Instagram	10	10.53	25	10.46	18	7.35	53	9.15
YouTube	7	7.37	19	7.95	14	5.71	40	6.91
Facebook Messenger	6	6.32	15	6.28	10	4.08	31	5.35
Telegram	5	5.26	17	7.11	9	3.67	31	5.35
Twitter	13	13.68	29	12.13	21	8.57	63	10.88
TikTok	3	3.16	7	2.93	5	2.04	15	2.59
Snapchat	2	2.11	4	1.67	4	1.63	10	1.73
LinkedIn	4	4.21	9	3.77	11	4.49	24	4.15
Pinterest	3	3.16	3	1.26	5	2.04	11	1.90
Others	5	5.26	7	2.93	15	6.12	27	4.66
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**

Table 1 revealed that WhatsApp (26.94%) followed by Facebook (20.38%) and Twitter (10.88%) are used by the majority of Nigerians in the promotion of national integration, compared to Instagram (9.15%), YouTube (6.91%), Facebook Messenger (5.35%), Telegram (5.35%), TikTok (2.59%), Snapchat (1.73%), LinkedIn (4.15%), Pinterest (1.90%), and Others (4.66%). It implies therefore that WhatsApp followed by Facebook and Twitter are the major social media platforms used among Nigerians in the promotion of national integration.

**Table 2: Components of National Integration Frequently Discussed on Social Media Among Nigerians**

Response	No. of Respondents						Total	%
	Abuja	%	Lagos	%	Kano	%		
Political integration	19	20	65	27.20	67	27.35	151	26.079
Economic integration	13	13.68	27	11.30	29	11.84	69	11.92
Cultural integration	15	15.79	25	10.46	27	11.02	67	11.57
Religious integration	17	17.89	57	23.85	51	20.82	125	21.59
Ethnic integration	13	13.68	31	12.97	31	12.65	75	12.95
Social integration	6	6.32	14	5.86	16	6.53	36	6.22
National symbols	7	7.37	11	4.60	13	5.31	31	5.35
Others	5	5.26	9	3.77	11	4.49	25	4.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**

Data in Table 2 revealed that political integration (26.079%), followed by religious integration (21.59%), ethnic integration (12.95%), economic integration (11.92%), cultural integration (11.57%) are major aspects of national integration available in social media for promotion compared to social integration (6.22%), integration through national symbols (5.35%) and Others (4.32%). This implies that political integration, followed by religious integration, ethnic integration, economic integration, and cultural integration are major aspects of national integration available in social media for promotion in Nigeria.

**Table 3: Perception of How Favourable Social Media Messages Are in Promoting National Integration among Nigerians**

Response	No. of Respondents						Total	%
	Abuja	%	Lagos	%	Kano	%		
Strongly agree	6	6.32	13	5.44	14	5.71	33	5.70
Agree	11	11.58	21	8.79	23	9.39	55	9.50
Neutral	5	5.26	15	6.28	16	6.53	36	6.22
Strongly Disagree	41	43.16	123	51.46	127	51.84	291	50.26
Disagree	32	33.68	67	28.03	65	26.53	164	28.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**

Table 3 reveals that the majority (50.26%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and another 28.32% disagreed that messages predominant on social media are favourable in the promotion of national integration among Nigerians. While 6.22% remained neutral, only a cumulative 15.20% fell in the category of those that agreed. This implies that social media messages are unfavourable in the promotion of national unity and integration in Nigeria.

**Table 4: Perception of Positive Influence of Social Media Messages on National Integration**

Response	No. of Respondents							
	Abuja	%	Lagos	%	Kano	%	Total	%
Strongly agree	5	5.26	9	3.77	11	4.49	25	4.32
Agree	9	9.47	17	7.11	19	7.76	45	7.77
Neutral	3	3.16	13	5.44	15	6.12	31	5.35
Strongly Disagree	53	55.79	139	58.16	139	56.73	331	57.17
Disagree	25	26.32	61	25.52	61	24.90	147	25.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**

Table 4 shows that cumulatively, a large proportion of the respondents (82.56%) fell in the category of those who disagreed that social media messages have a positive influence on national integration.

### Discussion

It is clear from this study that social media has been actively used among Nigerians in discussing issues of national interest. WhatsApp followed by Facebook and Twitter are the top social media platforms used among Nigerians as they discuss issues about national integration. The components of national integration which are regularly featured are political integration, religious integration, ethnic integration, economic integration, and cultural integration. These issues attract huge attention from Nigerians compared to other aspects. The findings align with what Tajuddin, Bahari and Nordin (2018), found in a similar study. They identified four types of frames used by audiences in their interpretation of PSAs in promoting unity and social cohesion messages. The frames are nationalistic frame, political frame, cultural identity frame, and episodic frame. Also, a study by Agwuocha (2019) found that during the social media revolution, prevalent issues such as crime, violence, conflict, elections and insurgency are discussed online. There are predominantly hate speeches, especially in reaction to issues of national interest because most of such discourses are laced with inappropriate use of language exposing the lack of communicative competence amongst users.

However, as found in the study, social media messages that are aimed at promoting national integration in Nigeria are not hitting the right notes with the people as a cumulative 78.58% of the respondents disagreed that the messaging is effective in promoting national integration. The implication of this is that social media messages are predominantly unfavourable in achieving integration in Nigeria. Findings in a study by Ugochukwu, Obiajulu and Nnabuiife (2021) supported this finding that the growth of social media in Nigeria has birthed the emergence of fake news which has been the bane of its effective

deployment for national integration on issues such as security.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that social media messages are not usually favourable and have no positive influence in promoting national integration as indicated by a significantly large portion of the respondents. This finding corroborates the one in a study by Jibril and Simon (2017) that with the divisive nature of online comments, the possibility of perpetual disunity is very high. Mutiu, Umar and Muhammed (2021) also acknowledged the increase in the spread of fake news on social media threatens national unity and integration in Nigeria. For instance, Onoja, Bebenimibo and Onoja (2021) noted that social media comments on herdsmen attacks in Nigeria were laden with negative frames which could worsen the security situation in the country.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded from the study that while social media platforms present opportunities for Nigerians to freely interact and discuss issues of national interest, the nature and pattern of conversation have not helped the course of national integration in Nigeria. The fact majority of respondents in this study do not find social media messages on the various components of the national integration discourse favourable or to have a positive influence meant that proponents of social change may need to rethink how best social media messages can be retooled to achieve these objectives.

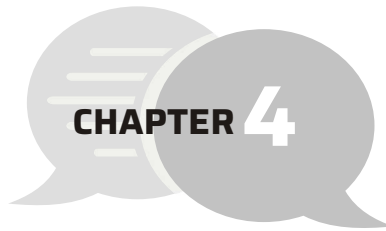


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# INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

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## **Introduction**

In contemporary societies, social media have revolutionised human communication patterns in a way never witnessed before now (Okoro & Nwafor,2013). The main index of social media technologies, which is, the speedy and unhindered flow of information within a twinkling of an eye, has promoted liberty and actualized human's right to freedom of speech and expression (Okoro & Nwafor,2013). Going further, social media platforms give liberty to the users to become both the producers and receivers of information (Ahmed, *et al.*, 2019). The implication of this is that citizens via social media platforms can dodge the run-of-the-mill practice of newsmaking in the conventional media, which involves the rigour of both gatekeeping and framing (Hermida, *et al*, 2012). Ahmed *et al*, (2019)'s emphasised that this new role ascribed to the audience by social media technologies in virtual communities has deemphasized the traditional role of the media as the producers and that of the audience as the receiver.

To differentiate and substantiate the traditional media role in response to the stance of Ahmed *et al.* (2019), Neuman *et al.* (2014) describe the conventional media role as that which is official and prescriptive while the social media role is tagged reactionary and pre-emptive (public feedback). Essentially, the dynamism in social media message creation gives leeway to easy information production, transmission and reception compared to that of conventional media. With social media technologies, both the initial poster (of a message) and the sharer (the third party) play the role of gatekeepers to the general audience. According to Achor (2017), both the poster and the third party assume three notable gatekeeping roles, which are: the originator, the transmitter, and the influencer.

As the originator, such an individual initiates an idea and encodes it in the form of chats, tweets, video, or audio and as the transmitter, such individual posts (transmits) such encoded messages in their social media handle (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, etc). As the influencer, such an individual (initial poster) also controls the flow of the messages (chats, tweets, video, or audio) by sharing them with groups and friends, who at the same time re-share in their various social media handles. Notably, in the process of sharing or forwarding the messages, the content could be edited or amplified to suit any intended goal (Achor, 2017). Against this background, social media users now specifically perform an audience gatekeeping role via the selection of what to post, how to post it and when to post it on the myriad social media platforms available worldwide.

With this role, social media technologies have impacted all spheres of human endeavour from global commerce, religion, culture, peace, conflict and, most importantly, governance (Ashiekpe & Mojaye, 2017). Via social media, many dictatorial and sit-tight political gladiators have been ousted and replaced with more democratic ones as evident in the 'political tsunami' witnessed in some African countries in the wake of the popular Arab spring in 2011/2012 (Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, 2017). This Arab uprising, which originated via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube fuelled protests that ended the protracted reigns of such dictatorial and sit-tight political figures, such as; Tunisia's Ben Ali, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, and Libya's Muammar al-Gaddafi. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) posit that social media have provided a platform where people across the globe can ventilate their opinions about government and governance as well as empowered citizens to perform check and balance roles on public and political office holders. Also, through social media technologies, people can demand transparency, probity, and accountability in government; and encourage a higher level of political participation among users (especially youths) as witnessed now in the build-up to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Across the globe and in Nigeria, social media technologies have been used to get the attention of citizens on sundry issues, such as; political participation, the clarion call for patriotism for one's country, tackling insecurity and terrorism and calling out government failures. On involvement in political activities during elections, political parties and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) make frantic efforts to connect with Nigerians via their various social media handles on the need to have maximum political participation. On the need for patriotism and tackling insecurity as well as terrorism, the Federal Government always engage the citizen (via social media handles) using their various agencies to create and disseminate messages on such subject matter. A notable one recently is the "If you see something, say something" campaign by the Federal Ministry of Information.



Apart from the above, citizens have also used social media technologies to mobilise and coordinate people on some impactful social campaigns and protests against perceived failures in government policies and actions. Examples are: the #Endsars protest in 2020 (coordinated via Twitter and other networking sites) initiated against the perceived unruly and unconstitutional conduct of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force (this later degenerated into a protest against bad governance in Nigeria), Occupy Nigeria protest initiated against the removal of fuel subsidy by the Nigerian government in January 2012, and the #BBOG (Bring back Our Girls) campaign coordinated on Twitter and other social networking sites to draw public attention to the seemingly forgotten story of over 200 Chibok Community School girls abducted by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria's North-east. Others are an online public push for the removal of Kemi Adeosun in the wake of her NYSC certificate scandal, an online public push for the removal of former SFG, Babachair Lawal when he was involved in grass cutting contract scandal, a call for Abba Kyari's dismissal due to his scandal with the United States involving Hushpuppi' case, protest against the prolonged stay of President Buhari's ministers who showed interest in contesting the presidency, protest for the removal of CBN governor- Godwin Ifeanyi Emezie in the wake of his involvement in politics, among others. Against this backdrop, this study investigates the perception of the audience on the influence of social media (as utilized by users) on government policies and actions in Nigeria.

### **Statement of Problem**

Social media in a heterogeneous and plural society like Nigeria have been used in both positive and negative ways. Among the negative ways are the spread of fake news, misinformation, and deliberate falsehood including hate speech while the positive usages include using social media for spreading information on healthy living, giving updates on happenings in the country and globally as well as educating the users on issues of national and global importance (Manning, 2014). Today, there is an abundance of studies on the nexus between social media and politics (Cheng, Muno & Moritze, 2015; Achor & Nnabuko, 2017; Ahlgvist, Black, Holoner & Helmonen, 2008). Issues of politics and governance dominate the online media platforms as Nigerians prepare for their every-four-year process of electing people into various political offices come 2023.

Numerous studies (Cheng, Muno & Moritze, 2015; Achor and Nnabuko, 2017; Hermid *et al.*, 2012; Ahlgvist, Black, Holoner and Helmonen, 2008) have emphasised the power of social media and its contribution to politics, globalisation, economy, among others. These studies affirm the multiplier strengths of social media on the issues highlighted above since its cameo. However, there are limited studies on the perception of the audience on the influence of social media (as utilized by users) on government policies and activities. Putting perception into the context of this study, perception refers to the cognitive process through which an individual organises, interprets and makes appropriate meanings from the information they are exposed to. Not only does perception create people's experience of the world around them, but also allows them to act appropriately within their environment (Ahlgvist, *et al.* 2008). According to Segard (2015), there is a relationship between perceptions and technology use because perception defines how various technologies are assessed, embraced or rejected as well as utilized for certain purposes (of concern to this study is the use of social media technologies to influence government policies and activities in Nigeria).



In light of the above, this paper attempts to bridge the knowledge gap and extend the frontiers of empirical discussions on the interplay and influence of social media activities on government policies and activities in Nigeria.

### **Objective of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the perception of the audience on the influence of social media (as utilized by users) on government policies and activities. The specific objectivities include:

- i. To determine the level of audience exposure to social media content on government policies and activities.
- ii. To assess the nature of social media content on government policies and activities.
- iii. To evaluate audience perception of the influence of social media content on government policies and activities.
- iv. To examine the attitude (actions) of the audience towards the use of social media for building an inclusive and hate-free democratic society.

### **Research Questions**

Prelude on the research objectives, these are the research questions:

- i. What is the level of audience exposure to social media content on government policies and activities?
- ii. What is the nature of social media content on government policies and activities?
- iii. How does the audience perceive the influence of social media content on government policies and activities?
- iv. How does the audience act towards the use of social media for building an inclusive and hate-free democratic society?

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following null hypotheses are formulated:

- H<sub>0</sub>1: Audiences are not exposed to social media content on government policies and activities.
- H<sub>0</sub>2: Social media content on government policies and activities are mostly negative.
- H<sub>0</sub>3: Social media content does not influence government policies and activities.
- H<sub>0</sub>4: The audience does not act towards using social media for building an inclusive and hate-free democratic society.

*N.B. Audience in this study refers to social media users.*

### **Audience Perception**

The audience within the domain of social media and as contextualised in this study refers to social media users, especially youth of ages 18-35 who belong to the digital native (people who are ICT compliant) category. According to Hermida (2015), there are four categories of social media users, namely: professionals, sharers, creators and bonders. The distinction among the categories is thin as each social media user can fall within each category depending on their present usage status.

Professional users refer to those who use social media technologies for the advancement of their professions and businesses while sharers are those who share tweets, chats, videos, audio and other news items created or posted by others on their personal social media handles and platforms (Hermida, 2015). Further, creators are those who, with the lack of censorship feature of social media, initiate or create tweets, chats, videos, audio

and other news items on issues of national or international importance while bonders are people including friends and relatives as well as acquaintances who use various social media platforms to share messages of affection, socialization and hope (Hermida, 2015). Such individuals also use social media platforms for dialogue and bonding (Hermida, 2015).

Shoemaker and Vos (2009) alongside Achor and Nnabuko (2019) in their contribution to Network Gatekeeping, classify social media users into four typologies, namely: everyday users, institutional users, networked individual users and professional communicators. The identified actors, according to them, converse, mediate, tweet, chat with one another, comment on posts, share information and retweet tweets. As a result of this inter-relationship, the identified typologies mediate the multi-directional flow of information as backed by the model of redefined gatekeeping (Achor & Nnabuko, 2019; Barzilia-Nahon, 2008).

Perception, on its part, refers to the cognitive process through which an individual organises, interprets and makes appropriate meanings from the information they are exposed to. Not only does perception create people's experience of the world around them, but also allows them to act appropriately within their environment (Ahlgvist, *et al.* 2008). According to Segard (2015), there is a relationship between perceptions and technology use because perception defines how various technologies are assessed, embraced or rejected as well as utilized for certain purposes.

According to Belch and Belch (2014), perception is an individual process which depends on an individual's internal factors such as experiences, moods, beliefs, attitudes, expectations and needs. The perceptual process is also influenced by the characteristics of a stimulus (Fennell, 2017). Essentially, audience perception of social media content hinges on varying psychological interpretations of the types of content shared cum the tone of the content as used by social media users in conversing or discussing such content (Lee, 2012; Chen & Ng, 2016). In this paper, the concern is to examine the audience's perception of social media's influence on government policies and activities in Nigeria.

### **Social Media Technologies**

Social media are the newest variant of web-based platforms which promote connectivity and interactivity among users worldwide (Akpoghiran & Erubami, 2019) and provide an avenue for experiencing the products of journalism (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015). They are based on the web 2.0 technology and use computer-mediated tools that can facilitate expressions, build an online community of users, create or co-create social values tagged UGC (Users Generated Content), and engender discussions among people that are geographically dispersed (Akpoghiran & Erubami, 2019). Despite social media enjoying wider discussions in almost all spheres of human endeavour or disciplines, there are no universally functionally and theoretically accepted definitions of what social media are within communication studies (Carr and Hayes, 2015, Lee, Sha, Dozier and Sargeant, 2015; Kent, 2015; Achor 2017). Notwithstanding, scholars in communication and social interaction studies gave three perspectives on what social media are (Achor & Nnabuko, 2019).

The first perspective described social media as interactive platforms or spaces where people converge online to share information and interact. This perspective further sees

social media as means of interaction among people, whereby, they create, share and exchange information as well as ideas in online virtual communities cum networks (Achor & Nnabuko, 2019). The second perspective described social media as technology-based websites which encourage person-to-person as well as machine-to-person production and sharing of information. Further, this perspective explores Web 2.0 and the architectural structure of social-mediated communication enabled by mobile and web-based technologies (Carr & Hayes, 2015). The third perspective referred to social media as platforms for promoting organization-public relationships as well as supporting collaborations, knowledge management, social connections and fostering public awareness of connection activities and happenings (Smith, 2015; Achors & Nnabuko, 2019). Combining the three perspectives, we posit in this paper that social media are web 2.0-enabled platforms which enable users (individuals or organization and their public) who may be wide, heterogeneous and diverse to meet, converse, interact, share information, ideas, knowledge, collaborations and awareness in a way that is not censored.

Social media are in different forms, such as magazines, weblogs, internet forums, social blogs, social networks, podcasts, video and social bookmarking, microblogging, photographs or picture (Kaplan & Haenein, 2010; Achor, Nwachukwu, & Nkwocha, 2015) and these platforms include Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Wikipedia, Twitter, Instagram, Instant blog, WhatsApp, 2go, etc. These social media platforms, according to Kaplan & Haelin (2010), are broadly categorised into social networking sites (E.g. Facebook), blogs and microblogs (E.g. Twitter, WhatsApp), collaborative projects (E.g. Wikipedia), content communities (E.g. YouTube), the virtual game world (E.g. World of Craft) and virtual social world (E.g. Second life).

In Nigeria, about 30.9 million Nigerians are active users of various social media platforms and this figure is projected to rise to 36.8 million in 2023 (Clement, 2019). Essentially, social media users are not only able to receive and consume content on social media but are also empowered to produce and disseminate information they deem fit, making them 'prosumers' in the process. That is, users are both producers and consumers of content.

### **Government Policies and Activities in Nigeria**

Government policies refer to the specific programmes of actions championed by the government to achieve its goals in different sectors of the nation's economy. It expresses the decisions, goals, as well as actions adopted by the government for social, political and economic management (Hassel, 2015). In Nigeria, the government has numerous policies and has embarked on different actions and activities to actualize its goals. There are policies in agriculture, finance, economy, education, security, health, etc while specific actors are appointed to man and ensure the actualization of the policies. In some instances, there are inadequacies in the actions and personalities of these appointed actors. This is sometimes reinforced by the (in)actions on the part of the presidency and/or the inadequacies of major actors in the nation's helms of affairs. These inadequacies usually attract public outcry, especially on social media. Social media users via different platforms create, tweet and retweet different contents on such inadequacies and such is presumed to have a specific influence on the government's further actions, activities and policies. This is essentially the focus of this study.

Examples of these inadequacies and the accompanied protest of social media users are: the #Endsars protest in 2020 (coordinated via Twitter and other networking sites) initiated against the perceived unruly and unconstitutional conduct of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force (this later degenerated to protest against bad governance in Nigeria), Occupy Nigeria protest initiated against the removal of fuel subsidy by the Nigerian government in January 2012, and the #BBOG (Bring back Our Girls) campaign coordinated on Twitter and other social networking sites to draw public attention to the seemingly forgotten story of over 200 Chibok Community School girls abducted by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria's North-east. Others are an online public push for the removal of Kemi Adeosun in the wake of her NYSC certificate scandal, an online public push for the removal of former SFG, Babachair Lawal when he was involved in grass-cutting contract scandal, a call for Abba Kyari's dismissal due to his scandal with the United States involving Hushpuppi' case, protest against the prolonged stay of President Buhari's ministers who showed interest in contesting the presidency, protest for the removal of CBN governor- Godwin Ifeanyi Emezie in the wake of his involvement in politics, protest against the prolonged Twitter ban in Nigeria, among others.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on two theories, namely: Audience Gatekeeping Theory and Social Network Theory. Audience Gatekeeping Theory was propounded by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) as a way to address the gap or failure of the traditional gatekeeping theory in recognising the audience or the gate on whom gatekeeping is exerted. The theory holds that the audience in the typical traditional gatekeeping models in media studies has roles that were neglected. The audience or the gated community, according to the theory, shares and determines the importance of news (set news agenda), thus, breaking the traditional newsroom routine and bureaucracy of setting agenda in the public domain. Social Media in the Audience Gatekeeping Theory, enable users to dialogue and interact with news, newsmakers and institution. This user-to-user interaction is integral and central to gatekeeping process (Kwon, 2012) as the audience via social media can filter information and post or promote only certain pieces which appeal to them (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Essentially, The Network Gatekeeping Theory holds that every social media user is a gatekeeper with the authority to decide which information they will share and which not to share (Diakopoulos & Zubiaga, 2014).

The relevance of this theory to this study is that it does not only affirm the nomenclature of social media users as "prosumers" but also, affirms their position as the gatekeepers of news and activities which set agenda in the public domain. From this theory, if individuals as gatekeepers gatekeep what they produce on social media, the negative aspect of social media use (hate speech, misinformation, falsehood, etc.) would be curbed. Thus, it can be deduced from this theory that information produced on social media whether positive or negative is deliberate.

Social Network Theory as propounded by John Bannes (1954) focuses on how people, organisations or groups interact with others in their network. It dwells on the role of social interaction in transmitting information, channelling personal or media influence and enabling attitudinal or behavioural change (Dunn, 1983). The theory recognizes two concepts: networks and nodes. The network is the connection, such as the social media networks while nodes are individual actors or organisations within the network (social media) (Liu, 2017). A fascinating concept of the theory is the six degrees of separation.

According to these six degrees of separation, the more people you know and interact with within the network, the smaller the world becomes. Hence, with the ties among the nodes, you just need six right connections (interaction with just or less than six nodes) to reach anywhere in this world.

The import of the propositions of the Social Network Theory is that any content shared, tweeted or re-tweet on social media platforms has reached everywhere in the entire universe. Thus, it would have specific effects on whom the contents are directed to because, as posited by the Audience Gatekeeping Theory, the audience (social media users) set the agenda in the public domain. Therefore, if individuals as gatekeepers produce negative or positive content or information, such message or information would reach everywhere in the entire universe with specific effects as set out in the message/information. This typifies how comments and users' activities on government policies can go far online and the effect the tone set out in the message can have on all the media audience and their reactions towards the government.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the survey research method because of its suitability in examining people's perceptions and opinions (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo & Okpanachi, 2017). The population of the study comprised all the youth in Southwest Nigeria between the ages of 18-35 who are tagged digital natives (conversant with ICT and allied technologies). According to Worldometer (2022), the population of people in southwest Nigeria is about 47 million and the youth represent about 35% of this population. Out of the population, a sample size of 300 was drawn out using the recommendation of Comrey and Lee that a sample size of 50 is very poor; 100 is poor; 200 is fair; 300 is good; 500 is very good; and 1,000 is excellent (Asemah, *et al.*, 2017).

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to decide that digital natives (people aged 18-35) would be selected for this study. In the second stage, simple random sampling was used as each youth in the southwest region was given an equal chance of being selected in the final sample. The last stage was based on Convenience Sampling as the first set of respondents to fill out the web-based questionnaire to reach 300 responses based on the count were selected in the final sample. Out of the 300 respondents, 65 respondents were from Lagos state; 58 respondents were from Oyo state; 52 were from Osun state; 43 respondents were from Ogun state while 41 respondents each were from both Ondo and Ekiti states.

Data were collected using an online Likert scale questionnaire with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Before administration (sending out the questionnaire), the instrument was subjected to content validity by three research and media studies experts who affirmed that the contents were modest, clear and intelligible enough to elicit responses that would actualize this study's objectives. On reliability, a pilot survey (online) was conducted using 20 respondents from the North central region of Nigeria (Offa and Ilorin, Kwara state) who were sent the online questionnaire for filling. The result of the pilot study, yielded a CronbachAlpha of .898 (89.8%), implying the reliability of the data set. The choice of Offa and Ilorin as the destination for the pilot test was based on the recommendation by Hassan, Schattner and Mazza (2006) that a pilot should be done preferably using respondents from a population different from the actual population to be



used for the study. Thus, Offa and Ilorin in the Northcentral region of Nigeria were considered close to the southwest region in language, culture and development.

For analysis of the result, descriptive statistics of percentage (%), mean (x) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used. The mean and standard deviation are considered the strongest and most widely used descriptive statistical tools in social science research (Asemah, *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, the responses to each statement on the 5-scale Likert questionnaire were averaged to determine the mean cut-off point for the study at 3.00, while the standard deviation benchmark for the study was pegged at 1.41. The decision to either accept or reject a statement was adapted from Nworgu's (2006) recommendation that where a computed mean score is equal to or less than the benchmark (cut-off point), the outcome is negative (rejected) but where a computed mean is greater than the benchmark, the outcome is positive (accepted). Accordingly, a high mean and low or moderate standard deviation indicated that the responses were markedly different (high variability), while a low mean and a low or moderate standard deviation indicated a low variability in the responses.

### Findings

All 300 copies of the questionnaire administered were properly filled and used for the analysis. Thus, there is a 100% response rate. In the analysis, 65% of the respondents were male (195); the least age of the respondents was 20 and the highest was 35, the modal age range was 26-35 years (215). A total of 45 (15%) of the respondents have had primary education, 129 (43%) have secondary education, and the remaining 126 (42%) have had various levels of tertiary education. Most of the respondents 165 (55%) were self-employed, 42 (14%) are civil servants (42), and the remaining 93 (31%) were either students or unemployed.

**Table 1: Respondents' Use of Social Media and Exposure to Online contents on government policies and activities**

Items	Responses	Frequency (%)
Respondents' use of social media	Yes	300 (100)
	No	
	Total	300 (100)
Most frequently used social media platforms	WhatsApp	122 (41)
	Twitter	75 (25)
	Facebook	96 (32)
	Instagram	2 (0.4)
	YouTube	5 (1.6)
	Total	300 (100)
The extent of social media usage	Daily	254 (84.7)
	Weekly	42 (14)
	Monthly	4 (1.3)
	Total	300 (100)
Frequency of exposure to social media content on government policy and activities	Always	265 (88.3)
	Sometimes	30 (10)
	Rarely	5 (1.7)
	Never	-
	Total	300 (100)

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**



Table 1 showed that all the respondents (100%) used social media, with WhatsApp (41%), Facebook (32%) and Twitter (25%) ranked as the most frequently used social media platforms. 254 (84.7%) of the respondents said they make daily use of social media and 265 (88.3%) of the respondents said exposure to online content on government policies and activities has become an always-occurring experience. This finding indicates the commonness and power of social media as communication platforms to engage and review content on government policies and activities on social media platforms.

**Table 2: Respondents' Perception of the Nature of Social Media Contents on Government Policies and Activities**

Items	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	X SD	Decision
Social media contents on government policies and activities are mostly negative	48 (16)	59 (20)	4 (1)	165 (55)	24 (8)	2.6 (1.3)	Reject
Most contents on government policy and activities on social media are false and unreliable	216 (72)	25 (8)	10 (3)	35 (12)	14 (5)	3.6 (1.5)	Accept
Government policy contents found on social media are never current and outdated	5 (2)	3 (1)	5 (2)	275 (91)	12 (4)	1.9 (1.0)	Reject
Conversations among people on social media on government policies and actions are often mundane, and trivial and rarely highlight important issues in the society	25 (8)	15 (5)	10 (3)	207 (69)	43 (15)	2.1 (1.2)	Reject
Social media content on government policy and activities is generated by anyone and everyone	285 (95)	8 (3)	-	7 (2)	-	4.2 (1.7)	Accept

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**

Table 2 showed that respondents accepted that the peculiar nature of social media content on government policies and activities is false and unreliable (N =58%; X = 3.4; SD =1.5) and accepted that content is generated by anyone and everyone on social media (N =98%; X = 4.2; SD =1.7). The respondents, however, rejected the notion that discussion (among social media users) on government policies and actions are often mundane, and trivial and rarely highlight important issues in society (N =84%; X = 2.1; SD =1.2). They equally disagreed that the contents are often outdated (N = 95%; X =1.9; SD =1.0) while they also disagreed that social media contents on government policies and activities are mostly negative (N = 63%; X = 2.6; SD=1.3).

**Table 3: Respondents' perception of the influence of social media content on government policies and activities**

Items	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	X SD	Decision
Social media content and discussions about government policies and activities fuelled the hate speech phenomenon in Nigeria	248 (82)	15 (5)	5 (2)	27 (9)	5 (2)	3.8 (1.2)	Accept
Social media have facilitated the unhindered dissemination of information on government policies and activities at a reduced cost and without needless censorship	216 (72)	25 (8)	10 (3)	35 (12)	14 (5)	3.6 (1.5)	Accept

The increasing level of political tension and youth violence (E,g Endsars, protest against subsidy removal, protest against Chibok girls kidnapping, etc) in Nigeria is traceable to the use of social media in discussing government policies and actions plus inactions	287 (96)	10 (3)	-	-	3 (1)	4.7 (0.5)	Accept
Social media content on government policies and activities has stirred up public interest in the activities of the government and the actors	215 (72)	45 (15)	10 (3)	25 (8)	5 (2)	3.4 (1.3)	Accept
Exposure to social media content on government policy and activities has given me a better understanding of happenings on the policies, activities and inactions of the government	287 (95)	8 (3)	-	5 (2)	-	4.5 (0.7)	Accept
Social media merely empower users to discuss government policies, activities and inactions online without enough motivation to act offline	85 (28)	45 (15)	20 (7)	148 (49)	2 (1)	1.7 (1.0)	Reject
Exposure to content on government policy and activities on social media has encouraged me to fight for a particular cause	215 (72)	10 (3)	5 (2)	45 (15)	25 (8)	3.2 (1.2)	Accept
Social media have provided me with the opportunity to get feedback from the government	237 (79)	45 (15)	12 (4)	-	6 (2)	4.2 (1.4)	Accept
Social media content on government policies and activities has made it easier to hold powerful political and public office-holders accountable	255 (85)	40 (13)	-	-	5 (2)	4.8 (0.4)	Accept

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**

Table 3 shows some of the perceived influence of social media content on government policies and activities to be: the enhancement of the flow of discussion on government policies and activities without needless censorship (N= 80%; X = 3.6; SD = 1.5), creation of opportunity for direct interaction with feedback from the government (N = 94%; X =4.2; SD = 1.4) as well as hold powerful political and public office holders accountable (N = 98%; X =4.8; SD = 0.4), the awakening of interest to fight for a cause among users (N = 75%; X = 3.2; SD = 1.2), enhancement of public understanding of happenings on the policies, activities and inactions of the government (N = 98%; X =4.5; SD = 0.7), and empower users to discuss government policies, activities and inactions online with motivation to act offline (not just a talker but with corresponding offline actions (N = 50%; X = 1.7; SD =1.0). On the flip side, online media were also perceived to have contributed to the growing phenomenon of hate speech in Nigeria (N= 87%; X = 3.8; SD =1.2) and increased political tension as well as both online and offline protest in Nigeria (N= 99%; X =4.7; SD =0.5).

## **Discussion**

The study affirms the popularity of social media platforms among Nigerians. All the respondents revealed that they have used, at least, one of the various web 2.0-based platforms for communication, with WhatsApp (41%), Facebook (32%) and Twitter (25%) ranked as the most frequently used social media platforms. This finding corroborates the findings of previous studies (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015; Clement, 2019; Akpoghiran & Erubami, 2019). This popularity of social media usage among Nigerians could be linked to

the Web 2.0 peculiar strengths and traits of convenience, interconnectivity, interactivity, universality, and affordability which allows geographically dispersed, wide and heterogeneous users to interact without restriction of censorship. Also, daily usage was found to be the dominant pattern of social media use among the majority of the respondents (84.7%) with monthly usage the least usage pattern (1.3%). This is consistent with the findings of Ashiekpe and Mojaye (2017). This persistent usage can be said to be a result of the engaging nature of social media platforms where messages and information among friends or members of a network group can easily be shared. Meanwhile, much of the information and messages shared are laced with content on government policies and activities including their inactions (Ajayi & Adesote, 2015). This is reflected in the responses of (88.3%) of the respondents who said that they are always exposed to media content on government policies and activities on social media.

Table 2 showed that respondents identified the peculiar nature of social media contents on government policies and activities to be false and unreliable (N =58%; X = 3.4; SD =1.5) and that the contents are generated by anyone and everyone on social media (N =98%; X = 4.2; SD =1.7). The respondents, however, rejected the notion that discussion (among social media users) on government policies and actions are often mundane, and trivial and rarely highlight important issues in society (N =84%; X = 2.1; SD =1.2). They equally disagreed that the contents are often outdated (N = 95%; X =1.9; SD =1.0) while they also disagreed that social media contents on government policies and activities are mostly negative (N = 63%; X = 2.6; SD=1.3).

Further, in Table 2, the findings indicated that the respondents largely perceived social media content on government policies and activities as false and unreliable. However, respondents said that often the users' discussions on government policies and actions including inactions are centred on important issues in the society. This is in agreement with a previous study in which online communication media were found to be promoters of half-truths and outright falsehoods (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Apuke & Appollos, 2017). This has been described as a major weakness of social media, which needs to be addressed for the success of online communication efforts via social media platforms to wax stronger. On the positive side, social media content on government policies, actions and inactions was perceived to be current and tailored towards the majority of citizens, based on User Generated Content (UGC). Unequivocally, this extant attribute of social media gives it the nomenclature: "the media of the now". Social media also have a simultaneity attribute where users can post news, photos and videos about events simultaneously as they are taking place and these contents can be edited and reposted by the users with the UGC feature. Thus, this UGC phenomenon birthed the 'prosumer' concept (a situation whereby the ordinary consumers of news (social media users) are also producing news for others to consume.

On the perceived influence of social media contents on the policies and activities of the government, respondents perceived that online platforms have positively contributed to the growth of democracy by facilitating the unrestricted flow of information on government policies and actions on social media at reduced cost and without needless censorship. As a result, social media have also stimulated public interest in the activities of government and public officials, enhancing public understanding of issues around government policies in a way that has enhanced the capacity of citizens to hold powerful political and public office holders accountable for their actions and inactions. Hence, social media provide a citizen-

government interaction and feedback mechanism. This is a power shift from an alteration to the top-down structure of communication by the mainstream media. Ideally, this takes the world and Nigeria in particular, closer to the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Similarly, being a “prosumer” brings social media users and citizens closer to Karl Marx's principle of power redistribution and control in which the tools and means of distribution are said to be in the hands of the workers.

Despite this influence of social media platforms on government policies and activities, the platforms also significantly contributed to the growing phenomenon of hate speech, political tension and violence. This has birthed politically active 'netizens' with enough motivation for offline willpower to act according to the direction of the online content and discussions they are exposed to. This goes in tandem with the conclusion of previous studies (Fenton & Barassi, 2011; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Apuke & Appollos, 2017; Erubami,2020) that online communication platforms encourage political cynicism and other harmful political outcomes as well as violence.

### **Conclusion**

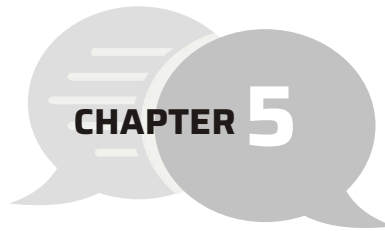
This study has revealed that social media platforms are popular means through which people are exposed to content (news and information) on government policies and actions daily in Nigeria. It was also found that social media could be used for the expression of hate speech that could fuel violence. Even though news and information on government policies and actions could be false, social media still provide a platform for citizens to get information on the policies of the government as well as the action and inaction of government officials. Furthermore, social media enhances the capacity of citizens to make the government and its officials accountable for their actions or inactions and provides citizens-government interaction and feedback mechanisms. Given this, it can be concluded that conversations on social media between citizens-citizens and citizens-government influence government policies and activities in Nigeria. It is hereby recommended that governments should use social media more constructively for citizens engagement particularly in a multicultural society since many people converge on the various platforms to get and discuss issues salient issues about governance.

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# SOCIAL MEDIA AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REPORTS OF TWITTER'S BAN IN NIGERIA

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## **Introduction**

**T**he effects of power and ideology in the production of meanings which sometimes are hidden tend to form a critical aspect of social systems and structures (Wodak, 2002). The ubiquitous nature of social media has enhanced its use by all and sundry in different spheres of life and for different daily activities (Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2019). In a multicultural society like Nigeria, citizens' participation in civic decisions has been greatly boosted by social media platforms. Scholars such as Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), also state that the new platforms people use for socializing and communicating such as social media can influence the way people think about the world, which in turn influences their decisions, behaviours, and the way they interact with others. For example, being exposed to a diverse range of social media platforms has been shown to increase empathy and improve social skills, while being isolated from social media has been shown to increase anxiety and decrease social skills (Fox & Moreland, 2015).

Nonetheless, citizen participation online can sometimes favour power hegemony, meaning that certain individuals or groups with more power and resources have a greater ability to influence the outcomes of online participation processes because not everyone has equal access to the internet or the necessary technological resources to participate fully in online platforms. This digital divide can disproportionately affect marginalized communities and individuals with lower socioeconomic status, limiting their ability to engage in online discussions and decision-making processes. Also, effective participation in online platforms often requires a certain level of digital skills and literacy. People who are more tech-savvy or have greater familiarity with online platforms may have an advantage in navigating and using these tools effectively, which can lead to unequal participation. The Council of Europe in 2018 averred that most citizens that participate and engage in online discussions are consumers and not producers of contents. On the other hand, Omilana, (2021) argued that social media has offered young people in Nigeria platforms to connect and organise in ways that the government struggles to control and co-opt.

The Nigerian government on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, officially banned Twitter and restricted it from operating in the country. The ban occurred after Twitter deleted tweets made by Nigeria's president, and temporarily suspended his account. Twitter on the other hand claimed that the tweet by the president's account where he was warning Nigerians predominantly the people of the South about a potential repeat of the 1967 Biafran war due to the ongoing insurgency in the Southern part of the country was a breach of its policy. On January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Nigeria lifted its ban after Twitter agreed to pay an "applicable tax" and establish a legal entity within the country sometime in the first quarter of 2022 (BBC, 2022).

However, the issue was argued to be far more complicated. Nigeria was alleged to have been toying with the idea of regulating the country's social media and internet. The anti-social media bill proposed in 2015 went as far as suggesting the death penalty for those found guilty of hate speech. The bill was withdrawn but was re-introduced again in 2019 in the Senate (Omilana,2021).

Also, the Nigerian government claimed that although the deletion of the president's tweets was factored into the decision to ban the platform, the main reason was ultimately based on "a litany of problems with the platform as misinformation and fake news spread through it" which may have violent consequences, citing the persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence (Informant247 News, 2021). Even the Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed made it clear during the announcement of the lift of the ban said that "Twitter must be licensed by the broadcasting commission and must agree not to allow its platform to be used by those who are promoting activities that are inimical to the corporate existence of Nigeria" (Maclean,2021).

However, scholars and organizations including *Amnesty International*, the *British, Canadian, and Swedish* diplomatic missions to Nigeria, as well as the *United States* and the *European Union* in a joint statement criticized the executive order that it has set a dangerous, anti-democratic example on how a government could groundlessly ban and control the way its people use the internet, and by doing so even without clear and extensive justifications (Ohuocha,2021).

Also, some domestic organizations such as the *Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project* (SERAP) and the *Nigerian Bar Association* indicated intent to challenge the ban in

court. The issue attracted national and international media's attention as journalists from political, business, and technological environments covered the report.

Furthermore, a literature review revealed that there are few academic articles and discourse analyses concerning the Twitter ban. This paper, therefore, takes a critical perspective regarding the issue of social justice in the matter and examines what power relations existed vis-à-vis dominant interests in the reportage of some selected news reports on the matter. Shiller (2005) suggests that news media actively shape public opinion and play a large role in the propagation of public perception through feedback mechanisms and attention cascades.

Therefore, the paper aims to discuss the attitude of news sources towards the Twitter ban in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- i. To examine how the selected news sources use textual and linguistic clues to report the underlying debates regarding the Twitter ban in Nigeria.
- ii. To interrogate the discursive and social practices that influenced the news sources' attitudes on Twitter's ban in Nigeria.

Based on the objectives, the following questions were postulated:

- i. How did the news sources use textual and linguistic strategies to report the underlying debates regarding the Twitter ban in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the discursive and social practices that influenced the news sources' attitudes on Twitter's ban in Nigeria?

### **Power Relations**

Power relationships are those in which one person can influence the behaviour of another in a socially constructive way (Dowding, 2008), whether by coercing compliance or by using a less obtrusive or even more subtle method (Rahmasari & Nurhayati, 2020). Power relationships are those social objects in which the nature of the connection makes power functional; typically, this combines a certain amount of authority with the capacity to influence the other person in a desired way (Simanjuntak *et al.* 2022).

According to Legido-Quigley, Khan, Durrance-Bagale, and Hanefeld (2019), the distribution of wealth and resources is frequently used to define power relations, however, power relationships are not just restricted to these two areas, but also in psychological and social relationships, institutions, organisations, military and political institutions, and families, power relations are developed.

Aijazi *et al.* (2021), also assert that power relations are a core aspect of the construction of social relations. It is reflected in the channels of communication that are used, the people who are involved in those channels and the internet which encourages a “networked” world or which makes the networked individual socially consequential. Not only do networked individuals have unlimited access to information, but they are also increasingly influential in the creation of that information. Zetti, (2020) also adds that networked individuals have gained more control over the types of information and knowledge that they access and the ways that they access it. This power shift has led to the emergence of a new breed of social actors with the potential to shift the balance of power in society.

## **Social Media and Power Relations**

Social media has had a significant impact on power relations in various spheres of society, including politics, activism, and business. Here are some ways in which social media has influenced power dynamics:

*Democratization of Information:* Social media platforms have enabled the widespread dissemination of information and news. Traditional gatekeepers, such as mainstream media outlets, no longer have exclusive control over the flow of information. This has allowed individuals and marginalized groups to share their perspectives and challenge dominant narratives, thereby decentralizing power.

*Amplification of Voices:* social media has given a platform to individuals and groups who were previously marginalized or ignored by mainstream institutions. Activists, grassroots organizations, and ordinary citizens can now reach a global audience, amplifying their voices and raising awareness about social issues. This increased visibility can challenge established power structures and facilitate social change.

*Direct Communication Channels:* social media allows for direct communication between individuals, regardless of their hierarchical positions. Previously inaccessible figures, such as politicians, celebrities, and CEOs, can now engage directly with the public, reducing the intermediaries that controlled access to power. This direct communication has the potential to foster transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.

*Mobilization and Activism:* social media has played a crucial role in organizing and mobilizing collective action. It has facilitated the rapid dissemination of information about protests, rallies, and social movements, allowing people to come together around shared causes and challenge established power structures. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook have been instrumental in organizing and coordinating social and political movements worldwide.

*Influence on Political Processes:* social media has become an influential platform for political discourse and engagement. Political candidates can use social media to directly communicate with voters, share their policy positions, and mobilize support. Social media platforms also facilitate the spread of political misinformation and manipulation, raising concerns about their influence on electoral processes and power dynamics.

*Consumer Empowerment:* social media has given consumers a voice and the ability to influence businesses and brands. Through platforms like Twitter, consumers can share their experiences, opinions, and feedback directly with companies, putting pressure on them to address concerns and improve their products or services. This power shift has forced businesses to become more responsive and customer-centric.

*Algorithmic Influence:* Social media platforms employ algorithms that determine the content users see. These algorithms can shape users' perspectives, reinforce existing beliefs, and contribute to filter bubbles and echo chambers. The power to control and manipulate algorithms lie in the hands of platform owners, raising concerns about their influence over public discourse and the potential for bias and manipulation.



Social media has provided opportunities for empowerment and challenge to power structures, it has also introduced new complexities and challenges. Issues such as online harassment, privacy concerns, and the spread of misinformation highlight the need for critical engagement with social media's impact on power relations (Leitch & Merlot, 2018; Lillqvist, Louhiala-Salminen, & Kankaanranta, 2016; Nasidi, Ahmad, & Dahiru, 2022).

According to Leitch & Merlot, (2018), social media has enabled a new type of power relations that were not possible in the past. They are now enablers of norms that individuals and societies find acceptable such as social, political, and religious systems. And they can create change in the behaviours of individuals and societies by influencing how people are treated, how they relate to others, how they act toward themselves, and how they interact with the world, including other people and society at large. Lotrea (2018), mentioned Twitter as one of the examples of the new power relations introduced by social technologies.

Furthermore, Miller & Vaccari (2020) asserts that social media has changed not just how people communicate, but it also can redistribute power, particularly between individuals and governments. Casero-Ripolles (2018) posits that today, with the growth of social networking, it is not just leaders that can affect change; rather, the most powerful agent of change today is the people, empowered by social media including those who own information, how it is distributed, and how it may be modified.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is indeed a growing interdisciplinary research movement that encompasses various theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of language. It emerged in the 1980s and has since gained prominence in fields such as linguistics, sociology, media studies, political science, and cultural studies. CDA aims to analyze how language is used to construct social power, shape ideologies, and reproduce social inequalities. CDA focuses on examining texts, whether they are written, spoken, or visual, to uncover the underlying power relations, social norms, and ideologies that are reflected and reproduced through language. It goes beyond the surface-level analysis of language and delves into the broader social, cultural, and political contexts in which texts are produced and interpreted.

This research is premised on Van Dijk's (2009) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Framework which asserts that CDA is a combination between theory and application of critical analysis. He defines CDA as a proposition that focuses on how abuse of power, dominance and inequality is practised in the discursiveness of social and political contexts, that is how mental representation of social group is influenced by the social structure. In this event, how the theme of conversation (Twitter banning and lifting of the ban in Nigeria) can influence how the selected news sources highlight the importance of the issue in their text.

Similarly, Williamson and Scifleet (2018) explain that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) takes linguistic and psychosocial approaches one step further by analysing data from a categorically critical stance. Such analyses examine the discourse, the social 'story' at play in the investigation but also ask why that particular person is relating that particular tale. This study adopts Van Dijk's CDA because it hammers on perspective, position, or critical attitude in a multidisciplinary approach as it explains the secret ideology in social practice.

Van Dijk, (2009) also proposed triangulation of the linkage between discourse, cognition and society, emphasizing the cognitive phenomena associated with the structure of discourse and how social inequality, domination, and ideology occur. He believes that to find social actors' social representations, attitudes and ideologies, the relationship between the discourse structure and the structure of society must be seen. Yu (2019) opines that although dominant discourses are naturalized by ideologies, critical scrutiny of the discourses can help to make them transparent.

Adapting these assumptions, this study focuses on identifying and detecting media discourse on the Twitter ban and lifting of the ban in Nigeria, and how the media discourse tries to construct a picture of Twitter's future in Nigeria. In the empirical analysis, the emphasis is put on the use of textual and linguistic clues, discursive and social practices use to explain the news sources' attitudes on Twitter's ban and the lifting of the ban in Nigeria. To provide a critical view regarding these, the three-dimensional model of CDA, *vias-a-viz* text and linguistic, discursive practices, and social practices are employed.

### **Review of Studies on Critical Discourse Analysis and Power Relations**

Critical Discourse Analysis research such as Higgins & Coffey, (2016), Fuoli, (2018) and Liu & Wu, (2015) generally focus on how companies construct themselves in the current economic and political environment to influence the wider stakeholders through corporate discourse analysis of sustainability reports, annual reports, or corporate websites. Media critical discourse analysis focuses on analyzing news discourses, more on the relations between social inequality, discourse, power, and dominance and quite recently some studies on social media studies begin to use CDA in analyzing power relations and social construction of ideology (Christopher 2008; Lillqvist, Louhiala-Salminen, & Kankaanranta, 2015; Zhu, 2020).

Christopher (2008) examines the contemporary configuration of power relations in the U.K. television sector, probing, in the process, the enduring accuracy of longstanding economic arguments concerning distributor dominance in the "cultural industries" more broadly. The study believes that such arguments are important to understand the power of the media and the circulation of power within the media. The study revealed that while recent developments concerning both producer-distributor and producer-advertiser relationships have begun to enhance the leverage enjoyed by the production community, the steady inflation of the mass-market premium enjoyed by the leading distributors (the terrestrial broadcasters) in the advertising market has largely sustained their power, about smaller (multichannel) distributors, to producer suppliers, and of course to the consuming public.

Lillqvist, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2015) did a critical discourse studies perspective to contribute to a nuanced understanding of discursive power relations between companies and consumers on social media by analysing the possibilities that corporate Facebook pages provide for consumer participation and criticism and corporate manipulation of discourse. The study draws from Bakhtin's view of dialogue to shed light on contextual and discursive features which operate to either promote or silence voices. The study revealed that the features of Facebook provide methods for "*monologization*" making the discourse appear participative while still controlling which voices are heard

Zhu (2020), looking at the linguistic perspectives, examined the issue of banning social media platforms. Zhu analysed six articles chosen from two international business newspapers which addressed the international media's attitude toward TikTok, and the US government's expectations. The study highlights that international media's stance toward the ownership of TikTok and its valuable algorithm varies, but TikTok users' benefits are not concerned with the discrimination of the Chinese public. Donald Trump's banning of TikTok was argued as a groundless national emergency.

### Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach and employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method to discuss selected news reports and attitudes to the Twitter ban and the lifting of the ban in Nigeria. This is because much of the public understanding of Twitter's potential security threat and the banning of Twitter in Nigeria comes through the media. The paper sources the media texts of five recognized local and international news sources, namely, *Guardian Nigeria*, *Punch*, *Washington Post*, *CNN*, and *Reuters for the analysis*. Five (5) stories (one each) from the news sources about the banning or lifting of the Twitter platform ban in Nigeria were purposely selected. Consideration was given to articles with the most reads with stories about the ban. The genre of the selected stories is mixed with both news materials and editorial opinions selected depending on how they appear in the stories.

**Table 1: Selected stories**

Newspaper	Title	Issuing Date	Url
Guardian Nigeria	Nigeria lifts Twitter suspension after more than six-month clampdown	12 January 2022	<a href="https://editor.guardian.ng/news/nigeria-lifts-suspension-on-twitter/">https://editor.guardian.ng/news/nigeria-lifts-suspension-on-twitter/</a>
Punch	Buhari orders conditional lifting of the Twitter ban	1st October 2021	<a href="https://punchng.com/breaking-buhari-orders-conditional-lifting-of-ban-on-twitter/">https://punchng.com/breaking-buhari-orders-conditional-lifting-of-ban-on-twitter/</a>
Washington Post	Nigeria suspends Twitter after the social media platform freezes president's account	June 4, 2021, at 2:42 p.m.	<i>"Nigeria suspends Twitter after the social media platform freezes president's account". Washington Post. ISSN 0190-8286. Retrieved 5 June 2021.</i>
CNN	Nigeria bans Twitter after company deletes President Buhari's tweet	June 5, 2021	<a href="https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/04/africa/nigeria-suspends-twitter-operations-intl/index.html">https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/04/africa/nigeria-suspends-twitter-operations-intl/index.html</a>
Reuters	Twitter Removes Nigerian President's 'Abusive' civil war post	June 3, 2021	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/twitter-removes-nigerian-presidents-abusive-civil-war-post-2021-06-02/">https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/twitter-removes-nigerian-presidents-abusive-civil-war-post-2021-06-02/</a>

The emphasis of the analysis is placed on three themes:

1. Text and linguistic organization: Fairclough (2002) defines text as an extended way for the semiotic dimension of social events. That the analysis of texts shows how texts articulate different discourses, genres and styles, potentially contributing to a changing character of social practices. Such text analysis allows the analyst to access the relationship, tension and shifts between the order of discourse and networking related to discursive and social practices. This study looks at the textual organization and linguistic structures of the news texts used in the analysis that is the words used, the structural organization of the sentence and even the sources of texts used to portray the ideological positions of the news stories.

2. Discursive practices look at how the selected news sources report the issue of Twitter banning and the lifting of the ban in Nigeria from the angle of the type of journalism used to report the story in terms of the content of the message and discourse procedures to enable the audience to understand the issue better.
3. Social practices majorly look at the socio-political background used in the stories to portray the ideological position of the news sources which can be inferred from instances and references used in the stories therefore 3 different stakeholders are identified; Twitter, the Nigerian government and the selected news sources.

## Findings and Discussions

This study focuses on how selected news sources try to construct a picture of the Twitter ban in Nigeria. This section presents the data and discusses it using the three adopted practices as subheadings below:

### Textual and Linguistic Organization

Firstly, the analysis presents the textual organization and linguistic structures of the news texts which reveal interesting insights into the ideological positions of the news reports. Both the local and international reports have been offered from some similar sociopolitical arguments, that the suspension was wrong and will have implications on political participation and freedom of expression.

According to reports by the selected international outlets, Twitter's statement described the suspension as “deeply concerning” and that “access to the free and #OpenInternet is an essential human right in modern society. “We will work to restore access for all those in Nigeria who rely on Twitter to communicate and connect with the world.” This statement was mentioned in all the selected reports of the international news media, but entirely unreferenced in the selected reports of the local newspapers.

Also, both articles from the local news media have used materials from the Independence Day speech of the Nigerian president and other official statements released by the Ministry of Communication. One of the articles simply recycled the speech of the Independence Day speech. 7 out of the 10 paragraphs in the news text were verbatim quotations from the speech. The news sources report further state the justifications for the suspension as provided by the Nigeria minister of information, Lai Muhammad, something that almost all the articles securitized and disparaged using syntagmatic devices and reporting techniques. For instance, the *Washington Post's* article called the justification for the suspension “vague” and described the suspension as “surprising”. It also quoted an anonymous “senior official” of the Nigerian government source saying that “... he was shocked by the move and wasn't sure how it would work.” Similarly, *CNN's* article quoted a Nigerian Twitter user, who points to the irony of the suspension in its announcement: “... using Twitter to suspend Twitter? Are you not mad?”

Whereas the reports of the international news sources were more robust and followed almost the same pattern, nearly the same sources were used, and the organizations of the sources were in a similar sequence. Only the local newspapers have used a few official sources but were not as detailed and as forceful as the articles from the international media. All the international reports have used sources from civil society such as Amnesty International, SERAP, NBA and opposition parties. This indicates how the suspension was widely condemned both locally and internationally, and the growing demands at the time

that the ban should be immediately lifted.

The news sources also portray the removal of the Tweet of the president as nothing personal, one of the articles labelled the removal as “freezing the account” to indicate that the account suspension was temporary, and it stated that it was for 24 hours.

However, this study deducted a similar attitude in the deployments of certain linguistic and structural devices on the lifting of the ban particularly the subtle portrayal of suppression of Twitter. The article from the *Guardian* used the word “clampdown” right at the headline, which can be understood to be a strong word that could demonstrate abuse or suppression. The article stated that the suspension was lifted after a negotiated agreement by the Nigerian government with the representatives of Twitter. It went further to state the conditions for lifting the ban and these were all relayed from the statement issued by the government sources only.

However, the use of the word “agreed” reads like Twitter was pressed into accepting these conditions as singularly recommended by the Nigerian government.

*The paragraph read: Apart from establishing offices in Nigeria, the Nigerian government said Twitter has also agreed to pay applicable tax in the country and “appoint a designated country representative to interface with Nigerian authorities.*

This structural organization of the complex sentence puts Twitter in a passive and receptive position.

### **Discursive Practice**

Discourse is socially situated, and it is a practice of how the texts are interpreted and received. To understand the selected news sources that report the Twitter banning and lifting of the ban issue in Nigeria, we must first study the purpose of journalism.

According to Richardson (2007), journalism aims to enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position in the world. To fulfil this informational need requires “reporting the actions and activities of the powerful”. In this regard, the journalistic practice requires analysis to examine the form and content of the message, discourse procedures of production and consumption related to messages as producers of news discourse usually have a considerable effect on what is conveyed and the manner it is portrayed, thus, shaping social views.

The selected news sources have large consumers and are business oriented. In other words, to ensure subscription, consumers expect more than informational content, but personal views and professional opinions of the issue and the news sources are most attuned to that. In addition, the news sources are available online, therefore it is not difficult to explain why all the analyzed news articles have been observed to have discursively described the Twitter suspension in Nigeria as somewhat excessive and authoritarian.

Active journalism was employed by the news media to shape the audience's understanding of the issue and promote the democratic rights of Nigerian citizens. Both the local and international reports offered similar sociopolitical arguments, that the suspension



was wrong and will have implications on political participation and freedom of expression.

The news sources mentioned that social media, particularly Twitter, have become the main vehicle for Nigerian citizens to exercise their democratic rights and demand accountability from the government. Twitter was not contacted to substantiate whether the company had accepted these conditions or not and/or for further explanations. Thus, the aim of news sources journalism in this regard seems not about enabling citizens with information to better their lives but “reporting the actions and activities of the powerful” on Twitter's ban and lifting of the ban.

### **Social Practice**

The Twitter ban reflected the authoritative nature of the Nigerian government to exert power over the citizens however, it tries to relate the issue with the long-proclaimed need for the sanity of online platforms by the Nigerian government. Nigeria's government have tried to introduce measures such as the social media bill among others due to the rise in fake news, hate speech and cyber security in the country. This the news sources accorded to the reasons behind the outburst of the banning of Twitter in the country. Characteristically, the news sources tried to demonstrate the Nigerian government as active and authoritative in its altercations with Twitter. This was grounded in a sentence-by-sentence reading of the reproduced Independence Day speech of the Nigerian president and the statements issued by other government officials in the selected news articles of the local newspapers. The same was further conditioned by the lexical patterns and word usage in the news texts.

The ideological position of the news sources can also be inferred from such instances where a reference has been made to the military background of the Nigerian president and the use of very strong concepts to qualify the suspension. Nearly all the news articles analyzed from both the local and international media have made direct reference to the military background of the

Nigerian president. In the *Punch* article, he was the “... Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.)”. *Reuters* and *CNN* showed how he was a military head of state and mentioned his participation in the “brutal two-year Nigeria-Biafra war, which killed an estimated one to three million people, mostly from the Igbo tribe in the eastern part of the country.”

The sociopolitical backgrounds in the reports further pointed to the separatist and secessionist agenda of an ethnic section of the country which was linked historically to the civil war. The role played by Nigeria's president was suggested. *Reuters* reported that “Buhari...served in the army against the secessionists and was Nigeria's military ruler in the 1980s...” The reports succeeded in creating a discursive circumstance for abuses and repression from the side of the Nigerian government. It was a clear case of media activism as the international media were either protecting the corporate interests of an American company or depending on the West-centric democratic ideals and values.

Twitter sources used in all the articles stated that the Nigerian president's tweet was removed on account of its violation of the company's “abusive policy”. Sources from the Nigerian government, however, dismissed this accusation, saying that “Twitter may have its own rules, it's not the universal rule... If (any president) anywhere in the world feels very bad and concerned about a situation, he is free to express such views.” It signified that

banning Twitter was the Nigerian president's way of showing his grievance in reaction to his suspension from the platform.

Furthermore, the news articles reproduced, from the official statements, how the Nigerian authorities had been active in and following due process to resolve the issue and in protecting Nigeria's national interests. This was indicated in the deployments of active verbs such as “Nigeria *banned* Twitter in June...”, and “Nigerian officials *defended* the ban...”. Whereas Twitter was constructed to appear passive in the news contexts such as “Twitter *was used* to promote fake news and for destabilising activities...” and “Buhari's government and Twitter *have been* in talks over a list of conditions for ending the suspension...” The *Guardian* initially used “Nigerian officials” or “Nigerian authorities”, but toward the end of the report switched to using “Buhari's government”. This could communicate the personal role of the president in the suspension.

CNN's article praised the use of VPN by some Nigerian users to bypass the suspension. It quoted one Adebola Williams, the co-founder of a consulting firm *StateCraft*, extolling how VPN became a “lifeline” for Twitter users in Nigeria. It further stated how it has always been on the agenda of Buhari's government “to regulate the use of social media in Nigeria.”

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, therefore, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Strengthening of media platforms to focus more on journalism oriented toward protecting political inclusion.
2. Inclusion of diverse viewpoints in news reports on issues of multicultural societies like Nigeria rather than shielding misuse of power and all forms of politically motivated communication regulations.

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# MEDIA LITERACY AS A PANACEA FOR VERIFYING AND MANAGING ONLINE FAKE NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

***Adeboye OLA***



## **Introduction**

**P**hotography is seen as a powerful mediated communication that can serve as evidence of what was once a physical manifestation of reality (Sontag, 2008). This position stands debatable in a digital era where photography now has a dual acceptability “to either depict the truth or fabricate the truth’ (Kangkana, 2020). This ambivalence power is being exploited by the promoters of information disorder to cause rancour within a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual society like Nigeria where people are highly sensitive to their cultural and religious affinity.

The 21st century has been credited with revolutionizing the nature of news reportage and visual storytelling with Web 2.0 technology. The popularity of social media as a platform for information sharing among peoples of the world has made more people rely on it instead of the traditional medium of mass communication. A study conducted by the Pew Research Centre (2016) confirmed that consumption of news on social platforms is on the increase with *Facebook* standing out as the first choice. The import of this is that more people are taking to social media for their daily dose of information. As those platforms attract more



people, so also producers and distributors of news move their content to meet target audiences. The development is beginning to affect the credibility of photojournalism with the issue of fake news taking centre stage. At the centre of this are media content providers, either as trained journalists or enthusiasts practising as citizen journalists. When it comes to the information they provide, the media audiences draw no line in what is given to them.

So much responsibility and trust are placed on journalists to provide truthful and authentic information that to do otherwise would be tantamount to great betrayal. The scenario where news producers will be involved in misinformation as it is with fake news must have been envisaged by UNESCO (1980) when it came up with an ethical framework to serve as a moral compass for those engaging in the production and distribution of news content, news photos inclusive, on whatever platform they choose to engage their audiences.

The **International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism** has ten-point principles agreed upon by International and regional organisations of professional journalists in 1978. Three key Principles out of the ten are very relevant to show the unethical nature of fake news to media professionals involved in the practice: People's Right to True Information, the Journalist's Dedication to Objective Reality and The Journalist's Social Responsibility:

**Principle I: People's Right to True Information-** people and individuals have the right to acquire an objective picture of reality using accurate and comprehensive information as well as to express themselves freely through the various media of culture and communication.

**Principle II: The Journalist's Dedication to Objective Reality-** The foremost task of the journalist is to serve the people's right to authentic information through an honest dedication to objective reality whereby facts are reported conscientiously in their proper context, pointing out their essential connections and without causing distortions, with the due deployment of the creative capacity of the journalist, so that the public is provided with adequate material to facilitate the formation of an accurate and comprehensive picture of the world in which the origin, nature and essence of events, processes and states of affairs are understood as objectively as possible.

**Principle III: The Journalist's Social Responsibility-** Information in journalism is understood as a social good and not as a commodity, which means that the journalist shares responsibility for the information transmitted and is thus accountable not only to those controlling the media but ultimately to the public at large, including various social interests. The journalist's social responsibility requires that he or she will act under all circumstances in conformity.

Photojournalism in its simplest form refers to the usage of photographs to report news and tell interesting stories. Operating within a profession where fact is considered sacred, it sometimes works with a notion that sees truth as an ideology. At the core of ethical journalism is its normative principle that has as its goals an obligation to truthful information, loyalty to citizens, accountability and independency (Ashley *et al.*, 2013). Newton (2001) explained that at the heart of photojournalism is the portrayal of human experience "accurately, honestly, and with an overriding sense of social responsibility". The 'ideology of press objectivity' appears important in how news photographs are framed

to show the sanctity of the frozen moments. Objectivity in photojournalism, therefore, is an evidential reflection of what the photojournalist witnessed and the accurate rendition of what was in front of the camera, both in content and tone.

Barthes (1977) posited that the nature of photography having polysemic meaning makes it dynamic and therefore subjected to diverse interpretations. The import of this is that photography is fluid with the potential for an amorphous meaning that keeps changing as a photograph moves across diverse cultural spaces (Sassoon, 2007). This feature is being exploited negatively by those using news photographs to further their predestined agenda. While photographic meaning could be deciphered from denotative and connotative angles as postulated by Barthes, it is theorised that as photographs pass through different mediums, there is a tendency for the connotative meaning to change while the denotative remains the same (Bull, 2010). The intended meaning where the connotative operates is usually what purveyors of misinformation exploit to spread their messages of hatred, cultural brainwashing, ethnic profiling, religious bigotry and political mudslinging, among others.

Faking news is not a recent phenomenon in Journalism having been linked to the Guttenberg era of the printing press. The age of enlightenment that followed witnessed printing becoming a pastime for all and sundry. What, however, came to be identified as Yellow journalism has also been seen as fake news in action, which Shu *et al.* (2017) tagged as 'Traditional fake news' American William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the *New York Journal*, had been identified with war-mongering believed to have contributed to America going to war with Spain in 1897. His stories stoked the war fire with their accusation that Spain was responsible for the explosion of the USS Maine in the harbour of Havana (Gelfert, 2018). In the same vein, *CNN* and the *New York Times* were believed to have been conscripted into the U.S. military campaign in the invasion of Iraq to help boost the war push with false information as news, “a tactic known as psychological operations” (Love, 2007 as cited in Gelfert, 2018).

### **The Concept of Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism, either as a philosophical or normative concept, is an umbrella for the multiplicity of cultures in society. It has been described by Stacy Wong as cited in Udebunu (2011, p. 2) as “the coexistence of many cultures in a society, without any one culture dominating the region”. Its strength lies in the collective acceptability of other cultures beyond ours and the logic of clamouring for a mutual understanding and the coexistence of diverse cultures in a cohesive society. Multiculturalism is also believed to include religious and ethnic justice against discrimination (Modood, 2008). The diversity of the Nigerian state as a multicultural society has been well documented in pieces of literature where the exact number of ethnic groups and languages have been variously put between 250 to 500 (Adegbami & Uche, 2015; Asike, 2019; Udebunu, 2011). Nigeria has been on a journey of nationhood since 1960 where its multiple cultural components try to find unity in its diversity. Asikie (2019) highlights the characteristics of the Nigerian multicultural society as follows:

- a. It has cultural diversity, so many aspects of cultures within its locality.
- b. It covers a wider variety of areas
- c. It is grounded in profound differences about the conceptions of a good life and religious ideology

- d. It does not share many important moral beliefs and social practices.
- e. It has more defiant as it relates to modern society in seeking rights, power and equality amongst members of the political community
- f. It is a multicultural society in the context of increasing globalization (pp.0073-0074)

The acceptability of multiple cultures in any politically homogenised state is therefore aimed at allying oneness where the ethos of unity in diversity is acceptable to all. While that cohesiveness is still a work in progress, any form of public communication where respect for other cultures and religions is taken for granted will make the sought-after unity elusive. This is the danger inherent in the new culture of misinformation currently witnessed on the internet with the attendant negative consequences. A major finding of Chudnovskaya & Lipatova (2018) in their study of ethnocultural stereotypes among British and Russian youths is the influence of social networks as the 'highest ranked' form of mass media for the 'sustainable generators of shaping stereotypes in the youth environment' (p. 430). The total population of youths is believed to be more than 50 % of the Nigerian estimated population of 213m (World Bank, 2022) which is instructive in facing the danger posed by the unwholesome consumption of misinformation in the mass media.

### **What is News?**

The meaning of any information generally accepted as news has come in different colours that most people now try to play safe with the opinion that what is big news in Ibadan may not be news in Lagos. News is seen generally as any new information that people somewhere will find interesting. It must be something they have not heard about or any unusual thing they have not seen before. But news evolves from activities and occurrences within the society which McQuail (2010) described to be the main form in which current information about public events is carried by media of all kinds. News in his view is of different types and formats, with cross-cultural differences in nature, with the defining characteristics, generally held to be timeliness, relevance and reliability (p. 488)

Irrespective of the information gathered by journalists as news, the key consideration before disseminating such is to ensure its accuracy and reliability. What this implies is the belief that Journalism is more than an ordinary distribution of fact-based information. Journalists, as news producers, are expected to be fair and accurate all the time. Their stories must not only be authentic but 'one that reflects reality, not their own perception of it or anyone else's, be it online or in print (Potter, n.d, p. 9).

The credibility issue has become a major issue in the media with journalism moving online. The race to first 'break' the news has heightened the pace at which media content reaches the audience. The impact of the breaking news competition is the integrity of what is presented in the information space that is often filled with factual inaccuracies (Akpan *et al.*, 2012). The contemporary face of fake news is happening in the era of digitisation and online journalism, the age of news democratisation.

### **What is Fake News?**

Fake News, which Sullivan (2017) tagged as a "tainted Term" and Facebook prefers to call "False News" (Oremus, 2017), has generated much debate that it is somehow difficult to reach a consensus on its actual definition. Din *et al.* (n.d) highlighted in a study conducted by Khaldarova & Pantti (2016) on the 2009 Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute, a multi-layered oxymoron of the term "fake news" as it is used today. They have linked it to an array of terms

such as: “ 'fabricated stories', 'misinformation', 'disinformation', 'counter-narrative', 'strategic narrative', 'blame', 'scandalous material/reportage', 'false news stories', 'misleading/sensational images', 'set of stereotypes', 'propaganda-entertainment' 'hostile comments' 'bizarre news' 'journalistically dubious stories'”(p.1).

A conceptual explanation of it seems to have expanded wide to cover areas such as unintentional reporting mistakes, rumours, satire, conspiracy theories false statements by politicians, reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false, etc. (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Holan, (2016) claimed that “Fake news is made-up stuff, masterfully manipulated to look like credible journalistic reports that are easily spread online to large audiences willing to believe the fictions and spread the word” (cited in Fitzpatrick, 2018, p.49).

Nielse and Graves (2017, p.1) on the other hand looked at fake news, which they chose to identify as false news, being, “the kinds peddled by for-profit actors or as part of misinformation campaigns”. Their study of audience perspective on the syndrome came up with many conclusions one of which is 'that the fake news problem is only in part about fabricated news reports' which, however, could be taken as a sign of news consumers' discontentment with the sources of information from the public and other avenues like news media and politicians, without excluding the platform companies. From the view of Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), however, fake news could simply be defined as “news stories that have no factual basis but are presented as facts” (p. 5). UNESCO has narrowed the discourse on fake news to three categorisations: *Misinformation*, *Disinformation* and *Malinformation* (Ireton and Posetti, 2018).

*Misinformation* has been categorised as inaccurate information disseminated without any intention to fool people. *Disinformation* covers all deliberately produced false and inaccurate information disseminated to mislead the media audience. *Malinformation* however contains true information used deliberately against individuals, organisations and a country to portray them in a bad light. Seven types of Misinformation and Disinformation have been identified by Wardle (2017) for further understanding of Information disorder when they appear on the internet:

1. *Satire or Parody*: No intention to cause harm but has the potential to fool
2. *Misleading Content*- misleading use of information to frame an issue or individuals.
3. *Imposter content*- when genuine sources are impersonated.
4. *Fabricated Content*- News content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm.
5. *False Connection*- when headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content.
6. *False Context*- when genuine content is shared with false contextual information.
7. *Manipulated Content*- when genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive. (FIRSTDRAFT)

Fake news photographs should be seen as a mixed grill of facts supported with visual elements that are completely unrelated but are used deliberately as evidence. Gelfert (2018) believed that the confusing narratives only show that “Many fake news stories are not wholly false, but mix deliberate falsehoods with well-known truths as a means of obfuscation” (p.100). It is interesting to know that media consumers could tacitly be encouraging information disorder through their patronage of online new platforms identified to be unprofessional in handling information. Ugwuanyi (2017) discovered that

despite news consumers' awareness of fake news in Nigeria, like in other parts of the world, most readers still see online newspapers as a credible source of information.

The implication is that even when some of these media outlets have been identified with fake news, some news consumers still did not see it as enough justification to boycott them. One thing not established, but probably taken for granted, in the study is the media literacy level of the sampled news consumers. Edogor *et al.*'s (2015) finding showed that most media consumers on social media and mainstream media online platforms do not have what it takes to assess the credibility of the information they consume on the internet. More worrisome is the issue of online readers reposting inaccurate information the consequences of which can be damning for society at large

### **Fake News in Nigeria**

Nigeria's cyberspace as part of the global internet terrain is not immune to the fake news syndrome. Long before Journalism found life on Web 2.0 technology, there have been cases of malfeasance on the integrity of news published in some newspapers and magazines. Publisher cum cartoonist, Lawrence Akapa, was found guilty by the ethics committee of the Nigerian Union of Journalists in 1990 for publishing fiction as factual stories in his defunct weekly, *TopNews Magazine*. The publication used fake and contrived photographs as evidence of cameracaptured images for their contrived and mostly weird stories. While the primary motive for publishing those manufactured stories was economic, the outcome showed the unsuspecting reading public being served misinformation by a deceitful organisation.

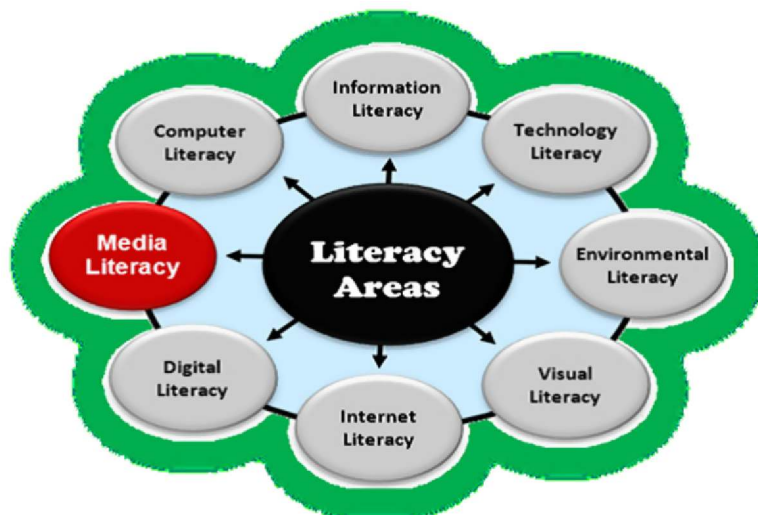
The internet appeared to have taken the faking syndrome to a new level on social media with images considered not necessarily news photographs but digitally manipulated to further a cause or support political, ethnic or religious partisanship. It becomes more worrisome when political, religious, socio and cultural differences are thrown overboard by all agents of misinformation. Sometimes the photographs are original and untouched but used wrongly in different contexts. Fake news photographs are antithetical to the integrity of Journalism, a profession associated with the dissemination of truth. At the heart of photojournalism is the portrayal of human experience "accurately, honestly, and with an overriding sense of social responsibility" (Newton, 2001). The core objective of Journalism, therefore, should be to provide information that will satisfy the news audience's interest in unknown activities within their immediate environment and events around the world.

### **Media Literacy**

Literacy in its elementary meaning simply refers to the ability to read and write. It was a word which at its evolution in the 19th also incorporated knowledge of Arithmetic (Pereira & Moura, 2019, as cited in e-Media, 2018). Competencies in the three areas were believed to be an indicator of knowledge by someone who had overcome illiteracy, in addition to fluency in the usage of a particular language of human communication. Literacy in the 21st century has moved beyond reading, writing and Arithmetic with scholars' identification of a multiplicity of literacies that cut across different disciplines. Advancements in technology and the internet revolution have drastically changed how man communicates leading to new requirements for measuring literacy.



The octopi nature of the Literacy concept has been highlighted by Yanarates (2020) whose work revealed the many faces of literacy today (see Table 1). Located within the literacy orbit is Media Literacy. It is a form of literacy linked to the mass media content as seen in the news (text and photographs), video and other mediated content that aims at providing information to a heterogeneous audience.



(Yanarates, 2020)

UNESCO has gone further to incorporate several forms of literacies under the umbrella of Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL). Media literacy is identified here as a subset that also includes others like Digital Literacy, Basic Literacy, News Literacy, Cultural Diversity, ICT Literacy/Digital internet Literacy, Library Literacy, Information Literacy and Other Types of Literacy. The aim of all forms of literacy within MIL is an audience approach to mediated content presented as information to enable citizens “understand the functions of the media and other information providers, critically evaluate their content and make informed decisions as users and producers of information and media content.” (UNESCO, 2013)

### **What is Media Literacy?**

Media Literacy [ML] has become a buzzword in academic study, media education and professional conversations across different fields of human endeavour. It deals with media content/messages as seen in fiction, advertising, films, etc. Its outlook is on how media audiences should approach media content and how to immune themselves from the unwholesome acceptability of such offerings.

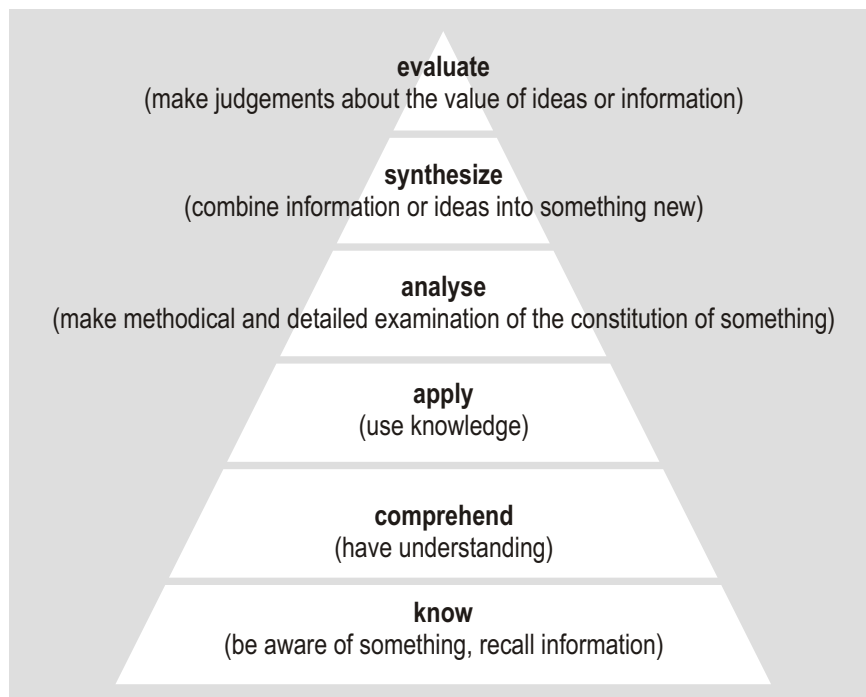
US National Association of Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) defines ML as, 'the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create and act using all forms of communication' (Bulger & Davison, 2018, p.7). The 'ability' focuses on individuals as media audiences and content creators as obtainable in online journalism. NAMLE seems to agree with the European Commission that sees ML as the ability “to access the media to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts”(Silver, n.d, p. 1)

A more engaging definition might be from the Centre for Media Literacy which looks at ML from a learning perspective as “the ability to communicate competently in all media forms,

print, and electronic, as well as to access, understand, and analyze and evaluate the powerful images, words and sounds that make our contemporary mass media culture” (Potter, 2013, p.418). It is a definition that accepts media consumers as active recipients who are not expected to take for granted what the media offer in the information space. ML as a subset of MIL raises the media consciousness of media audiences and makes them active and knowledgeable through some acquired skill sets that promote critical engagement with media content. Some definitions have therefore highlighted the importance of critical thinking in media audience reception of media content (Adams and Hamm, 2001; Thoman and Jolls, 2003; Moeller, 2009).

**Critical thinking** is a mental exercise that puts a media audience into asking questions about mediated content in the media. It is a self-paced critical examination of information and evaluation of such information against the background of supporting evidence and what the person knows before the encounter that will lead to making an informed decision. When you think critically, you weigh up all sides of an argument and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. So, critical thinking skills entail: actively seeking all sides of an argument, testing the soundness of the claims made, and testing the soundness of the evidence used to support the claims. According to UNESCO's definition, “critical thinking is a process that involves asking appropriate questions, gathering and creatively sorting through relevant information, relating new information to existing knowledge, re-examining beliefs and assumptions, reasoning logically, and drawing reliable and trustworthy conclusions” (UNESCO, para. 1).

The Bloom Taxonomy, though developed for education, has been applied in varying degrees to explain critical thinking in different situations. It offers a set of processes using specific skills that will lead to informed decision-making when applied in a hierarchical order. The application starts from the pyramid base from 'exposure' to a piece of information/idea and ends at the apex with the 'evaluation' of such.



Bloom (1956) Level of intellectual skill thinking triangle

Centre for Media Literacy (CML) has narrowed what appeared as six items on Bloom's taxonomy to a manageable four-key media literacy process skills in a linear order: Access-Analyse-Evaluate-Create (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). The four items are geared towards achieving double-edge results in critical evaluation of media content, but also obtaining a skill set to enable a media audience to create content.

Critical thinking is generally associated with a media audience asking relevant questions as key to unravelling hidden signals in media content. The following are some of the reasons why media literacy is important:

1. The democratisation of media content on the internet has led to the proliferation of information disorder. The fallout of this is the promotion of false and non-verifiable information as news. Media consumers need to be enlightened and know how to sift the good from the bad before arriving at individual decisions that may be detrimental to society. Democracy thrives on accurate information needed by the citizenry to make informed decisions. Fake information to media consumers who are not media literate will be inimical to the survival of democracy.
2. Media as the fourth estate of the realm need to be accountable since much is expected from them as information producers. Media literate audiences are expected to scrutinise content served to them in a process that can lead to the unmasking of fake information promoters online.
3. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a quantum rise in visual culture across the globe. The media is becoming more visual too, while social media and the availability of camera phones have made almost everybody a visual enthusiast. The ease at which image editing software can be used has turned every photograph on the internet suspect. As technology makes photography less reliable as a record of reality, media literacy skills will ensure that fake images are easily identified before they cause discord in the information space.
4. Audience engagement with the media makes people aware of what is in the media space as news and information, a relationship that portrays them as critical stakeholders in the information circuit. This awareness can create a feeling of self-actualisation in an audience as an enlightened person that can also enlighten others based on their media literacy. But most important is the long-time effect. In the words of Livingstone (2004, p. 20.), "The promise of media literacy, surely, is that it can form part of a strategy to reposition the media user- from passive to active, from the recipient to participant, from consumer to citizen."

Mediated content is brought to life under the banner of information dissemination. The content may appear brief, innocent and innocuous, but there is a belief that the context where the real meaning and motives lie may contain deeper information that only the literate in media matter may find easy to decode. A critical and analytical mind is expected to ask questions that will unmask what may lie beneath the veil. This explains the idea behind the Centre for Media Literacy's probing questions on media literacy based on five core concepts. These are:

1. All media messages are 'constructed.'
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power(Thoman & Jolls,

2005, p.18).

The five concepts point to one single thing about media content- messages are created on purpose. Getting to know why a media message was created and the purpose behind it forms the main issue only people who are media literates can comprehend.

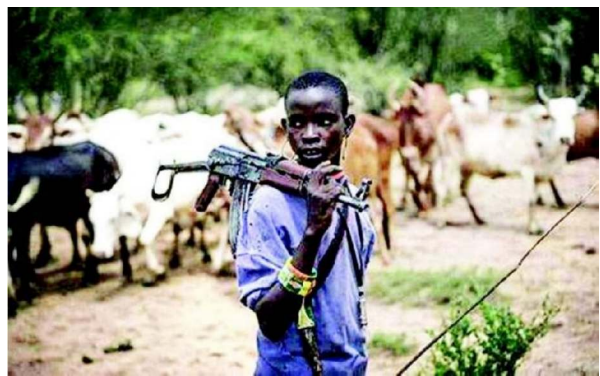
### **Fake Photographs in the Media Space**

Manipulated images, fake news photographs and false-context photographs have become the norm in the media. The prevalence is probably higher as more news consumers turned online for their news consumption. The trend in political campaigning has created a new business for some with SM skills as 'Propaganda secretaries' to the officeseeking politicians. Their modus operandi ranges from 'factchecking' stories about opponents or downright manufacturing misleading content to demarket opposing political candidates on social media. (Hassan & Hitchen, 2019). "Accuracy is not always prioritised over political point-scoring, especially as these online operators are looking to illustrate their value to the party or candidate by creating viral content that increases their visibility' (para. 10). It is a new discouraging reality that portends more danger for the nation's political stability as Misinformation becomes another form of Business entrepreneurship/venture especially in an age of ethnoreligious distrust.

Two different photographs were for a long time used online by many Nigerian media organisations to corroborate their reportage of the incessant killings of farmers by suspected Fulani herdsmen in the North Central Geopolitical zone of the country. Some Nigerian mainstream media (the *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Thisday*, *Guardian*, *Daily Trust*, etc) and a coterie of online publications and bloggers at one time or the other used these photographs as that of 'armed' Fulani herdsmen.



Pix 1



Pix 2

Abdulhamid and Bamas (2016) in an online article revealed that the two photographs going viral as images of marauding herdsmen were not taken in Nigeria. According to the duo, "The photo credit (Pix 1) belongs to Reuters/Goran Tomasevic and was first published online on December 14, 2013. It is a photo of a man from the Dinka tribe holding his AK 47 rifle in front of a herd of cows in a Dinka cattle herders' camp".

Pix 2 was also of a young cattle herder in Kenya with its original caption being, " *Young Pokot warrior, Korinamba Ruto, herding his cattle with an AKS 74 gun which he carries for protection against attacks from cattle rustlers from the neighbouring Turkana community, Kenya. Photo date: June 19, 2012. Credit: Sven Torfinn/Panos Pictures/Felix Features*".



*For many online readers yearning for photographs showing the “killer” herdsmen, there was no way to know that they have been conned by the media who were unable to get the real photograph from the theatre of action. Former President of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) Waheed Odusile, cited in Abdulhamid and Bamas (2016) described the motive behind the fake photographs as an attempt at stigmatising a whole race by the press. A scholar, Dr Farook Kperogi, interviewed in the article looked at the legal implications of using photographs without the copyright owner's authorisation, but also noted that “there is an ethical imperative to verify the real source of a picture before using it, especially in light of the tendency for purveyors of hate on social media to mislabel and misidentify pictures to promote (a) predetermined agenda.”*

Also trending during the 2020 #endSARS protest were photographs posted on *Twitter* by some account holders who probably were acting anonymously to justify the protest and also woo more people to the cause.



The Nigerian Catholic conference match was later discovered to be disinformation from a verification conducted by Mwai (2020) for the *BBC*. The photograph was used out of context having been taken originally in 2020 during the clergymen's street match in Abuja against insecurity in the country

### **Effect of Fake News Photographs**

At the receiving end of published fake news photographs is the audience who, with poor media literacy skills, becomes susceptible to media manipulation. The general notion that photography is evidence of what has happened makes the audience accept what they see as truth; whether an image has been used out of context or irrelevant to the story may be waived aside by a readership that is thirsty for visuals. To Mallonee (2016), “This works to the advantage of those who sell lies as truth, knowing that people believe what they see and see what they believe”. This view finds relevance in what Sontag, cited by Mallonee (2016), highlighted as, “Something we hear about, but doubt seems proven when we're showing a photograph of it”(para.8).



Mallonee (2016) recognised the emotive power of photographs in helping fake news go viral and therefore theorised by identifying 'misappropriation' and 'misrepresentation' as two ways by which fake news can be helped to spread. He believed that "The people publishing and promoting fake news routinely take photos out of context, digitally alter them, or combine them with text to manipulate readers, knowing that people tend to accept photographs as truthful representations" (Mallonee, 2016, para.3). The main intention of fake news promoters, when they manipulate images either through alteration or combining two composite images, is primarily to make them real and convincing to indiscernible news consumers who are mostly media illiterates to achieve a predetermined objective. These could be for partisanship to mobilise against political opponents (Peterson *et al.*, 2018) Another major reason why the audience of social media is susceptible to fake news more has been attributed by Shu *et al.* (2017) to the followership nature that binds people together in a network as determined 'by topics, interest and relations' and the 'like-minded' spirit of a community. They concluded that "users on social media tend to form groups containing like-minded people where they then polarize their opinions, resulting in an echo chamber effect. The echo chamber effect facilitates the process by which people consume and believe fake news" (Echo Chamber Effect, para 1).

The prevalence of fake news on the internet could erroneously give a wrong impression that it is one of the features of online Journalism. It should be noted that those who profit from its existence are those who produce them for reasons ranging from political gains to profiteering. Shu *et al.* (2017) looked into the negative impact of fake news on individuals and came up with this revelation:

First, fake news can break the authenticity balance of the news ecosystem. For example, the most popular fake news was even more widely spread on Facebook than the most popular authentic mainstream news during the U.S. 2016 presidential election. Second, fake news intentionally persuades consumers to accept biased or false beliefs. Fake news is usually manipulated by propagandists to convey political messages or influence. For example, some report shows that Russia has created fake accounts and social bots to spread false stories. Third, fake news changes the way people interpret and respond to real news. For example, some fake news was just created to trigger people's distrust and make them confused, impeding their abilities to differentiate what is true from what is not (p.1)

### **Verification Process to Debunk Fake News Photographs**

Verification is a new word in the 21<sup>st</sup> century news ecology. It refers to the deliberate process carried out by a reporter or a news consumer to ascertain the accuracy and the authenticity of information, news photographs and other forms of mediated stories, in the public space. Individuals and media organisations who peddle misinformation and disinformation often play on media audience emotions and bias for various reasons bordering on the profit motive, political influence and troublemaking (Wanjiku, 2022).

Some stages should be followed to ascertain the originality, accuracy and authenticity of a news photograph online irrespective of what the sharer or source wants viewers to believe. They are in the form of probing questions that serve as **Verification checks** intended to scrutinise both the content and the context:

1. What does the content show?

2. How original is the content of the photograph?
3. What is the source?
4. Where was the photograph captured/recorded? Can you discover visual clues as in distinctive buildings or the street?
5. When was it captured in terms of time and date? Anything from the weather condition visible from the direction of the shadow, lighting, rain, etc?
6. What other clues can you [the viewer] obtain from the content?
7. Can one make anything out of the street signs, billboards, placards and other visual clues?
8. Can the photograph be shown to colleagues and trusted friends for their views?
9. Any possibility of getting an eyewitness account, officials or reporters who probably witnessed the event?
10. What could be the bigger picture? Why was the photograph taken? Could there be a hidden motive behind the photograph?

The above critical analysis will determine what to look out for as verification moves to forensic scrutiny of the photograph using the appropriate verification tools. There are many tools available online to verify visual content like news photographs, especially in an online environment. Everything depends on what exactly one is trying to verify

### **Verification Tools for Photographs**

A. *Google Reverse Image Search, TinEye, Yandex, Labinol/reverse, Dupli Checker, etc.*

They are used to achieve these specific objectives:

1. To ascertain the original source/uploader of the photograph.
2. Check the earliest known history [where and when the photograph has been used on the internet.
3. Where and when the photograph was created/taken/produced.
4. To check if the photograph is being used in the right context.

B. *Jeffrey's Image Metadata, Foto Forensics, EXIF Viewer*

1. To examine the image metadata for the possible discovery of context
2. To know the date and time when the photograph was recorded
3. Ascertain image details like the camera used, exposure, GPS, etc.
4. Conduct a cross-reference of content

C. *Google Maps/Earth/Street View, Wikimapia, Yandex maps, Bing maps*

1. To verify the location where the photograph was taken.
2. To verify visual clues noticed in the photograph

D. *Invid Toolkit, Google Earth, Youtube Image Viewer, Suncalc*

1. To verify videos
2. To check the angle of shadows in a video

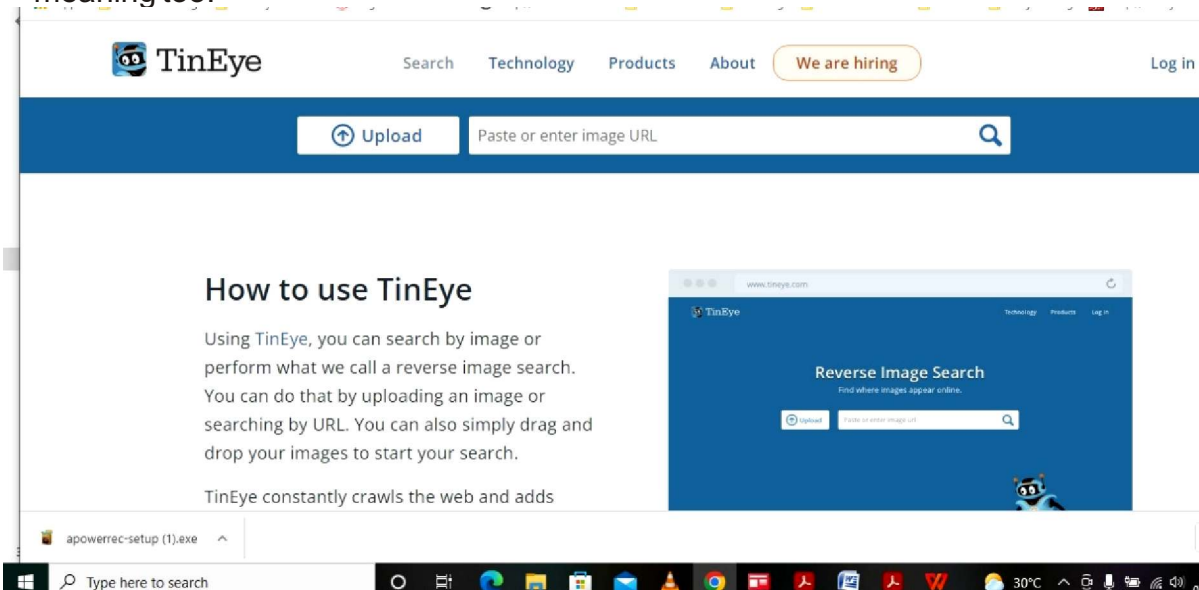
E. *Wolfram Alpha, Weather Info, Weather Forecaster,*

1. To cross-reference the weather situation in the published video/photos
2. For establishing geolocation.

### **Practical Exercise on How to Verify Photographs**

1. Use any of these verification tools- *Google Reverse Image Search, TinEye, or Yandex.*
2. Identify the photograph. Download and save on the laptop/notebook/desktop.
3. Such identified photographs can also be right-clicked. Select "search Google for image" from the drop-down menu (when Google IRS is used).
4. Go to any of the tool websites i.e <https://tineye.com>

5. If using Google RIS, go to Google images
6. Click Search by image icon
7. Click **Upload an image** or drag the photograph where it was saved and drop it in the search
8. Go to the folder where the photograph was saved on your system.
9. Click **Open** or **Choose**.
10. The same photograph can be uploaded by pasting its URL on the image icon in Google Images, TinEye
11. The search will look for the photo to check if it has appeared online before and in what context. The search will reveal if the user has taken the photograph out of its original meaning too.



### **How To Avoid or Minimise Misinformation**

This is the media literacy key to energising the literacy skills of consumers of media content online. While there is always the instinct to repost and share information that aligns with one's cognitive biases, following these steps could immunise one from being used as a courier of fake news on the internet.

1. Read before sharing
2. Pause and Think. How authentic is the source of the information? Is it from an authentic website?
3. Is the claim in the news photograph backed with visible evidence? A Verification exercise may be conducted for an objective analysis.
4. Double-check. Is the information appearing in other media outlets? Wait a bit before reposting if it claims to be an 'exclusive'.
5. Have you considered the number of people the information may affect negatively [amplification effect]? If it doesn't serve the general interest of your immediate society, don't post.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria as a multiethnic entity stands to lose its identity and possibly fragmentation if unverifiable visual information on social media is left unchecked. Images anchored on

ethnic profiling, religious sentiments, political mudslinging and brainwashing are capable of misleading many Nigerians with poor media literacy. For many who are less tolerant of others' right to ethno-religious and political differences as the hallmark of a multiethnic society, any visuals are weapons of propagating their beliefs, but a sure recipe over time for disintegration. While Media literacy is an antidote in the war against misinformation, content verification should become part of media consumption for individuals on Social media. Not only will messengers of unverifiable information be exposed, but it will also help those at the receiving end of misinformation to take necessary legal action against the identified culprits.

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**SECTION 3:**  
MEDIA, POWER AND  
GENDER PRESENTATIONS



# POWER, GENDER AND HARMFUL EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS REPORTING BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

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## **Introduction**

Unequalities between men and women are one of the most enduring trends in the allocation of power. From the private domain of the home to the highest levels of political decision-making, the collection of roles, behaviours, and attitudes that cultures designate as suitable for women and men (referred to as "gender") can be the source, consequence, and mechanism of power relations. By supporting and relying on gender norms, larger organizations and structures can also influence how power is distributed. This power dynamic often plays out in the media sector. Journalism has been regarded as a male-dominated profession. Steiner (2017) opines that when American colleges established journalism schools in the early 20th century, they did not disallow women since they did not foresee that they would apply.

Until the 1980s, U.K. journalists received their training on the job through an apprenticeship system. Hence, the greatest obstacle for U.K. women was getting accepted as an apprentice. Journalism textbooks and teaching materials often

discouraged women from considering journalism as a serious career because they treat men's writing as the exception rather than the rule wherever it was taught. These included materials authored by women themselves (Steiner, 1992). The majority of journalism textbooks and curricula now seek to neglect gender concerns by "naturalizing" male-invented and occasionally advantageous professional norms and standards (Steiner, 2017). Journalism training in Nigeria follows the US model. There was no segregation between men and women in terms of training and enrollment of students for mass communication and journalism courses. But when it comes to practice, the margin between women in the newsroom and the top echelon of the media industry is still very wide compared to males. Courses such as media and gender have been mainstreamed into mass communication curricula in Nigeria (Pate *et al.*, 2017).

Although not enough is being done, a little and, conscious effort is being made to address the structural flaws in the power dynamics between the two sexes in the media industry. However, the reality in the field differs. The biggest allegations concerning gender disparities in reporting are made in the areas of war and conflict (Steiner, 2017). Women are allegedly more likely to cover collateral damage, sexual assault as a technique, and the wider effects and human cost of warfare, while males place more emphasis on military strategy (Elwood-Akers, 1988). However, some, particularly female combat reporters, maintained that women do not write differently, although editors occasionally assign writers based on their gender. Women journalists frequently talk about being asked to cover a conflict from the "women's perspective." They often reluctantly accepted these assignments because it was their only opportunity to cover a war, or occasionally because they wanted to be featured at the top of the newscast or on the front page (Bartimus *et al.*, 2002). Contrary to common Western misconceptions, another research indicated that Arab males react emotionally to this type of news whereas Arab women prefer a distant, unemotional tone when reporting on pain and suffering (Mellor, 2012).

Explicating the gender perspective of dangerous beat coverage is critical to put to rest the argument of power dynamics in the media sector concerning the functionality of both sexes. Those leaning towards the patriarchal angle of the divide would argue that, with all things being equal, women would probably choose to cover soft news while men are likely to choose hard beat over soft beat (Byerly, 2014). The issue of vertical segregation in the news media, where women are disproportionately underrepresented in important editorial decision-making jobs, has long been highlighted by research throughout the world. However, horizontal segregation where there are gendered divides of reporting-related tasks remains a problem. The majority of female reporters are still tasked with covering the majority of the soft news topics like features, the arts, education, and health, even though it appears that more of them are covering hard news rounds like politics and business. Most people believe that female reporters are still pigeonholed in these traditionally female story areas (North, 2016).

However, Steiner (2017) argues that the most likely demography to believe that gender matters or that it ought to matter more is female activists and academics. Women journalists, according to informal surveys by an advocacy group, think they provide a unique, more human angle viewpoint to the news, despite some women's claims that "news is news" and ethics are ethics. Similar to how many members of one women's advocacy group claimed to sympathize with women and place an emphasis on personal and emotional aspects. But because so many journalists agreed that female supervisors

and editors are even more macho than their male counterparts, experts have charged the respondents with being ignorant of gender issues and having normalized male-identified concerns of a male profession (Ross, 2001).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The threat and safety threats experienced by journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's northeast area have been documented by a series of studies (Pate & Idris, 2017; Abdulsalam 2021; Poopola, 2012). However, the isolated cases of women journalists and the dynamics of gender-specific threats have not been exhaustively investigated. Other studies have explored the gender perspective of safety in Nigeria (Unaegbu, 2017), yet there is a paucity of literature on the experience of the female journalists that reported the Boko Haram insurgency at the peak of the war. The study's goal is to look into the risks and dangers that female journalists experience when reporting Boko Haram's activities, as well as their understanding of safety threats and the safety and security management strategies that journalists and their media organizations practised when covering the insurgency. In the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency, despite being a war that targets women specifically in terms of the insurgents' disdain for women, women journalists still cover the war without fear. The war also reveals the often-argued line in power dynamics in the media sector.

### **Research Objectives**

- i. To examine the power dynamics within the context of reporting the Boko Haram insurgency and understand how these dynamics influence the experiences of women journalists.
- ii. To investigate the gendered challenges faced by women journalists reporting on the Boko Haram insurgency.
- iii. To explore the harmful experiences and psychological effects endured by women journalists reporting on the Boko Haram insurgency and identify potential strategies to mitigate these negative impacts.

### **Gender, Power and Safety of Women Journalists**

There is a strong link between power and gender. The interlink is at the centre of the debate on the safety of women journalists. Culturally, gender shapes power, from the 'private' relationships of the household to the highest levels of newsroom decision-making. Being a "lady" is frequently associated with being helpless (quiet, obedient, accommodating). In contrast, a 'real man' is strong (outspoken, in charge, and able to enforce his will), especially when it comes to women. The power disparities that these gender roles are built on continue unabated. For instance, a significant obstacle to women's access to decision-making is the belief held by many men and women that it is not "natural" for women to speak up in public (Melki & Mallat, 2019; ). Power equals masculinity also contributes to the explanation of why powerful people frequently exhibit gendered domination. *According to a report by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) (2021), "all things remaining equal, it will take at least a further 67 years to close the average gender equality gap in traditional news media" (p. 4). This shows that the power disparity between men and women in the media is still persistent despite the recent progress.*

*Women's involvement in the media in terms of women being the subject on one hand and being sources on the other hand has increased. The survey by the Global Media Monitoring Project (2021) found that "at the global average level, mainstream news media*



are currently at the midway point to gender parity in subjects and sources” (p.4). The percentage of female subjects and sources increased by one point to 25% between 2015 and 2020. The broadcast news media had the best visibility for the single-point improvement, which is the first since 2010.

World over, there has been a drastic improvement in the involvement of women in the news. North American news media continue to be the finest in the world despite a three-point fall in the percentage of female topics and sources since 2015. Since 1995, European news media have advanced on this metric more than Pacific area media have during the previous five years. Except for Africa, all other areas' media have improved over the past quarter century by three to twelve points. The Covid-19 story, which is expected to be the big news item of 2020, dominated the science and health headlines. A decline in women's voice and visibility in the tales has coincided with the pandemic's stratospheric rise in the news value of this important subject. While the percentage of science/health stories in the news increased greatly in 2020 compared to previous times (from 10% in 2005 to 17%), the representation of women in these stories decreased by five points after rising steadily between 2000 and 2015 (GMMP, 2021).

In both digital and traditional media, the proportion of women in the news in North America and the Pacific has crossed the crucial 30% mark. Concerning print and broadcast news, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East all perform below the worldwide norms. In North American digital social and legal journalism, gender parity in themes and sources has been achieved for the sole region and topic (GMMP, 2021).

Age is also another important factor in working against women in the media. The GMMP first looked into how persons who are 80 years of age and older were portrayed in the press in 2020, a year marked by the global Covid-19 epidemic when being elderly was seen as a risk factor. The report showed that the oldest age group had little coverage in the news: barely 3% of newspaper readers were over 80, and less than 1% of television news viewers were over 80. Even more so than the men in that age bracket, women 80 and older were invisible. Overall, males who are 50 years of age or older are quite likely to be in the news in print media; 42% of all news subjects fall into this age category. Men's visibility peaks from 50 to 64 years old, whereas women's biggest age group, is 35 to 49. Women over 50 have grown less prominent over time in publications and on television. Compared to 15% of males, only 3% of all women in the news are between the ages of 65 and 79 (GMMP, 2021).

According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (2021), the reporter gender gap is the same in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Pacific media have progressed slower than the rest of the world, but they are currently the second-best performers after their Caribbean counterparts. Women reporters are more likely than males to resort to female topics and sources. The gender source selection disparity appeared to be closing according to the 2015 findings, but in the 2020 wave, the difference more than doubled to reach 7 points. Currently, women make up 31% of subjects and sources in conventional news articles, compared to men's 24% for the same subjects and sources. In terms of the propensity to directly challenge gender stereotypes, to bring up gender inequality issues, and to make reference to laws or policies that support gender equality or human rights, stories produced by women journalists tend to be of a marginally higher quality from a gender perspective.

Remuneration and payment also create some sort of power in the media space. Looking at the gap in terms of pay and remuneration between the two genders, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (2012) opines that there is wanton inequality in the remuneration of both women and men in the media sector. Male remuneration, benefits and incentives are more than their female counterpart in the sixteen countries studied. There has also been evidence of gender-based pay differences in the news media industry globally (Ross & Padovani, 2016). Ibrahim, Abba-Aji, Adamu and Thi (2022) argued that in Nigeria, the story is the same. They observed that “factors like negotiation, nepotism and unstructured promotions sometimes create an uneven wage situation (which is open to both genders) but usually favourable to more male journalists” (pp. 324-325).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research was based on the New Institutional Theory, which claims that institutions operate as a buffer between macro-level influences and micro-level activity. As a result, outcomes are determined by the interaction of institutional and non-institutional macro-variables over time. The focus of the new institutional theory on how institutions shape organizational practices makes it pertinent for research connections between journalism, power and gender dynamic of security threats, in the media industry (Lowrey, 2012; Jamil, 2017).

In reaction to the worry that political or societal situations could not be adequately described as the rational conclusion of the combination of individual or organizational behaviour, new institutionalism emerged from sociology, political science, and other social science fields (March & Olsen, 1983). Instead, institutions themselves are actors that have an impact on how economic resources and political power are distributed, which in turn has an impact on institutions themselves (March & Olsen, 1983). Institutions enforce order in a potentially emergent environment in this way (March & Olsen, 1983).

The profession of journalism is revered and regarded as an institution itself. It has three qualities that define it as an institution: As formal frameworks, they "allow as well as limit" (Cook, 2005, p. 67) or establish the guidelines for personal decisions and socially acceptable behaviour (i.e., NUJ, NPC, NBC, etc). They reach over distance and persist across time (Cook, 2005). Finally, "institutions are intended to preside over a sociological and/or political sector" (Cook, 2005, p. 70). Each of these three criteria is met by journalism (Cook, 2005).

The institution of journalism spans the fields of politics, business, culture, and society (Cook, 2006; Sparrow, 2006). Because of this, journalism is reliant on "vast cultural, social, political, and economic organizations" (Lowrey & Gade, 2011). Thus, institutional rules serve as the guiding principle for journalists' work practices (Cook, 2005; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

### **Methodology**

This study utilized both primary and secondary data. The primary data were sourced through interviews with five women journalists who are members of the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) in the northeast which comprises Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states. The reason is to get their opinion about their experiences while covering the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast region of Nigeria. While the secondary data relied on relevant documents and literature related to the topic

being investigated. Most respondents are first-degree or second-degree holders in mass communication who occupy middle management and senior executive positions in their firms ranging from 10 to 30 years. They are all members of the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists and have a lot of expertise and experience. All newspapers were privately owned, although broadcast media reflected both private and state ownership. The study used narrative analysis in presenting its data.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **The Power Dynamics Of Women's Experience Reporting The Boko Haram Insurgency**

The Boko Haram situation in Maiduguri in 2009 was Nigerian journalists' first exposure to covering extremism, terrorism, or significant domestic upheavals. Reporters watched the conflicts as they took place. They attentively watched the audible noises of heavy weapons, bomb blasts, military progress, and the arrival of reinforcements. They also witnessed the deaths and wreckage of the populace and their property; the defiance of the terrorists and the overrun of their enclave; and the arrest and extrajudicial execution of Muhammad Yusuf, the head of Boko Haram. Many of the journalists were startled by the events, however, despite being afraid, threatened, and pursued, they continued to report the story as it happened. Covering the terror war that wreaked havoc on North East required a combination of expertise, daring, and devotion.

Despite all that, women journalists did not run away from the challenge. They covered the carnage as it unfolded and exposed themselves to both physical and emotional attacks. A female journalist, FJ1, was confronted by military troops while reporting the April 2011 attack on the INEC office (Vanguard, 2011). They brandished pistols at her and demanded what she was searching for outside at that hour of the night as a lady. She was also threatened by the rebels not to reveal her face while covering them. According to FJ1 testimony, the militants sent her husband a message saying, "Tell your wife never to expose her face on TV when she goes covering our case". One other female journalist working with British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) FJ2 had to relocate from the epicentre of the war after it became glaring that the insurgents were after her life.

War reporting is largely thought of as a male domain since it is the highest profile, most perilous, and most competitive beat in journalism. However, a small number of women have always pushed for such positions, and they are increasingly succeeding. As they did during the First and Second World Wars and in Korea, the U.S. and U.K. military and news organizations can no longer use the justification that the front lacks restrooms for women to bar women from receiving war postings. The first major conflict that women (the vast majority of whom are from the United States) covered was the Vietnam War, but frequently as independent contractors. Women make up about half of the American press corps in Iraq. In Nigeria, the story is slightly different. Men dominated the journalism scene, especially in a conservative northern environment. As a result, only strong women are free to practice journalism without fear of intimidation or being slut-shamed as 'yar iska'.

### **The Harmful Experiences and Potential Survival Strategies**

The study discovered that the local media outlets covering the insurgency at the time neither did environmental risk assessments nor realized the risks associated with covering Boko Haram before covering the conflict. As a result of the insurgency, some media

organizations did send reporters to the northeast region, although they were able to perform assessments before doing so, whilst other media organizations chose to do so after suffering casualties. Despite the assessment, the level of preparation and equipment for journalists demonstrates that media companies did not fully grasp the scope of the risk and hazards their correspondents would face at the front lines. The investigation discovered that editors and bureau heads simply instruct the reporters in the area to produce articles while sitting in their comfort zones, paying little attention to the risk or the difficulty of the terrain.

Findings indicate that media firms failed to give their women reporters a safety handbook and incident reporting instructions before they entered dangerous areas. Others only provide oral guidelines. Reporting guideline is crucial since the way the conflict was covered has put several reporters at risk from the insurgents. In truth, several media outlets do not offer any safety advice or internal reporting requirements. The lack of safety training, reporting manuals and similar other prerequisites of dangerous beat coverage put women journalists in severe danger. As a result of the lack of incident reporting guidelines, the study found that the majority of the women journalists resort to reporting the insurgency in a way that will not displease the insurgents and the military. Despite that, they were not shielded from attacks.

There are several justifications for the recent surge of female war correspondents. At least in part, it is economic. Because overseas offices had been reduced, particularly after 9/11, many news organizations suddenly required reporters in conflict areas, but some men were reluctant to take risks for career advancement especially considering that war correspondents are constantly the target of assaults. Smart television producers realized that lovely features soften the look of body bags and that spectators would even find it enjoyable to see women acting in traditionally masculine ways (Cohen, 2001). Most women journalists that covered the insurgency were already located in the region before the war started. So, it was easier for them to adjust to the new reality with their male counterpart even though some male journalists fled the scene at the instance of the first blast. International media organizations also employ the services of some of them as freelancers. This is logical and more economical than sending in their staff who do not understand the terrain or the complexity of the war.

### **The Gendered Challenges Faced By Women Journalists**

There is also the tendency of women to use their sexuality as a weapon to cultivate sources. Under normal circumstances, some sources are more open to female journalists than male journalists. In the northeast, women journalists were able to interact with family members of the insurgents and cultivated sources amongst them. Steiner (2017) argues that while this may incite animosity among competitors, editors may be more eager than ever to allow women to use their sexuality. Many women who have covered conflicts in the past talked about taking advantage of their feminine privilege: their visibility let them stand out at press conferences and have their questions answered first; troops who were hungry for female interaction assisted them in several crucial ways. Arab women journalists have recently claimed that they can pass checkpoints more easily than males can. Women's very subordinate status helps them get away with subterfuges (Playdon, 2002). Similarly, women journalists sometimes find it easy to navigate military checkpoints. In another instance, they are subject to selective attack by both the security agents and the insurgents.



The dual nature of sexuality as a weapon means it can be positive and negative. Women journalists covering wars are now faced with a case of sexual violence and harassment in the northeast. Steiner (2017) buttresses that public critics and even journalists themselves claim that the trend is now focused on violence, particularly sexual assault, against women in conflict areas. There is a significant danger of rape and sexual assault for female combat correspondents. More than half of the 29 female reporters who participated in the study who were on assignment reported experiencing sexual harassment (Matloff, 2007). In the northeast, because the majority of the women journalists are married and divulging information on rape or sexual assault can have grievous consequences. The majority of them would rather not share such information with anyone. Feinstein and Sinyor (2009) also attest that reporters who have been sexually assaulted often in battle zones rarely come out, whether out of humiliation, a need to stay in the macho club, or most likely a fear of having their assignments cancelled. Men and women both have significant rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol use as self-medication due to the pressures of kidnapping, major injury, and death.

The study is anchored on the new institution theory. Institutions are shaped by gender, and this has an impact on how power is distributed. The majority of political and economic institutions, which have historically been dominated by males, were created with (elite) men in mind. They depend on men's dominance over women and idealize "masculine" patterns of behaviour. The authority of males over women and the power of the most "masculine" men over everyone else is therefore "locked in" by these institutions (media industry). Consider the political parties. Their male-dominated cultures frequently render them inaccessible to women, although they are important gatekeepers for women's political involvement. For instance, female politicians in Nigeria have complained that crucial party decisions are frequently made in bars, which are typically off-limits to them (Abdulsalam, 2022).

Similarly, the secretariats of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), which serve as a melting point for journalists in Nigeria are highly limited in engaging women. Within the context of this study, the Chapel created by the journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency had limited women (FJ3). Not because the women were not interested but because the way the institution was structured does not allow for the free involvement of women. Therefore, the new institution will protect and balance power between men and women covering the dangerous beat. As Ryfe (2006) argues, "Institutional orders will reproduce in the absence of a shock to the system" (p. 137). If women journalists continue to operate inside an institutional structure that has not addressed issues like threats and assaults, safety training and procedure, proper welfare and compensation, etc., power disparity in the media will persist. The Boko Haram insurgency, which was a shock to the system, has opened up options for new paths, giving women journalists the needed leverage to renegotiate power in the media industry.

## **Conclusion**

This study has discussed, albeit, not conclusively, the issue of power and gender in the media industry as it relates to the experience of women journalists that covered the Boko Haram insurgency. If anything, the findings will put to rest, the argument that women can hardly survive covering dangerous terrain. That line of argument is borne out of male power domineering tendency and effort to make war reporting a masculine beat. It has highlighted how power dynamics in the media sector affect both sexes' performance. The



majority of the women journalists that covered the insurgency went through the same turmoil as their male counterparts with some additional threats due to their gender.

Steiner (2017) opines that the women's movement and the increased prominence of women themselves have transformed (and challenged) the media industry in addition to changing economic limitations, technology, audiences, and professional conventions. Journalists still disagree on whether gender matters in modern war coverage, yet many women consider themselves professionals before they consider themselves journalists. Women who work in the most strongly gendered fields sports and war reporting must establish their credentials by fitting in with the boys. Other than that, women have much fewer restrictive options when it comes to gender performance. Women are no longer limited to a women's neighbourhood or derided as unfeminine if they work in the newsroom. Even women who experience significant sexism on their own or in groups do not always become gender aware, much less adopt methods to work that are specifically tailored to women.

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# PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA AND GENDER REPRESENTATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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## **Introduction**

**T**he issue of gender bias against womenfolk is not new. It has always been there in our homes where the male child tends to be preferred above the female child; in our tertiary institutions where some courses are presumed to be for the male folk alone; in our workplaces where some positions are seen as the exclusive preserve of men, and in the larger society where most cultures are skewed against women. Narrating how some people are suffering from low expectations due to some traditional beliefs, like dancing when they have a male child, and not dancing when they have a female child, David Ibiyeomie said:

They believe a female is nothing in society. This system places high value on males than females, which is very wrong today. If you go to some families, some females are the ones financing everything. Most times, it is the females that take care of their parents when they get old because the men will be so busy with their wives and children. Let's abolish such practice because females are very vital in society (News

Hub Creator, 2022, p.1).

Ekwelie (2005) implicates the Judeo-Christian culture for treating women as second-class citizens who are constantly mocked, who can only be seen but not heard, and who are owned as property. According to Ekwelie (2005), the British Parliament issued a Witchcraft Act at one point, which stipulated punishment for women who seduced men into marriage by flaunting their God-given endowments but did not penalise the males who lustfully wedded the women. According to Sheck, Wylie, Watson, and Brar (2020), women are still viewed as second-class citizens in comparison to "first-class males" today as a result of various cultural norms.

Over the past century, campaigns against discrimination against women have received global attention, and various groups and organisations have risen to advocate for equality between men and women. Gender parity between them is so wide that World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021 revealed that it will take another generation of women to wait for gender parity. The World Economic Forum also estimates that it will take 145.5 years to attain gender parity in politics (World Economic Forum, 2021).

The media are intended to be battlegrounds for women's emancipation since it is the mass media that may emphasise and help to improve women's position. However, although the fight for gender parity continues, the media tend to do a disservice to gender equality campaigners. Discrimination has occurred in the media, both in reporting and employment, as well as in government positions. Depending on the agenda the media wanted to accomplish *abinitio*, which is sometimes established and pushed out, the media depiction of topics may have either a harmful or beneficial influence. As a result, media framing and representation may be defined as how the media highlights and emphasise certain concerns to influence how the public understands and interprets such issues. This is consistent with the stand of Iyengar and Kinder (as cited in Guanah & Obi, 2019) who posit that "by lavishing news coverage on an issue while ignoring others, the media draw attention to certain aspects of political life at the expense of the others" (p.114).

The way the media present a story affects our views in one way or another, and through this, the media use stereotypes to enable discrimination, hence, Malcolm X (as cited in Sheck, Wylie, Watson & Brar, 2020) warns that "If you are not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing" (p.2). Displaying a picture that highlights the ideology that men are somehow superior to women, Sheck, Wylie, Watson and Brar (2020) argue that when people view an image like that, it continues to sustain and further the gap of inequality between men and women.

The media have been faulted for subtly and overtly supporting discrimination against women, though there have been cases of such discrimination against men too, however, such cases are few. For example, Alexis Ohanian, the co-founder and executive chairman of the social news website *Reddit*, was referred to by the media as a tennis player, 'Serena Williams' husband' despite his achievements. He is an American Internet entrepreneur and investor. He also co-founded the early-stage venture capital firm Initialized Capital, helped launch the travel search website Hipmunk, and started the social enterprise *Breadpig*. He was also a partner at Y Combinator (Ikeji, 2021a).



The issue of media bias and discrimination against women seems to be more, like the case of the first woman and African to be elected as Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. She was cynically described by, at least three Swiss newspapers, *Luzerner Zeitung*, *Aargauer Zeitung* and *St. Galler Tagblatt*, as a 66-year-old Nigerian grandmother. The headline in *Aargauer Zeitung* newspaper on February 9, 2021, specifically read “This grandmother will become the boss of the WTO.” The fact that she graduated from Harvard University, or has a PhD from MIT, and rose to become the Managing Director of the World Bank which won the heart of 164 countries to be voted for as the WTO Director-General was left out of the report. Ajasa (2021) reports that *Aargauer Zeitung* newspaper had to tender an apology to the WTO Director-General after several women heads of UN agencies and more than 120 ambassadors in Geneva signed a petition calling out the headline as racist and sexist. While welcoming the apology in a tweet, Dr Okonjo-Iweala said she was “thankful to all my sisters, UN Women Leaders and the 124 Ambassadors in Geneva who signed the petition on calling out the racist & sexist remarks in this newspaper” (Ajasa, 2021, p.2).

Kamala Harris, the Vice President of the United States of America, has stated that her media portrayal would be different if she were a white male. According to a report from *The New York Times* (as cited in The Publishergr.com, 2021), Harris has been confiding in allies that she believes the news would cover her differently if she were white and male, attributing some of her negative press coverage to race and gender, particularly in conservative media outlets.

Gender discrimination in the media may be attributed to the macho newsroom culture as tenable in most media houses where men are the dominant staff. It may also be accredited to the fact that a smaller number of women practice journalism as against the ratio of the number of them that studied journalism in school. Shrum and Bischak (2001) maintain that there are fewer females than males in almost all forms of mainstream media, and those who do appear are often portrayed in very stereotypical ways.

To this end, it is important to investigate the current perception of stakeholders in the gender and media discourse. Here, this paper examined the extent media reports encourage general and gender stereotypes/discrimination; ascertained if the macho newsroom culture in journalism practice is the reason for biased reporting in the media against the female gender, and determined the factors that make a smaller number of women practice journalism.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of discrimination against women remains topical because the disparity between men and women tends not to be receding. The media are accused of abettal for not doing enough in conferring status on the stereotype against women discourse, and for not standing up, voicing concern, or providing adequate support for gender equality advocates. They are considered to be part of the problem instead of the solution. Hence Guanah (2017) accuses the mass media, which are supposed to accord all citizens equal rights and opportunities, of encouraging gender imbalance.

Although many studies have been conducted on gender discrimination, very few have attempted to examine, in-depth, the extent to which media reports encourage general and gender stereotypes, and the effects of macho newsroom culture as it relates to biased

reporting against the female gender in the media. It is this gaping that this study intended to fill.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Examine the extent to which media reports encourage general and gender stereotypes/discrimination.
- ii. Ascertain if the macho-newsroom culture in journalism practice is the reason for biased media reports of females.
- iii. Determine the factors that make a smaller number of women practice journalism.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Critical Media Theory served as the foundation for this study. The development of Critical Theory at the Frankfurt School in the 1920s and 1930s by intellectuals and theoreticians including Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and Max Horkheimer is connected to the history of this theory. The theories of György Lukács and Antonio Gramsci have also had an impact. According to Outhwaite (2009), the Frankfurt School researchers of the second generation, particularly Jürgen Habermas, have also had an impact. The critical theory advanced toward American pragmatism in Habermas' work, transcending its theoretical foundations in German idealism.

The two versions of critical theory started to overlap much more than they had before in the 1970s and 1980s when Habermas redefined critical social theory as a study of communication, with communicative competence and communicative rationality on the one hand, and distorted communication on the other. Horkheimer (as cited in George, 2008) emphasises that a theory is critical insofar as it seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (p. 567).

A critical theory is essentially any method of social philosophy that emphasises self-reflective analysis and critique of society and culture to expose and confront power structures. The premise of critical theory, which has roots in sociology and literary criticism, is that social issues are more often caused by social institutions and cultural presuppositions than by specific people. Ideology, according to Raymond (1981), is the main barrier to human liberty. Numerous academic disciplines, including psychoanalysis, sociology, history, communication theory, philosophy, and feminist theory, can benefit from the use of critical theory.

According to Glynn (2020), in general, neo-Marxist and Hegelian, the Frankfurt School's critical theory generated potent critiques of positivist, mainstream forms of social science and philosophy. Glynn (2020), opines that the Frankfurt School's theory of the emerging "mass media" of the 20th century served as a potent critique of the mainstream, positivist, "administrative" mass communication research that predominated in the field's early years.

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom developed varieties of structural and cultural Marxism that heavily drew on the work of Althusser and Gramsci in particular. As a result, there were some direct theoretical descendants of the Frankfurt School critical theory. Furthermore, the CCCS created semiotic and ethnographic approaches to critical media studies that drew from the

works of authors like Barthes and Geertz, leading to ideas of media audiences that were very different from those of the Frankfurt School and political economists.

In light of this, R. M. Seiler (as cited in Ucalgary, 2019), says that critical theory, a social theory, places the investigation into mass communication in the domain of ideology and explains the function of communication and the place of the media. According to Glynn (2020), the Birmingham School's critical media theory closely interacted with feminist theory and politics as well as critical race theory in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It also engaged in dialogues and debates with poststructuralism, postmodernism, post-Marxism, and postcolonialism as it gained international traction under the looser umbrella of "Cultural Studies" (p.2).

Several important texts that outline different media-related thought processes are examined by critical media theory. They are crucial in the sense that they seek to define the boundaries of how current media operate and in highlighting the possibility for expanded uses of media (Google Search, 2015). This theory is used in this study because it criticises the media's complacent position in speaking out forcefully for the female gender when it comes to concerns of gender equity.

### **Salient Issues About Gender Inequality**

Gender imbalance has long been a topic of discussion across the world. Guanah and Nwabueze (2021) point out that it is now being classified as a crime against women, although the demand for gender equality is frequently connected with equal access to education, excellent healthcare, equal employment, decision-making, and freedom for all sexes.

The discourse on women has assumed a central theme in global Treaties, Conventions and Declarations; even with that, women still face various systemic barriers and gender inequality. Many had hoped women would be more fairly treated, and the inequity gap between them and men reduced when Charters, such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights adopted in 1981; the ECOWAS Protocol, Democracy and Good Governance 2001; the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) adopted in July 2001; the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which obligates state parties to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, and Women and Children's Rights, as adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, and the 1995 World Conference that was held in Beijing, China, where over 46,000 women from all works of life from over 183 countries, including Nigeria, were represented, and where twelve critical areas of women's consensus were addressed. Fast forward to today, and a sense remains that the struggle for parity is still going on the world over. Despite the disappointments, women still hope that the gap will be bridged someday.

Gender discrimination, according to Rukhshanda, Muneera, and Waheed (2017), is the unjust treatment of women, as well as the denial of opportunities and violations of their rights. It is the uneven treatment of persons based on their qualities that distinguishes those causes that lead a person to discriminate, such as stereotypes, prejudice, and/or racism. Gender is influenced by culture, social interactions, and natural settings, according to Linda (2016), hence the twentieth century was defined by a worldwide trend toward gender equality/discrimination.

Gender inequality impacts the position of women in Africa, according to Ewrierhoma (2019), and one asks if the disparity is formed or a fiction based on changing conditions. Men and women are segregated by the dynamics of social interactions, access to resources, and decision-making, with the former held up as the norm and supported, while the latter is viewed as the outlier, the 'other,' or outsider. As a result, inequality denotes an unequal, inexact distribution or allocation of rights at various gender sites such as the family, education, labour, sexual orientations, and mental capacity.

When a woman is revealed to be resolute and understands what type of life she wants to live, society frequently plays the gender card. Guanah, Dalung and Anho (2018) state that the media have been criticised for remaining mute when it comes to proclaiming the huge gains women have made in society while blowing the men's trumpet. What is required of the media is that they portray news in such a manner that women's contributions to society are not perceived through the lens of gender, but rather as ordinary human endeavours.

### **Multifarious Biases Against Women**

The female gender is faced with numerous types of discrimination, and one of the brazenly jingoistic attitudes and discrimination being perpetuated against women and the girl-child includes violence. Recently in the Aguleri Community of Anambra State, Nigeria, a woman was humiliated, stripped naked, and paraded naked around the community because she was alleged to have caused the death of her husband by sleeping with another man (MassMediaNG, 2022). The snag about the matter is that the male culprit who supposedly committed adultery with her was left off the hook. MassMediaNG (2022) reports that the video is posted online, and the community people said the woman should remain naked for the world to see. Women have their portion of the blame for being discriminated against, for instance, more women in the crowd paraded the naked woman. It is actions like these that made the Catholic Diocesan and Religious Directors of Social Communication, in a resolution declare that "Women are the worst victims of all violence and crises situations. They contribute so much to the economy but are not allowed to take charge" (Vanguard, 2017, p2).

There are numerous cases of discrimination against women in different spheres of life. For instance, it took 232 years and 115 prior appointments for Ketanji Brown Jackson, a black woman, to be selected to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States of America in 2022, making her place in history as the first Black female justice (Denean, 2022). In the recent past in Nigeria, a male National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member knelt with a ring to propose marriage to a female soldier (Private Sofiyat Akinlabi) at the NYSC orientation camp in Yikpata, Kwara State. Oyero (2021) reports that the visibly excited spinster, in military uniform, accepted the young graduate's proposal.

The Nigerian Army, on the other hand, detained the female officer. Sofiyat Akinlabi's offences, according to the Army authority's spokesman, Brig. Gen. Onyema Nwachukwu was fraternisation while on official duty at the NYSC camp; that is, engaging in an intimate relationship with a trainee. She was also ineligible for marriage because she had not served in the Army for at least three years; she disobeyed the Armed Forces of Nigeria's standing guidelines and directives for the use of social media; she engaged in romantic relationships while in uniform; and her behaviour was detrimental to good order and military discipline (Daily Trust, 2021).

However, both the NYSC member and the soldier are over the age of 18, which makes them eligible for marriage under Nigerian law; also, there is a clear distinction between accepting a marriage proposal and marrying. To demonstrate that detaining the female officer was gender discrimination, several Facebook users dug up and shared photos of male soldiers who engaged in romance and proposed to their girlfriends while wearing their uniforms, and they were not penalised for doing so as seen in the case of the female soldier (Ikeji, 2021b).

In response to the imprisonment of the female soldier, Rhoda Tyoden, the immediate past president of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), declares that army rules could not trump the Nigerian constitution. She goes on to say that the regulation prohibiting female soldiers from marrying while serving for less than three years is discriminatory and hence illegal because it does not apply to male personnel. Tyoden emphasises that “if the fear of her becoming pregnant has anything detrimental to her service in the military, then what about the officer who impregnates her? Let the rule be generic that nobody engages in this or that” (Daily Trust, 2021, p.2).

Similarly, MassMediaNG (2021a) reports the case of another female soldier who accepted the proposal of a shoemaker and was punished by her fellow soldiers who dragged her in the mud till she could not breathe. The soldiers felt it was humiliating for her to accept the proposal of a “common floor guy.” Even in the transportation industry in Nigeria, where women are attempting to make a career, they face prejudice. Under the umbrella of the Ladies on Wheel Association of Nigeria (LOWAN), a group of Nigerian female commercial drivers, the majority of whom are university graduates in various fields, have accused Nigerians of subjecting them to unfair treatment, including discrimination, humiliation, and harassment.

Apart from branding them as sex workers, the women claim that many of their clients try to take advantage of them by pursuing amoral encounters. Nkechi Abiola, the president and founder of LOWAN, notes that many of her members are subjected to abuse from their families, their surroundings, and society as a whole. A woman driver was once assaulted by a guy inside her vehicle. According to Abiola, discrimination extends to an unwillingness to patronise them, as many requested trips are cancelled regularly once the rider realises that the driver is a woman (Kanabe, 2021).

Another clear case of open discrimination against the female gender was displayed in Nigeria’s 8th Senate where Senator Biodun Olujimi was forced to step down her bill calling for gender equality. The bill, entitled “A bill for an Act to make provisions for the empowerment of women and gender equality and to establish a legislative framework for the empowerment of women”, according to Senator Olujimi, was designed to align all aspects and implementation of laws relating to women empowerment as well as address issues relating to appointments and representation of women in decision making, positions and structures. According to Umoru (2021), during the second reading of the bill on the floor of the House, a heated debate ensued, and the sponsor was forced to withdraw it after some senators who kicked against it, cited “socio-cultural and Islamic concerns.” The bill, which was first brought to the Senate during the 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly, had earlier been killed by the 7th Senate.



The ongoing 9th Assembly recently rejected the affirmative action bills to create special seats for women in the legislative and executive arms of government at federal and state levels, and other gender-related bills in the National Assembly (NASS). Sponsored by Senator Nkeiru Onyejeocha, the bill sought 111 extra seats in the National Assembly for women – one Senate and two House of Representatives seats from each state and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It also aimed at obtaining 108 seats in state assemblies for women. The Affirmative Action Bill, on the other hand, sought 35 per cent of political party positions for women.

According to Vanguard (2022), if the bills had passed, Nigerian women would have gained significantly more visibility in all facets of politics and administration as a result of constitutional empowerment. Nigeria would have finally met its duties under the worldwide conventions for the eradication of gender discrimination, to which it is a signatory. Nigerian women consider NASS' action to be a loud and clear statement that "they do not want progress for society: for mothers, aunties, sisters, wives, and daughters" (Nnamdi, 2022, p.2). In her statement, the minister of women's affairs, Pauline Tallen, said Nigerian women were disappointed and aggrieved at the actions of the 9th National Assembly (NASS) which denied women the opportunity of inclusion and representation in governance by voting against the gender bills.

While calling on NASS to reconsider their decision on the rejected gender bills, another set of aggrieved women, under the aegis of Women of Nigeria, asked the National Assembly to note that the National Assembly has taken the women backwards because, "their actions undermine the importance and relevance of women's contribution to the governance of Nigeria including the key role women play to bring victory to political parties in elections at all levels across the country" (Edeme, 2022, p.1).

However, the fact remains that women do antagonise themselves when they are expected to work together to achieve gender equality. This was the case of the deputy minister for women, family, and community development, of Malaysia, Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff. She advised husbands to 'discipline' their 'stubborn' wives by speaking to them, but if they refuse to change their behaviour, then they should sleep apart from them for three days, and if after that the woman refuses to change, they can gently hit her to show his strictness and how much he wants her to change (Yabaleftonline, 2022). Also, members of the Ladies on Wheel Association of Nigeria (LOWAN) complain about women passengers giving them more problems. These female passengers see them as wayward drivers who are only out to attract men. Nonetheless, Cable News Network (CNN) International Anchor, Zain Asher said it is important for women who are in positions of power to use their influences to uplift other women rather than engaging in unnecessary rivalry (Ajayi, 2022).

### **Media and Gender Equity Promotion**

The media are saddled with enormous responsibilities because of the power in their possession, hence they can easily turn the tides of any situation with their reportage through framing. They can supply critical knowledge to educate the public about gender issues, and to modify negative attitudes and behaviours toward women in particular. They may be useful, efficient, and a fantastic teaching tool for providing a visual understanding of more complex subjects as well as portraying processes that can be utilised to spread gender awareness. If the media are unavoidable in society, then their good roles must be consistent with the occurrence of unpleasant events as well; as a result, they should

always expose discrimination against women and girls.

According to Guanah, Dalung, and Anho (2018), the mass media serve as a bridge not just in ensuring that prejudice against women is decreased, if not eliminated, but also in portraying women as capable of handling any task thrown at them. The media are change agents, and they are extremely effective at entertaining, educating, and informing the public on important issues. Instead of a tinge of gender prejudice in some media coverage, the media should be perceived as promoting equality in society. The media must rise to the occasion and try to close the gap between men and women.

Women's rights to security and safety, as well as their right to dignity and freedom from humiliating treatment by society, are all protected by the media. Through their reporting, they must not advocate, normalise, or perpetuate views and behaviours that are anti-gender equality, as this will exacerbate and jeopardise the agitation for gender equity in society. The media should make conscious attempts to balance gender representation in their news articles and reports.

Today, the media should play a stronger role in levelling up the disparity between men and women and putting an end to the second-class status of the female gender being embroiled. If they are silent, doing nothing to liberate women from the enormous discrimination they are exposed to, it invariably means the media are accomplices in the silencing of the women's agenda that society has consciously and unconsciously embarked on. Their job is not to stereotype. Their assignment is to promote the virtues of the female gender and publicise their innate ability to function and multitask satisfactorily. They are meant to propagate "what a man can do, a woman can also do, if not better than the man if given equal opportunity."

### **Methodology**

A survey design was adopted, and a questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. The population of the study is made of all the teaching and non-teaching staff of the Departments of Mass Communication and Music (Theatre Arts) of the University of Benin (UNIBEN), Benin City; Delta State University (DELSU), Abraka, and University of Africa (UAT), Toru-Orua. The justification for the population was purposive due to the knowledge of the sets in the population.

According to Ayakoroma (2020), and data obtained from the schools (Schools' Registries), the various staff strength of these universities is the Department of Music (DELSU) = 14, Department of Mass Communication (DELSU) = 26; UNIBEN's Department of Mass Communication = 38, UNIBEN's Department of Theatre Arts (where Music is domiciled) = 45; UAT's Department of Mass Communication = 16, and UAT's Department of Theatre Arts (where Music is domiciled) = 14. This gives the population 153. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table was used to determine the Sample. The table indicates that when a given population is between 150 and 159, the corresponding sample size will be 108. Proportionate Allocation Formula was used to ascertain the sample size to pick from each University thus:

DELSU:  $\frac{40 \times 108}{153} = 28.24$  Approximately = 28  
 UNIBEN:  $\frac{83 \times 108}{153} = 58.59$  Approximately = 59  
 UAT:  $\frac{30 \times 108}{153} = 21.18$  Approximately = 21  
 Total: = 108

A simple random sampling technique was used to select the individuals from each school who were administered the questionnaire.

## Findings and Discussion

**Table 1:** The extent to which media reports encourage gender stereotypes/discrimination

Responses	Frequency	%
Very High Extent	27	25
High Extent	31	28.70
Undecided	2	1.85
Low Extent	23	21.30
Very Low Extent	25	23.15
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022

**KEYS:** Very High Extent- 90% - 100%; High Extent- 89% - 70%; Undecided- 50% - 69%; Low Extent- 40% - 49%; Very Low Extent- 1% - 39%.

The data in Table 1 above implies that the media, in one way or the other, contribute to gender discrimination being perpetuated against the girl-child and women in society.

**Table 2:** Macho newsroom culture in journalism practice as the reason for biased media reports of female

Responses	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	26	24.07
Agree	27	25
Undecided	3	2.79
Disagree	26	24.07
Strongly Disagree	26	24.07
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022

Likert - type five points rating scale and dichotomous were used: 5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4=Agree (A), 3= Undecided (U), 2= Strongly Disagree (SD), and 1= Disagree (D) responses as well as open-ended questions.

From Table 2, it can be deduced that there is no clear agreement as to whether the dominance of the newsroom by the male gender is a factor in biased reporting against the female gender in the media.

**Table 3:** Why a smaller number of women are in journalism practice

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Culture:	16	14.81
Marriage	12	11.11
Macho Newsroom Culture	7	6.48
Nature of Work	10	9.26
Religion	5	4.63
Stereotype	11	10.19
Career Prospect	10	9.26
Interest	9	8.33
Laziness	7	6.48
Poor Remuneration	6	5.56
Health issue	6	5.56
Internal Politics	9	8.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022

Table 3 shows that numerous reasons account for why there are fewer women than men practising journalism even when research has revealed that more women than men study journalism as a course in tertiary institutions.

The first finding shows that the media partially accentuate stereotypes and discrimination against the female gender in society. This finding reverberates with the postulations of Sheck, Wylie, Watson and Brar(2020), that based on facts, images and research, a conclusion can be drawn supporting the argument that the media does encourage and allow stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

The discrimination and marginalisation of the female gender have become a steady drumbeat across the world. The pushback has to be now, and it should be well coordinated. The media should be at the forefront of safeguarding the dignity of the girl-child and women, and not the contrary. They are to strengthen the position of women as equal entities with their male counterparts.

The media needs to do their parts in ensuring that the present dichotomy that exists between the male and female genders is completely removed. If they do not wield their power of persuasion, agenda-setting, status conferral, and framing to fight against the discrimination that women are experiencing, then, they cannot be adjudged to be performing to full capacity their expected roles in society, which includes bringing about equity among all citizens, no matter their sex.

Ekwelie (2005) emphasises that the media can help in fighting gender discrimination, redeeming the image of women, correcting the wrong portrayal of women in the newspapers, magazines, and other publications, and ensuring there is gender equality and mutual respect for women. He points out that these can be done through the use of language, pictures, cartoons, and all other illustrations. Through the mass media, all will begin to come to terms with society as it is, and not as ordered by those who have hatred for women.

Findings also show that it is not true that the macho newsroom culture in journalism practice is the reason for biased reporting in the media against the female gender despite the belief by some people that the chauvinistic toxin tends to have found its way into the newsroom. MassMediaNG (2021b) refers to macho newsroom culture as male domination of the journalism profession which also reflects on daily newsroom activities. It is explained as an atmosphere of work which makes one feel that the job is mainly for men. This situation made Djerf-Pierre (2007) declare that women are being denied an equal place at the reporters' table.

Ross and Carter (2001) write that feminist news researchers have long argued that in the macho culture of most newsrooms, journalists' daily descriptions of what is newsworthy remain firmly based on masculine news values. Cable News Network (CNN) International anchor, Zain Asher, asserts, "With women and their numbers in the media, I think that having low representation is not good" (Ajayi, 2022, p.1).

Discrimination against women is said to exist in newsrooms because men who are enraged by women's "invasion" of some media newsrooms are quoted by Steiner (2009) to have said that, "Newsworld would defeminize and even desex women" (p.116). Roy Greenslade wonders how the profession could remain so male-dominated when the classes he was teaching were increasingly full of young women (Allan, as cited in Ibrahim, 2020).

The under-reporting and biased reporting against women in Nigeria by the mass media may be a result of the overwhelming presence of male journalists in news media organisations. This makes their perspectives in the reporting to be more prevalent than those of the few women journalists and also gives them the leeway and liberty to be biased if they choose to. Stuart Allan, while writing on Journalism and the Culture of Othering, says this about how macho newsroom culture influences women in journalism practice:

There is no disputing the fact that macho newsroom culture is a predominant feature in the journalism industry across the world. It could also be a discouraging factor for women's enrolment in journalism practice. This is why media managers and stakeholders need to do more to work against gender disparity or practices that could encourage it in the workplace environment in the media sector (MassMediaNG, 2021b, p.2).

Polly Curtis, editor-in-chief, of HuffPost, one of the leading online news websites in the United States of America, once said in an interview, "I have experienced extremely male-dominated cultures in journalism that I found very difficult at times. I also had long stretches of my career when it just wasn't an issue. At its worst, I've seen how off-putting that macho culture can be for younger women coming into newsrooms" (MassMediaNG, 2021c, p. 3).

Findings further show that a lot of factors are responsible for why there is less number of women practising journalism. The reasons for this may differ slightly among countries due to socio-cultural and other environmental factors, but the general factors include Culture, Marriage, Religion, Career Prospects, Macho Newsroom, Interest, Laziness, Nature of Work, Stereotypes, Poor Remuneration, Health Issues, and Internal Politics.



According to MassMediaNG (2021c), women in Nigeria and most African countries are limited to being housekeepers, remaining with the children, and taking care of domestic issues. Even if a woman has a paying career, she must find a way to integrate it with housekeeping responsibilities. Since journalism is a job that requires long hours, a woman, especially one who is married, may not be able to handle it. With the eyes of African culture, a woman who exhibits the act of fearlessness that journalism bestows on its practitioners will be viewed as a wild woman. As a result, journalism is not a preferred profession for women in many regions, particularly in Africa, due to cultural differences.

Some women become so consumed with the needs of the 'home front' after they get married that they have little time for active journalism practice. They become preoccupied with caring for the family, racing about the house watching the kids, and attending to their husbands. For instance, Palser, Lazerwitz, and Fotopoulou (2022) cite one editor-in-chief who stated that he spent months recruiting his editing team before taking on the post of editor-in-chief. He said he lost track of the number of invites he sent out to ladies who declined due to scheduling constraints. Given the number of responsibilities, several of the women stated that taking on such a demanding role would not be suitable.

Other factors cited by MassMediaNG (2021c) that contribute to a lower number of women practising journalism include religion, stereotypes, and career prospects, where men dominate managerial positions in the media, making women feel hopeless in their efforts to reach the top; interest, where more female communication graduates prefer to work in public relations and advertising rather than journalism; and laziness, where some women do not want "skin pain." Journalism is demanding, time-consuming, and risky. Not everyone, including men, wants to be under such duress for a salary that is way below par.

The means of solving the problems associated with gender reporting are attainable. Since more scholars claim that fewer female journalists are responsible for the underrepresentation of women in news coverage, Nwabueze (2013) believes that removing all bottlenecks that prevent women from becoming journalists will ensure balanced coverage of both the male and female gender by the media in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Gender parity can be made a strategic objective for every segment of society, and women can be supported to participate fully in governance and decision-making without any form of encumbrance placed before them. All forms of gender discrimination against women can be eliminated, and gender-neutral flexible career paths be promoted in Nigeria. It is the duty of the media to continue to show genuine commitment in the fight against all forms of marginalisation against women and portray equality between men and women in all spheres of life. The ideal thing is that the mass media should be a partner in progress with women by being a voice for them at all times, and in all situations instead of being women's bane and pain.

As a means to deconstruct the macho-room culture, and encourage more women to practice journalism, media organisations are at liberty to initiate and promote more gender-friendly work plans and editorial policies in their organisations to entice women to pick up journalism jobs and participate in the agitation for gender equity. Women can also bring to bear on their journalism career the training that the home provides, especially those whose beats focus on the home and women's activities. This will present them, journalists, with

double portfolios, that is marriage and media.

On their part, women must ensure that the struggle for gender equality continues. They should capitalise on the availability of social media to change the narratives against them. For instance, they should lead in publishing the cheering news emanating from Afghanistan that the Taliban has issued a decree barring forced marriage, saying women should not be considered “property” and must consent to the marriage (Louis, 2021). Women can build up their power base in the fight against all forms of discrimination against them.

Everybody must work towards ensuring the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls by allowing them to advance and unleash their limitless potential because this will aid the objective of sustainable development goals.

### **Recommendations**

1. Since the media are powerful influencers of man`s decision-making faculty, they should always display balance while reporting gender issues. They must deliberately democratise news narratives to extricate all forms of gender discrimination from them for women to have equal voices too.
2. The media should encourage women advocacy groups, and adequately sensitise the woman on the street to join the vanguard for gender equality.
3. More women should venture into the practice of journalism, and ascend the management cadre to ensure gender issues are given prominence.
4. Gender quotas should also be given in newsrooms that could disintegrate the macho-news room culture.

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# COMMUNICATING CULTURAL PRACTICES OF WIDOWHOOD IN AKOKWA IDEATO NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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## **Introduction**

**W**idowhood practices vary from culture to culture, especially in Africa and Nigeria, in particular. Just as the practices are varied, so are the ways these practices are communicated among the people. Even in Igbo culture, widowhood practices vary according to sub-cultures. Some of these practices are not properly communicated to women before marriage. Observers argue that by the time women lose their husbands, especially young widows, they face a lot of inhuman treatment which results in trauma (AIT NEWS, June 25, 2022). These practices and inappropriateness in the way they are communicated are conspicuously evident in the Akokwa sub-culture. Although Akokwa is not exclusively different from other Igbo communities, in terms of widowhood practices, it is believed that some specific widowhood practices may be deeply identified exclusively with the Akokwa community.

Many of these practices deny widows and their children rights to ownership of the deceased persons' estate. Some of the practices subject the widow to slavish and barbaric treatment while the relatives of the deceased husband only see the widow as the property

of the deceased and should be treated as such. This is where communication of the practices between the family of the deceased and the widow and between the community and the widows becomes the pivot of this study.

The history of widowhood practices in Akokwa is as old as the area itself, with some dotted changes due to the advent of Christianity in the area. Akokwa in the present day, is imbued with traditional religion and Christianity. Often, these two religions overlap in observation of trado-cultural practices or are parallel though in some extreme cases, they become quite dissimilar. Most often, Christians are observed to be ardent custodians and unrepentant observers of the traditions of the people just as it is in the case of cultural practices of widowhood.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Widowhood is a phenomenon that can hardly be predicted since death is unpredictable except when one is terminally ill. Widowhood results from the death of one's husband but the concern associated with widowhood is the rites and observances the widow is subjected to. In the Akokwa sub-culture of Igbo, widows are subjected to some of these rites that seem to engender trauma, deprivation and depression and in some cases, extended to their children. The point of concern is whether young girls and newly married women have been adequately communicated regarding the cultural expectations from them, in case of their husbands' death. It also questions the kind of communication that takes place between the widow and the rest of the extended family of the deceased. Since communication can either facilitate relief or induce pain in a situation like this, the need to investigate the kind of communication that takes place before and during widowhood, concerning cultural practices in Akokwa became inevitable. Investigating communication of widowhood practices among the people of Akokwa in Ideato North Local Government Area of Imo State puts this study ahead of other studies in widowhood practices.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. Through what communication forms are young unmarried women in Akokwa given pre-cultural practices of widowhood to get them prepared for possible widowhood?
- ii. What is the pattern of communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa between the widow and other members of her husband's family?
- iii. What implication does the nature of the communication of widowhood practices in Akokwa have for the psychology of widows and their children?
- iv. How does communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa affect the wellbeing of the deceased's family?
- v. What role does religion play in communicating cultural practices of widowhood in contemporary Akokwa?

### **Communicating Widowhood Culture**

Communication is simply defined as an exchange of meaning between the sender and the receiver of a message (Akpan, 1987). In other words, for communication to take place there must be the sender, the message, the channel and the receiver. Akpan (1987) argues that communication is a transaction between the sender of a message and the receiver. The sender in the communication process can be an individual, a group of individuals or even an institution. Similarly, the receiver in the communication process can be an individual, a group of persons, an institution or even the mass of people in society. Thus,

there is what is known as interpersonal communication, small group communication and mass communication (Bittner, 1989). In the context of this study, all the categories mentioned here apply.

As a result, the community or the family will always be the sender of the message while the widow is the receiver. According to Akpan (1987), communication is a transaction of messages between the sender and the receiver. Therefore, the way this communication is handled by the sender plays a very important role in producing results, taking into consideration the particular situation of the widow. Appropriate management of communication by families of deceased husbands or widows would comfort and encourage them to get over their sorrow quickly. On the contrary, when communication by the family of the deceased subject the widow to dehumanizing treatment, such communication will certainly cause harm to the psychological state of the widow and even that of her children.

Udoudo and Neku (2011) in relating gender to the work of the media, state that such representation is a depiction of society's regard for female gender. Considering this picture of societal inadequate regard for the female gender, one is likely to infer that the kind of communication that surrounds cultural practices of widowhood may not be different from the way society pictures the female gender. Roles assigned to women by society account for the kind of communication that affects them though not in all cases (Miller, 1975). This, therefore, makes it practically impossible to detach the kind of communication from the treatment a widow receives from her community. Illustrating the gap in gender with the role of the press, Udoudo and Neku (2011) add, "If the press is to be measured by the roles played by Nigerian women then critics of the press would not stop criticising the press since women's representation would always feature women in the kitchen, childbirth, petty trading domestic violence, pains etc," (p. 389). Indeed, this observation is not far from the way widows in some cultures in Nigeria and Africa, at large are treated. Many of them go through a lot of pain from society. Although the issue of gender inequality is a global concern (Armstrong, 2006), some Nigerian cultures seem to communicate the enslavement of widows in modern times.

Ordinarily, widowhood is a stage of life which a woman who has lost her husband must go through. According to Nnachi and Nnubia (2011), widowhood means the condition in which a woman finds herself at the death of her husband. A widow, therefore, is a woman whose husband is dead and has not remarried. However, widowhood in many African cultures is often looked at as a stage when a woman who has lost her husband must go through some intimidation and dehumanizing treatments. Amogunla (2021) reports that in Nigeria, stories abound of widows being forced to drink the water used in washing their husbands' corpses in the belief that the wives would die if they are guilty of the death of their husbands. In other words, this is a way of declaring their innocence before local deities. He adds that the stigma or outright rejection, a widow faces leaves her abandoned. Some women also nurse the superstition that associating with a widow can make them lose their husbands while some men also have the fear that they will die. This stigma indeed, results from a lack of proper communication among the living about the dead and the living.

Similarly, Ogbonna (2021) states that in Igbo culture, at the death of the husband, the widow is not supposed to appear in public places and events like markets, burial ceremonies, traditional weddings etc, until the burial of her husband is over. He adds that

“even after the burial, her movement in a sense, remains restricted until the expiration of six months, known as *iyipu akwa uju*” (p.191). According to Ogbonna normally, the widow is shaven by her fellow widow known as *Alutara di* and dressed in a white garment until six months after the funeral. Viewing from a religious perspective, Ogbuchi (2017) states that the high rate of widowhood rites in Igbo land is a source of anxiety and stress to the widows who struggle to adjust to the new phase of life. Earlier, Ihuzue (1972) had stated that widowhood is detestable and terrifying not as a result of the woman's loss of a companion, a friend, a bread-winner, a head of the family and father but on the grounds of indignity, degradation and poverty that are associated with widowhood rites.

Yarhere and Soola (2008) point to the violation of widowhood rights among others, identified by the UN document on Human Rights as psychological violence against women. They argue that in Ibo and Bini customary laws, a widow has no right to her intestate husband's property. This leaves the widow very disadvantaged, especially if she does not have a male child. In other words, the brothers of the deceased are customarily entitled to the intestate property of the deceased instead of the wife. Pointing to the causes of violence against women and children in Delta State for example, Oladitan and Anyanwu (2008) observe that culture and tradition which border on people's belief system and practice essentially render the victims hapless. This type of culture is not pleasant and helpful to the widow who as a result of her sorrowful situation, needs kind treatment from people around her.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is premised on the Standpoint theory of Sandra Harding and Julia T. Wood (Griffin 2000). Standpoint theorists suggest that humans can use the inequalities of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation to observe how different locations within the social hierarchy tend to generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relationships (Griffin, 2000). Aside from the issue of gender emphasized by Griffin (2000), Harding and Wood stress that economic condition, race, and sexuality are additional cultural identities that can either draw people to the centre of society or push them out to the fringes. “Thus, an intersection of minority positions creates a highly looked-down-upon location in the social hierarchy” (Griffin, 2000, p.451). This theory applies to the study as a response to the kind of derogatory discrimination against widows by a section of society in communicating cultural practices of widowhood.

### **Methodology**

This is a qualitative ethnographic study, resulting in the use of Focus Group Discussion and Participant Observation. Since the researcher shares the same culture as other members of the community, her observations were based strictly on her experiences as a bona fide member of the sub-culture. In addition, a Focus Group Discussion, comprising three widows, one traditional religionist, one preacher of the Gospel of Christ, one traditional ruler and four members of the community (ten discussants in total), was conducted on June 26, 2022, at Obi Akrika na Mbaoji Hall in Umukegwu Autonomous Community, Akokwa. For the ethical purpose, the participants were coded as Widow One, Widow Two, Widow Three, Christian Cleric, Traditional Religionist, Traditional Ruler, Member One, Member Two, Member Three and Member Four. Participants were purposively selected based on the discretion of the researcher to obtain optimal results. Only those who married, at least, once were qualified to take part in the discussion.



Because Igbo culture and traditions permit men and women to sit together and discuss their affairs, there was no need to segregate females from male participants. Similarly, Christianity which is the predominant religion in Akokwa does not discriminate against women sitting together with men to discuss their affairs. The six autonomous communities of Akokwa were represented by these men and women. Data from the discussion were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The communities are Umuokwara, Umuezeaga, Umuopia, Akwu, Owerre-Akokwa and Umukegwu. Akokwa is a border community between Imo and Anambra States. Within Imo State, Akokwa shares a boundary with Osina in Orlu Local Government Area, in the South-West while in the North-East, it is bordered with Umuchu and in the North-West, with Uga, all in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. As a result of its unique geographical location, and sharing common borders with communities in both Imo and Anambra States, it is interesting that the culture of Akokwa can have some borrowings from both states. This, therefore, made this study of interest to the communities.

### **Findings**

From the focus group discussion, traditional religionists believed that a widow passes through a lot of pain and agony not only because of the treatment or actions meted out to her but also because she no longer has a husband who will speak and protect her from people who may try to infringe on her rights. He also said there is no amount of love and care given to a widow from her husband's people that she would be happy with, rather she would always feel cheated, mainly the childless ones and those who did not have means of livelihood before the demise of their spouses. "The practices of widowhood in our community are a tradition inherited by our forefathers and because of that, it cannot be modified", he added. He gave an example that a woman who has lost her husband is expected to stay in the house for at least, two weeks and she is not expected to go to the market or be seen in a crowd. She is not expected to have a bath for at least, three days, food will be given to her by her other mates until a date is fixed for the burial of her husband. "The tradition has been existing time immemorial; we grew up to meet the four market days, which are: Eke, Ori, Afor, Nkwo. These market days signify a lot to the Igbo man and that is why for us, the traditionalists there are things we don't do on some certain days".

According to him, "Widowhood in Igbo land and my community is gradually going into extinction and bastardization by the so-called church people who are neither here nor there. Before now, you hardly would see a widow who goes dressing as she wishes. From a distance, you would know truly this woman is mourning by the dressing, unlike what is done nowadays, that widows wear trousers, shorts, sleeveless and roam about without minding the dead". According to Traditional Religionists, it is because of all these abnormalities that deaths are on the increase. He believed that a woman who has lost her husband should show regard for her husband and widowhood.

Widow One said that she was asked not to step out of the house until the husband was buried. Even if it would take one year before the funeral, she was told that her mates would be the ones to feed her. She, however, added that none of the mates did, except one. She also narrated how she was scolded and almost beaten because she went close to the market to sell a bunch of plantains to enable her to get money to buy foodstuffs because the six children left by her husband, including a set of twins, were only catered for by her and the children were crying out of hunger. She was told not to have her bath for three days. According to her, that was what the tradition demanded of her. She also said that because

she took care of her husband while he was sick, she was given some herbs to bathe with for seven days; that is after the first three days without having a shower. Each night before going to bed she padded herself up with clothes. The pad was presumably believed would prevent the late husband from coming to have sex with her. Then, after the burial, she was asked to shave her hair. At this point, any time she went to market, she should not stay beyond 6 pm to show respect for the spirit of her late husband.

Christian Cleric, when asked, why widowhood practices are mainly a burden to the woman more than the man, said “During the creation, God created man and through the man, a woman was created and because of that a man is not supposed to sit at a place just because he has lost his wife; he needs to go out and fend for the family, unlike the woman who is the weaker sex. She needs to stay out and allow her husband to take care of her needs”. When asked what the real Igbo tradition expects of a widow, he said a widow should respect her husband's siblings.

However, Widow Two had a contrary understanding of the treatment given to a widow. She said that despite how she took care of her husband when he was sick until his death, none of her husband's siblings cared to know how she was faring with the children but upon the husband's death, they all came to tell her the “do's and don'ts” (observances). According to her, she was told to not cook beyond 6 pm. She also said that she was told not to visit her place or go there to sleep. No matter what happened, she should try and get home by 6 pm. According to her, some practices need to be abolished because of the pains widows pass through, “after all, men and women are all created by the same God”.

Member Two, in his view, said that those restrictive sanctions given to the women did not apply to widowers as some people came to tell him not to stay indoors while he was mourning his wife. He added that some men even questioned why he was still in seclusion instead of going out to look for what to fend for his children; that, he is a man and should act as one. To him, the practices are only a burden or undeserved punishment meted out to a hapless and innocent widow. He wished that such practices would be eradicated.

On general discussion which was put across to the discussants, six out of the ten said that the Church is the cause of the problem and why the widows do not observe widowhood practices as expected of them. Many deaths among young and old were attributed to alleged inadequate observance of cultural practices of widowhood in the area. On the contrary, the female discussants said the position of the other six was baseless, rather it was a way of keeping the women folk silent from speaking their minds. They believed that if such practices should be reduced, the world of Akokwa women would be a better place for everybody. According to the women, “After all, a woman who has chosen a man to live the rest of her life with came with a good intention and nobody would wish to become a widow because it is not what one should be proud of but fate has made it so”.

Widow Three who was the oldest among the widows said that the earlier those rites and practices were abolished, the better for everybody. According to her, what she went through during her husband's death should not be experienced or imagined. She asked rhetorically, “Can you imagine eating, especially 'fufu' without washing your hands for three nights?” According to her, “a widow goes through a lot of untold pains in the hands of her husband's people”. She added that she went through very unfortunate situations such as poor nutrition, unhealthy shelter and above all, vulnerability to violence from outsiders.

According to her, widows are likely to suffer not only physical ill-health but also mental stress and chronic depression because they go through a lot of grief, losses and trauma after the death of their husbands. "Widows go through rejection, insecurity, discrimination, stigmatization and harmful traditional practices based on cultural practices of widowhood, caused by the death of their husbands, which often, cannot and should not be attributable to the wives".

Asked if there has been any planned and deliberate means of letting young unmarried and newly married women know the implications and demands of cultural practices of widowhood to get them prepared for possible widowhood, all the discussants agreed that such an arrangement was unnecessary and not made. The church too, was not preparing the minds of the female faithful for such a possibility. On the part of the tradition, it would show a wish of unfortunate sudden deaths of the men folk if such a pre-emptive drill was done all in the name of preparing the minds of the wives. The discussants believed that such a measure would also put a scare in the mind of the young women. However, they believed that the tradition expects a wife to be told the observances she must abide by at the death of her husband. To them, that is enough communication that a widow needs to enable her to mourn her husband and live among the husband's family and the community at large.

### **Participant Observation**

Being an ethnographic study, my observations as a participant were valid. My observations were very much in agreement with the Focus Group Discussion, with the addition that a widow's brother-in-law may choose to openly opt to remarry the widow or surreptitiously make advances to the late brother's wife. In both situations, if the widow refuses to oblige, she may be exposed to hatred or more victimization by the brother-in-law. Similarly, the widow hardly gets consulted by her husband's brothers before decisions affecting her and the children are taken.

For instance, the choice of funeral date and the arrangement for the funeral can be done without consulting the widow. She is to accept every arrangement made by the family members. Where there is a religious service to mark the end of the mourning that has the widow at the centre, such a decision can still be made for her and her children by family members. Indeed, in communicating widowhood practices whose burden is upon the widow, the widow is only placed as the receiver of the message and most often, the communication seems to be one-way, from the family of the husband to the widow.

A widow who took care of her husband while he was sick is expected to bathe with special herbs for seven days to dispel the spirit of the husband from coming around her. The herbs can be mixed with black soap and boiled for her bath every night. It is assumed that any violation of this measure can lead to the woman interacting with the husband in the dream and also making her sick. This agrees with the assertion of the Focus Group Discussion. Similarly, the widow is not expected to shave her pubic hair within the mourning period. Allowing the pubic hair for the period of mourning like not having a bath for three days, may not have any reason other than subjecting the widow to a slavish condition that shows deference to the deceased. She is also expected to wail every morning before Cockcrow for the period that precedes her husband's funeral. She must feign the action if she is not emotional enough to wail.

On the nature of communication about cultural practices of widowhood, a widow can only be told what she is expected to do as a widow. This is done by older women who are equally older widows. Such communication centres on the behaviour of the widow, whether real or fake. For example, a widow would be advised to sit on the floor all through the funeral ceremonies. She is not supposed to welcome visitors; she is not supposed to smile even if there is reason to do so. She does not have the right to sleep outside of her home all through the period of her mourning and does not have to appear “cheerful and glamorous” during the period of her mourning.

The widow is also expected not to attend public functions during the period of her mourning the husband. If she does, she would be rebuked even by her people because of what the people would say about her; mainly that the people would deride her as being disrespectful to the late husband. She is expected to always display a moody appearance and always be in her mourning dress all through the mourning period. She is not expected to display the true state of her free mind, otherwise, that would mean she is careless about the death of her husband. In summary, communication surrounding cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa reveals more of what people would say (pretence) than what gives the widow conviction about what she does (reality). Unfortunately, the pretence must be enforced by the spectators who give themselves the responsibility of the custodians of the traditions. It is always a unidirectional form of communication that ignores the sensibilities of the woman.

## **Discussion**

### **RQ 1: Through what form of communication are young unmarried and newly married women in Akokwa given pre-cultural practices of widowhood to get them prepared for possible widowhood?**

Based on the results presented above, it is very clear that there is no deliberate form of communication to keep young women prepared for possible widowhood in Akokwa. In other words, communication on widowhood practices in Akokwa is strategically withheld from young women so as not to scare them before they face reality. Also, the fear of inviting death to the men is another reason pre-communication of widowhood is not encouraged.

The decision not to communicate cultural practices of widowhood to young women does not help the women to understand the situation they are likely to contend with in the event of the death of their husbands. Such a stand rather confirms Oladitan and Anyanwu's (2008) observation that culture and tradition which border on people's belief system and practice essentially render the victims hapless. In other words, the inherent rights that the widows have been made subservient to the cultural practices and traditions that cannot guarantee hope and a future for the widow.

### **RQ 2: What is the pattern of communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa between the widow and other members of her husband's family?**

From both the Focus Group Discussion and the Participant Observation, it is very clear that the pattern of communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa is forceful, haphazard, and intended to create fear in the widow without regard to the rights and dignity of the widow. It portrays the widow as a property of the husband's family or better, a weaker

vessel that must be dictated to. This agrees with Harding and Wood's Standpoint theory which states that "an intersection of minority positions creates a highly looked-down-upon location in the social hierarchy" (Griffin, 2000, p.451). A widow in Akokwa is expected to comply with whatever she is told even when the majority of these "commandments" are against her wish. She cannot argue against the ill-treatment that she undergoes because she wants to display her respect for her late husband in the eyes of the people. As stated earlier, since the flow of communication is one-way, she is only the receiver of the message. Here, communication is neither transactional nor interactional but unidirectional which is fit for bullet theory that does not apply to liberal and democratic communication situations.

### **RQ 3: What implication does the nature of the communication of widowhood practices in Akokwa have for the psychology of widows and their children?**

Both the Focus Group Discussion and the Participant Observation have shown that communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa among the deceased's family members is more pain-inducing than relief of pain. Ordering a widow who mourns her husband not to go to the market to fend for the family, stopping her from going out until the husband is buried and taking over the husband's inheritance by the man's brothers will further inflict pain on the traumatised widow. Such measures are capable of rendering the widow poorer. Ogbuchi (2017) states that the high rate of widowhood rites in Igbo land is a source of anxiety and stress to the widows who struggle to adjust to the new phase of life. Ogbuchi's assertion reinforces the findings of this study elicited from the Focus Group Discussion and Participant Observation on communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa which is a sub-culture of Igbo culture.

### **RQ 4: How does communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa affect the wellbeing of the deceased's family?**

Generally, communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa seems to be deliberately skewed against the wellbeing of the deceased's family. Akokwa tradition allows brothers of the deceased to inherit the intestate property of the deceased instead of the widow, especially if the widow is childless or has little children. This kind of tradition does not take the wellbeing of the deceased's family into consideration. Similarly, labelling a widow who went to sell a bunch of plantain in the local market a violator of cultural practices of widowhood is very inimical to the wellbeing of the family of the deceased. It appears to be a cultural practice that does not believe in human dignity and the wellbeing of the victim. No wonder Ihuzue (1972) has stated that widowhood is detestable and terrifying not as a result of the woman's loss of a companion, a friend, a bread-winner, a head of the family and father but on the grounds of indignity, degradation and poverty that are associated with widowhood rites.

### **RQ 5: What role does religion play in communicating cultural practices of widowhood in contemporary Akokwa?**

It seems the traditional religion of the people of Akokwa plays a very significant part in communicating cultural practices of widowhood in the community. Indeed, all the observances are based on traditional religious beliefs. Any slight modification to widowhood practices is described to be the "evil of Christianity" in the area. During the



Focus Group Discussion, the Traditional Religionists were vehemently attacking the Christian religion as the destroyer of widowhood practices.

On the other hand, observation indicates that even Christianity in the area has failed to have enough influence on the barbaric aspects of cultural practices of widowhood in the area. Churches, especially the notable ones in the area have endorsed cultural practices of widowhood. In such churches, the end of mourning with all its cultural practices is observed in a special church service. However, there have been some moves, especially by the new breed churches to disregard some inhuman cultural practices of widowhood and victimization of widows in the area. These moves are yet to record significance.

### **Conclusion**

The study has shown that there is no deliberate form of communication to keep young women prepared for possible widowhood in Akokwa. It is also very clear that the pattern of communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa is forceful, haphazard, intended to create fear in the widow and unmindful of the rights of the widow. It portrays the widow as a property of the husband's family or better, a weaker vessel that must be dictated to. The study has also shown that communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa among the deceased's family members is more pain-inducing than relief of pain. Communicating cultural practices of widowhood in Akokwa seems to be deliberately skewed against the wellbeing of the deceased's family.

The traditional religion of the people of Akokwa plays a very significant part in communicating cultural practices of widowhood in the area. Christianity seems to have failed in generating enough influence on the inhuman aspects of cultural practices of widowhood in the area. However, some new-generation churches are disregarding widowhood practices, but their efforts have not yielded significant results. All in all, the study has confirmed the position of earlier studies by other researchers on widowhood practices in Igbo culture (Yarware & Soola, 2008; Ihezue, D.A. (1972)

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made to discourage the practice of widowhood and make communication inclusive of women's sensibilities in Akokwa.

1. There should be adequate enlightenment given to young unmarried and married women on the implications and demands of widowhood in the area.
2. Churches, government agencies, None Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and youths should take it upon themselves to enlighten the people of Akokwa on the need to relax the slavish and barbaric aspects of widowhood practices in the area.
3. A widow should be encouraged by the family of the deceased husband to live her normal life after the death of her husband and exercise her rights and freedoms with dignity like every other human being.
4. Widows should speak and stand for their rights instead of giving themselves to be gagged and cowed into accepting practices that demean their dignity. They should eschew the fear that underlies threats of cultural practices of widowhood.

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**SECTION 4:**  
MEDIA, ETHICS AND  
CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS



# MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

*Toyosi Olugbenga Samson OWOLABI*



## **Introduction**

**T**he concept of multiculturalism as it relates to Nigeria and other African countries is of critical importance in the analysis of power relations, national integration and the overall development of the nation before, during and in the postcolonial era. The character of the nationalist movement which eventually lost its initial vibrancy and sense of unity of purpose to factional and divisive pressures, which were fueled and strengthened by the emergence of separatist and ethnic campaigners have their roots in the intrusion of ethnic identification and religious affiliation into African polity.

Over the years, diverse ethnic groups have been living together peacefully despite socio-cultural diversity. In Nigeria, before and immediately after independence, different ethnic groupings both major and minor have dwelled together without any suspicion and distrust. Multiculturalism started wearing a negative and aggressive posture characterized by hostility and conflict when new elements such as socio-economic, religious and political competitions, leading to fear of hegemony and unhealthy power play began to creep into

the relationship. Nigeria as a multicultural nation is characterized by diversity, heterogeneity and pluralism of cultures, orientations, ethnic origins, religious affiliation, ideological posture, patterns of thinking, communicative styles, political leaning, socio-economic development and geographical locations (Albert, 2002; Takwa, 2017).

Ideally, the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of the country ought not to constitute a challenge to a harmonious and peaceful relationship. Multiculturalism in Nigeria as exemplified during the pre-colonial era was advantageous in that each ethnic group lived and developed together without conflict and ethnic hegemony of one over the other. This corroborates the assertion that there is unity in diversity. Even during the colonial era and the early post-independence era, the multiethnic setting of the country could be perceived as beneficial, especially concerning the competitive tendencies, socio-economic development and political consciousness of each ethnic group that constitutes the nation (Owolabi and Tijani-Adenle, 2022).

Like the two sides of a coin, the multiculturalism nature of a country can become detrimental when, according to Pate and Oso (2017), diversities and competitive tendencies are poorly managed as the situation has been since 1966 when the first military coup was staged in Nigeria. The mismanagement of Nigeria's ethnic diversity has led to ethnic suspicion, hatred and outright conflict. In the present circumstance in Nigeria, the mass media are central to the power relations among the ethnic groups. The media occupy a central position in discussing political, social, economic and other governance issues, leading to the process of decision-making, opinion formation and behavioural disposition in the society. Therefore, the centrality of information to governance confers on the mass media the responsibility of determining the identity, style of operation, and contents, which are capable of manipulating the desires, actions and inactions of the reading, listening and viewing audiences (Takwa, 2017).

In the manner of a monopolistic market where the consumers are at the mercy of the marketers, "authoritative diffusion of information places the public at the beck and call of the source" as epitomized in the authoritarian and communist-soviet press theories (Mustapha, Ahmad and Abubakar 2014, p.115). Although the media system as it is in Nigeria's present democratic milieu appears to operate with a measure of objectivity that guarantees accuracy, fairness and balance, some communication scholars still believe the media are not free from bias at the individual, professional, organization and ideological levels as they gather, process and disseminate information to the public (Baran and Davis, 2010). This paper, therefore, investigates the normative and pragmatic inter-activity of the media and the power relations among the multi-ethnic components that constitute Nigeria. This will be examined given the nature of media ownership and control in Nigeria.

### **Media Ownership, Power Relations and Multiculturalism in Perspective**

Mass media are perceived as a wide variety of printed, electronic as well as new forms of communication apparatuses that are used in communicating information and exchange of ideas with the intent to engender an understanding of events in a heterogeneous society. The media are expected to serve as the custodians of common values and the protector of communal interests, as well as watch over the governance of the state to the extent that no segment or a portion of it exercises undue power over the others (McNair, 2009). Unfortunately, this role of the media in society has been significantly compromised due to the ownership structure of many media outfits.



It is noteworthy that the mass media system in any nation cannot be discussed without examining media ownership trends, which over the years, have constituted a hindrance to the media's ability to objectively carry out its statutory roles. Media ownership, according to Rauf (2003, p.49), "is the autonomy of an individual or group over a mass medium". This means an individual, individuals or group of people who own and fund a medium of mass communication can determine and influence how it is managed through the selection of staff, the welfare of staff, the commercialization of news and the editorial focus and orientation. Media ownership according to Gans (1979) cited in Adejola and Bello (2014) usually have either commercial or political interest or both at variance with the ethical principles of journalism practice. Against that background, media owners often resort to influencing directly or indirectly the editorial process and news contents of their medium to protect their various interests. In other instances, the media owners may have religious and/or ethnic affiliations that may necessitate compelling their reporters and editors to give full coverage to the group at the expense of others.

While asserting that media owners interfere with what is published or aired in the media and by extension what becomes public knowledge, Rauf (2003, p.50) classifies media ownership into four groups. These are government ownership, private ownership, corporate ownership and political party ownership. In another classification, Warren (2007) identifies seven forms of media ownership, which include international corporations, national corporations, small organisations, government, community, individual and non-profit organisations. Notwithstanding the diverse ownership forms mentioned above, media ownership in Nigeria is categorized into three: federal government-owned, state government and privately-owned media. It is important to note that by their allegiances to the idea and ideals of their owners, media are found to contribute to the mismanagement of power relations that have caused ethnic suspicion and hostilities among the constituent ethnic groups that make up the nation.

### **Power Relations**

The concept of "power" seems to be widespread, but in scholarly circles especially in the social sciences, it is a word that is highly ambiguous with more connotation than the real meaning. Power is central to politics just as money is pivotal to economics and commerce (NOUN 2013). Power is a central ingredient in both national and international politics. Power determines the relative influence of actors in the political system, as well as shapes the structure of the system itself. This explains why "politics has been described by political scientists as the struggle for power." Power is without doubt the most crucial of all concepts in the political process. The concept of power has been described in relational and material terms. The relational definition formulated by Dahl (1957, p.3) sees power as an "ability to make an individual or a group do something it would not otherwise do." The material definition sees power as "capabilities or resources, mainly military with which states can influence one another." (p.3). At the most general level, power means, the ability to get the outcome one wants. However, there are several ways to affect the behaviour of others. You can coerce them with threats; you can induce them with payments; or you can attract and co-opt them to do what you want, and you can apply violence against the other.

If politics has to do with struggling for state power, it, therefore, connotes that individuals or groups saddled with exercising power can use the power to attract favour to self and to as many as may be favourably disposed to them. Power in power relations can also be used to oppress others. This is why Qin (2018) defines power relations as relationships in which

one person has social formative power over another and is able to get the other person to do what he wishes whether by compelling obedience or in some less compulsive and even in a more subtle way.

### **Concept of Multiculturalism**

The concept of multiculturalism can be described as plurality, diversity and variety of culture, people and multiple identities, all of which manifest in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking and language. According to Takwa (2017), one of the colonial legacies bequeathed to Africa is the emergence of 54 independent countries with diverse ethnic and cultural configurations. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation with over 400 ethnic groups, about 250 languages and about 5000 dialects, 36 federating states, 3 major religions, and 18 political parties all operating based on diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political interests to protect (United Nations, 2020). A sense of ethnic affiliation and cultural variability is not inherently a threat to harmonious inter-ethnic relations as can be seen in the long-established mutual relationships among the different ethnic groups since its amalgamation in 1914 despite obvious socio-cultural differences. Multiculturalism and ethnic consciousness in Nigeria began to assume negative features shortly before her independence in 1960 (Omu, 2008). Then, political and socio-economic competition and hegemonic tendency were observed to be creeping into the relationship thus, leading to power struggles, inequalities and conflicts among the three most prominent ethnic groups: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani, which rivalry coloured the direction of the political and constitutional development of Nigeria. This configuration was needed to manage the situation if the nation will progress and its political ship will not capsize.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the social responsibility theory propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1963. The social responsibility theory which we now celebrate as the defining platform for the practice of journalism arose out of dissatisfaction with an earlier normative ideal, the libertarian theory. The commercialization of the press as a result of unanticipated technological developments in the media industry had priced the media out of the reach of common individuals and groups and concentrated it in the hands of few businessmen and political elites most of who had the resources to establish and run media empire and monopolise its usage (McQuail, (2005).

While explaining the basic principles of the theory, McQuail, (1983, p.121) cited in Anaeto *et al.*, (2008) encapsulates thus:

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 groups 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 (p.57)

Going by the above basic tenets, the media as a social institution and media workers as professionals occupy a privileged position and enjoy certain freedom which demands that they must be socially responsible to the public. In other words, social responsibility theory

expects the media to serve the 'public interests' in whichever way it is defined. To serve the 'public interest', the media are expected to maintain a high professional and ethical standard of practice through objectivity, fairness, balance and truthfulness in news coverage and reporting. However, the normative assumptions that the media serve the public and its appointed representatives as a watchdog, participate in public discourse and advocate for the common good on behalf of the public have been called to question. This is because of the media's linkage to the political and economic structure of the society, which has made them become a critical actor in the nation's power relations. Under this condition, the media are observed to be unable to impartially serve the public interest as expected.

### **Managing Power Relations in Multicultural Nigeria: Matters Arising**

Successive governments, military, pseudo-civilian and democratically elected have attempted to manage the nation's ethnic diversity by engendering national integration. This they did by wishing away socio-cultural differences and imposing unitarianism despite the obvious complex cultural diversity. Unfortunately, the more unity they sought to create, the more discord and conflicts they created (Edewor, Aluko and Folarin, 2014).

The rising ethnic divide and suspicion that evolved gave birth to the consciousness of 'tribalism,' and 'nationalism' which have become recurring issues in Nigerian politics. The post-independence regional structure, North, East, and West, that served as the political base for engendering national cohesion and integration thus gave way to the creation of twelve states by the military government that came to power after the three-year civil war between 1967 and 1970. Thereafter, there was the birth of minority ethnic agitations manifested in the creation of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Odua People's Congress (O.P.C.), and the Arewa Consultative Forum (A.C.F.). All these are later signs that Nigeria had cast off her "unity in diversity" toga and adorned herself in the garment of tribalism and ethnoreligious consciousness.

According to Danaan (2017, p. 76), in all the six geopolitical zones in which Nigeria is divided, there is no obvious distinction between the "natives" and "settlers" and between "Christians" and "Muslims" with one group attempting to monopolise privileges at the expense of others. This is despite the constitutional guarantee that every Nigerian, regardless of ethnic origin and religious affiliation is entitled to the same rights and privileges (The Constitution, 1999, section 15 (3) (b)). The South East geo-political zone, which is predominantly populated by the Igbo ethnic group has alleged the politics of exclusivity and unequal treatment against Nigeria. According to the group, it is only the south-east zone that has never produced the president of Nigeria since democratic government was restored in 1999. The south-south geo-political zones, which constitute the resource base of the country have also alleged that the north-east and north-west which contribute little to the nation's internally generated revenue (IGR) have been taking too much to themselves because they have always been at the receiving end of power play (Osimerah, & Okolo, 2017).

An attempt by the government to manage the dichotomy and lopsidedness in the sharing of state resources and power such that no part of the country (majority or minority) will be at a disadvantage explains why the government established some affirmative policies. These include the power rotation, federal character principles, quota systems, and catchment

areas established to provide opportunities for educationally disadvantaged areas to acquire education, participate in governance and attract development to each group (Joshua *et al.*, 2014). However, it has been observed that there are controversies over how these affirmative action policies are discriminatorily implemented, thus motivating mediocrity, and suspicion, and encouraging ethnic partisanship (Akinwale, 2014). Uneven treatment of citizens based on ethnicity has become a common feature of political leadership in Nigeria. Also, different measurements are used to allocate state resources and distribute opportunities among the diverse ethnic groups thus, breeding agitation and controversy among the constituent groups. These practices are particularly more prevalent in the education and employment sectors where the Southern states are believed to be advantaged over the North.

According to Ugohand Ukpere (2012), the government's efforts to resolve cases of inequalities in Nigeria and allay fears of domination through affirmative policies have been faulted on the ground that outdated data gathered about four decades ago are still being used to allocate resources, and as a means of determining access to education, infrastructure, employment, and inclusion in government, which are believed to lead to injustice and policy abuse. According to Ogwo (2022), there has been wide condemnation of the disparity that characterized the federal government's endorsement of inequality in the cut-off marks for admission into the country's 110 unity schools. For instance, candidates from Abia State were required to score 130, Anambra State -139, Delta State -131, Enugu State -134, Imo State -138, Lagos State -133, and Ogun State -131. And candidates from Kebbi State were given -2 and 20, Taraba -3 and 11, Yobe -2 and 27, and Zamfara State -4 and 2 for males and females respectively.

As a follow-up to that, the reality of ethnic and religious affiliation and consciousness has become a bargaining chip among the political class. For instance, when a presidential candidate emerges from one faith (e.g., Christianity) the running mate automatically must be selected from another faith (e.g., Islam). Also, when a presidential candidate emerges from the North, for example, the running mate naturally must come from the South. This unwritten rule is what has brought about the issue of Muslim/Christian or Christian/Muslim political controversy. At no other time has this calculation played out than in the just concluded general elections in Nigeria. Not keeping to this unwritten rule by the two leading political parties has become an underlying factor responsible for the internal rancour tearing the membership apart. This in part has also defined the outcome of the just concluded presidential elections (Anaughe, 2023). It also explains the mutual suspicions that usually characterized the interaction among people of the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria.

Although, it has been argued by some people especially the northern political leaders that religious consideration as well as zoning of power among the three levels of government are not entrenched in the 1999 constitution but an imposition of the military regime of Gen. Sanni Abacha. However, the protagonists of the policy were quick to add that, "the entire 1999 constitution was also an imposition which we have lived with though subject to serial amendment" (Vanguard, 2021). In politics, either local or international, the disproportionate distributions of power and national resources or changes to those distributions have been observed to be the fundamental causes of conflicts and unstable political systems. For instance, since after the civil war and the country's return to participatory democracy in 2009, the presidency of Nigeria has not been zoned to the



southeast of Nigeria. Each time politicians of Igbo extraction are always schemed out of the primary election by members of the ruling class.

According to ICIR's (2021) investigation, the top appointment into the country's security service by President Buhari since 2015 is lopsided in favour of officers from the northern part of the country. Figure 1 below illustrates this claim.

## Heads of Security Agencies and their State of origin

Heads of Institution/Agency	Agency	State of Origin	Region
Leo Irabor	Defence	Delta State	South
Ibrahim Attahiru	Nigerian Army	Kaduna State	North
Isiaka Oladayo Amao	Nigerian Air Force	Osun State	South
Awwal Zubairu Gambo	Nigerian Navy	Kano State	North
Usman Alkali Baba	Nigeria Police Force	Yobe State	North
Yusuf Magaji Bichi	Department of State Security	Kano State	North
Ahmed Rufai Abubakar	National Intelligence Agency	Katsina State	North
John Mrabure	Nigeria Correctional Service	Delta State	South
Muhammed Babandede	Nigeria Immigration Service	Jigawa State	North
Hameed Ibrahim Ali	Nigeria Customs Service	Bauchi State	North
Ahmed Abubakar Audi	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps	Nasarawa State	North
Boboye O Oyeyemi	Federal Road Safety Commission	Kwara State	North
Dr. Liman Alhaji Ibrahim	Federal Fire Service	Niger State	North
Abdulrasheed Bawa	EFCC	Kebbi State	North
Bolaji Owasanoye	ICPC	Ondo State	South
Buba Marwa	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency	Adamawa State	North

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Figure 1: Heads of Security Agencies and their State of Origin as of April 6, 2021.

The above table shows that Nigeria is not running an inclusive government in the last eight years. No wonder, when a security council meeting is held, apart from one or two nominal people in attendance, the entire decision makers there are all from a section of the country. This explains why Nigeria's unity is so fragile and partly this may be the reason why it has been difficult to tackle the security challenges confronting the country.

Another investigation that beamed a searchlight into Buhari's appointments into the top management of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and its subsidiaries also reveals an uneven geographical spread of senior appointments. An analysis carried out by **the ICIR** revealed that out of 40 senior management positions within the NNPC ranging from chief operating officers and managing directors of its subsidiaries to general managers' roles in the corporation, 24 are occupied by Nigerians from the North while those from the South where oil is being explored head 16.

According to Castells (2009), "power relations have always existed in every society where a social actor is to influence disproportionately the decisions of other social actors in ways that favour the empowered actors' will, interests, and values" (p.10). The social actors, in



this case, include the ruling elites, which cut across every regional, ethnic, political and religious group. Others are the media (prints and electronics) and the masses. The power struggle always occurs between the elites of each group with the media and the masses becoming hostages in the power game. It is therefore not surprising to note that the combined issues of religion, ethnicity, and corruption in government are often being used to capture and retain power. In many instances, it can be more detrimental to some and may be favourable to others.

Power relations also exist at the institutional levels, the three arms of government executive, legislative and judiciary contend for power (Salawu 2010). According to Fagbadebo and Francis (2016,), “the principle of separation of powers and the doctrines of checks and balances are two major mechanisms that define power relations among the three arms of government within the three-tier governance structure.” (p.1). These institutional control measures are meant to avert disproportionate use of power and to engender good governance. Nevertheless, it has been observed that as a result of the unequal distribution of power among the three arms, the executive power towers above the other arms thus, the implementation of checks and balances is hindered at the federal, state and local government levels. This, according to Onabajo (2014), accounts for why there is always a fierce inter-ethnic struggle for executive power among the political elites in different ethnic groups and clans that constitute Nigeria thus, also leading to a governance crisis and abuse of state power.

In the advent of any social or economic challenge in the country, citizens are often quick to blame one another rather than addressing their common problem, which is the ruling elites (Onifade, 2015). For instance, Christians blame Muslims for the Boko Haram insurgency by accusing them of attempting to Islamize Nigeria through Boko Haram. Muslims on the other hand claim that Boko Haram has killed more Muslims than Christians, therefore, they see Boko Haram as a tool of political terrorism used by the Christians to decimate the Muslim population so that the president can always be their member. While this altercation continues, the ruling elites regardless of their political leaning, ethnic affiliation and religious persuasion will continue to share state power and allocate public resources to themselves. It is an irony to witness situations when a member of the ruling class is accused of embezzlement, those who share the same ethnicity or religious belief as the accused would organise themselves to defend the corrupt acts while those from other ethnic or religious groups would continue to castigate the government official without seeking full information on the issue. Often, these scenarios have led to a series of conflicts, which the ruling class do maximise for political gains. It is therefore not surprising that “about 40% of conflicts in Nigeria are ethno-religion -based.” (Salawu, 2010, p. 345).

### **Interplay of Media Ownership and Power Relations in a Multicultural Setting**

In every multicultural society, it is common to find each ethnic group soliciting media support and to find expression to compete for equal representation in the national polity. Besides the lateral struggle for political influence among the political and economic elites in Nigeria, there are also the vertical and multi-dimensional aspects of the power struggle in the polity. This exists among some social collective actors (groups and institutions) which include; political organizations, political parties, public organizations, pressure groups, and terrorist organizations (McNair, 1995). These groups compete with one another for space in the mass media in their quests to get the attention and sympathy of the public.

The media as a 'marketplace of ideas' where all available voices are expressed must demonstrate some levels of diversity and pluralism. As the 'fourth estate of the realm', the media are expected to serve as the custodians of common values and protectors of public interest, watching over the operations of the society such that no segment exercise undue power over others (McNair, 2009). This is in line with an assumption of the Social Responsibility theory which says the media should reflect its society's plurality, by giving equal access to various points of view and granting both majority and minority groups the right to reply (McQuail, 1987).

It is noteworthy, however, that there is a growing concern about the ownership structure and influence especially when reporting power relations. Apart from government influence, media ownership in Nigeria is also skewed along ethnic, religious, political and business lines. The Nigerian mass media have mixed ownerships ranging from the Federal government, states and private individuals. While the governments fund their media and use it to project their policies and programmes to the people, the privately owned media on the other hand are funded and run as purely commercial ventures with profit motive and social responsibility to the society. According to Akpesiri and Friday (2008), privatization and commercialization removed the control of information from the government and transfer it to the business class, which incidentally portends greater danger through the private sector monopoly of information. Against this backdrop, a pertinent question is, to what extent has the media carried out its statutory role and how are the media roles perceived among the diverse ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria?

In most African countries particularly Nigeria, media ownership has continued to play an influential role in the editorial policies of media organisations, especially in government media. The government has continuously used the state-owned media to crush the voice of the opposition. Governments over the years have used these media to their advantage during presidential election campaigns across the continent, especially if the government in power is contesting. It is so bad in some media organisations that the ethics of journalism are exchanged with the opinions and decisions of the proprietors of the organization (Ali, 2015). Government-owned media in Africa have been a propaganda tool in the hands of incumbent governments to deceive the citizens about projects they have failed to accomplish after several years in power (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010).

It is noteworthy that to enjoy continuous peaceful coexistence in a multicultural and multiethnic society such as Nigeria, there must be tolerance based on understanding among the political actors. This is where the media become pertinent as an objective and impartial arbiter. This also explains why each group compete with one another for space in the mass media in their quests to get the attention and sympathy of the public.

However, Croteau and Hoynes (2001) contend that there is an uncomfortable alliance between the media owners of big media conglomerates and the members of the political class, which raises pertinent questions about the ability of the media to arbitrate impartially in the public sphere. Baran and Davis (2010) capture the media and political elites' relationships thus:

Media enable the dominant social elite to create and maintain their power. Media provide the elites with convenient, subtle, yet highly effective means of promoting worldviews favourable to their interests. Media can be viewed as a public arena in which cultural

battles are fought and a dominant or hegemonic culture is promoted (p.34).

The assertion by Baran *et al* (2010) suggests a dilution of the role of the media as an impartial arbiter in society's diverse and conflicting interests as well as its role as a watchdog of the governance system. The connection of the media with the economic and political powerhouse has cast doubt on its ability to effectively and objectively carry out its role, particularly in a multicultural society like Nigeria. Earlier, Herman and Chomsky (2002) remarked that the inability of the media to pragmatically function as an impartial mediator in the contentious public sphere can be linked to their form of ownership and orientation.

Adejola and Bello (2014) note that aside from other limiting factors, media ownership is a major factor contributing to subjectivity in media practice. To be objective, journalists require that they report events without undue interference from media proprietors or any other stakeholder. Media owners, as a result of their commercial and/or political interests that are opposed to journalistic principles, usually influence editors' news judgment such that their other interests (ethnic and religious) will be protected. It is at this point of news selection that the editor's interests usually clash with the owners. Whenever there is power play among the ethnic groups that constitute the society, each actor in the power play usually expects a certain degree of support from the media. In Nigeria, the issue of ownership influence is a frequent one in media discourse because it bears on both management and practice (Aina 2002).

Contributing further to ownership discourse, Adejola and Bello (2017) emphasize that the likelihood of journalists being objective in reporting power relations in a multicultural setting as Nigeria is significantly affected by ownership-induced issues such as "hindered press freedom, poor condition of service for journalists, gratification received from news sources, the wave of commercialization, the ethnic and religious affiliation of the owner, preservation and protection of media owners' political and economic interests." (p.109). Therefore, whether government-owned or privately owned, the ownership influence and control of the media have been a critical issue in journalism practice in general and specifically in a multicultural setting. The ownership pattern in Nigeria has been dominated by 'economics and politics' (the rich and the political elites) who are determined to deploy the media power into furthering wealth accumulation and sustenance of power hegemony. The government-owned media in particular have been classified as the ruling political party's propaganda machine.

Given the above situation, it has been observed that ethnocentrism backed by the media without objectivity breeds mutual suspicion and erodes mutual understanding and cooperation that are required to foster national integration, unity and national development among the constituent groups. The outcome is that when a constituent group in a country is supported by the media to protect and strengthen ethnic agenda at the expense of other groups, they deny the country the opportunity to develop at its optimal capacity (Abdulkadir, 2011, p. 2). No doubt, objectivity is a critical and fundamental canon of journalism but media ownership and power relations have turned to a ruse in a multicultural setting intermingled with politics and religion.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has discussed some conceptual and theoretical issues which underpinned the concerns and the issues concerning the interplay of media ownership and power play in a multicultural setting such as Nigeria. A critical study of the future of media ownership vis-a-vis power play in a multicultural nation such as Nigeria and the controversies around it makes it easy for communication scholars to assert that it is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored.

The study assumes that the interplay of media ownership with a power play in a multicultural setting has become a major complication in the course of media effective arbitration to engender unity and progress. The ethnic diversity in the configuration of the Nigerian society which ought to be a unique selling point for the nation to attain its potential has become a burden as each tribal and religious group wants to dominate and enjoy the commonwealth of the country at the expense of others.

This study has also discovered that the media in Nigeria are not only biased but their performance has been overwhelmed by political, economic and profit motives of their owners. It is, therefore, not surprising to note that professionalism, ethics, national patriotism and unity of purpose that used to be the canon of the Nigerian press before independence had given way to ethnoreligious and proprietorial parochial interests. Although the successive governments have tried to manage the ethnoreligious and political plurality of the country, they have failed to achieve the desired goal of national cohesion and development because the government applied interventionist policies such as federal character, catchment area and quota systems and rotational principles most times, were disproportionately implemented to favour certain group at the expense of others.

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# MEDIA ETHICS AND POWER IN MULTICULTURAL NIGERIA

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## **Introduction**

In Africa, the evolution of the media is marked by developments and contradictions. At stake often are rights, freedoms, and responsibilities. The 1999 constitution has provided a prism for interrogating the mix of these elements, in a way that provides perspective on the media as moderators and transmitters, and as the Fourth Estate of the Realm. How well the media are functioning, is a subject of contestation, with variable assessments, ranging from acknowledgements of the media's centrality to development processes right from the colony, to questions about what may be the progressive erosion of the capacities and relevance of the media, due to debilitating dysfunctionalities (Owens-Ibie in Aondover *et al.*, 2021).

At the heart of the debate is ethics, which is as universal as it is local in the application, with Codes at the core of the professionalism undergirding journalism practice. Ethical problems are peculiar to the practice of journalism in Nigeria as well as the enforcement of sanctions against journalists who have breached the Code. A symbiosis is implicit or

assumed in the relationship between law and ethics. Law, therefore, is supposed to strengthen the frames for the ethical anchor of media operations and practice, and Nigeria in particular has laws specifically targeted at the media and its practitioners.

From the colonial to postcolonial administrations, the law has provided a credible platform for a justice system from which the media have benefited, either through express provisions in specific Acts or through rulings by courts of law that have aligned with expectations. Section 2 of the 1999 Constitution - on Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, assigns to the media the responsibility of holding the government accountable to its primary mandate of good governance. The flip side has been suggestions of the subversion of the same legal space for questionable and duplicitous interpretations or implied manipulation (Owens-Ibie in Aondover *et al.*, 2021).

When this is juxtaposed with ethical space, the prospects are dampened. This is why this paper is interrogating ethics and power in multicultural Nigeria. At the level of the media as an institution, issues of the future remain critical. The potency of media influence on the masses when effectively managed is fundamental for the collective coexistence of people in the society. This belief was further reinforced by what happened in Europe before and during the 2nd World War. Thus, the paper argued that the media and the journalistic practice do not exist in isolation or a social vacuum but their existence and operations are informed by certain values or normative assumptions, which need to be taken into cognizance.

As noted by Pate and Oso (2017) Nigeria is a multicultural nation of diverse people, multiple identities, and colourful outlooks. It has a population of 200+ Million people, 400+ ethnic groups, two major religions, dozens of political parties, 36 federating states, and additional complex platforms of diversities. The Nigerian multicultural setting is characterised by diversity, heterogeneity, and pluralism in the cultures, orientations, and attitudes of the people. In other words, it connotes diversity as a fact of life on the grounds of sex, cultural practice, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, ideological stance, political leaning, level of social development, place of habitation, and so on (Pate & Oso, 2017). Nigeria's diversity has both its strength and weakness. Of recent, the negative side of its diversity and pluralism seems to have outweighed the positive side. However, the mass media actively reflect both the strength and the weaknesses.

In this digital era, new media sometimes undermine the hierarchical control of social knowledge by bypassing established mediating agencies and distributing prohibited or restricted information. At other times, new media were incorporated within the system of power, and their potential for disturbing established flows of influence was contained. Within this context, the paper examined the media in a heterogeneous Nigerian society. Based on the lacuna in the literature, this paper discusses some of the conceptual and theoretical issues, which have underpinned the concerned objectives of media and power in multicultural Nigeria, the dangers and consequences of unethical behaviour in multicultural Nigeria, and ethical issues in Nigerian media and how it affects national development.

### **Ethics and Media Influence in Context**

Ethics is a frame for moral conduct and socially approved behaviour as well as conduct that is socially correct based on the core values that are often cherished and upheld by society.

Communication scholars Like Mojaye and Aondover (2022) are of the view that ethics is central to academic and journalistic practice or engagements. Ethics are deeply rooted in the Constitutional and the various regulatory codes in Nigeria. The national ethic is derived from our religions, individual cultures, and social etiquette (Veronese, *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, our cultures and traditions have prescriptive codes on personal and social values as well as standard rules of engagement in relationships. Thus, issues around the unethical conduct of some journalists may not be due to the absence of background or foundational training in standard ethical practices. Rather it may represent deviance from the norm.

Media ethics offers a most interesting, and comprehensive account of a strong correlation between positive values and correct attitudinal disposition in journalistic practice in Nigeria. This paper focuses on the contemporary role of the media in gathering, processing, and the delivery of information. Ethics in the media generally mediates the space between maintaining the status quo and the struggle for freedom of speech and expression. While the power elites would always want to maintain the status quo, there is also a conflict of interest between proprietors or investors and media professionals. The former tend to support government officials for pecuniary issues and professional journalists are usually swayed by the need to protect public interest. Media ethics in journalism is therefore fundamental to both individuals and society. Journalists must report accurately to serve as the conscience of the nation.

This assertion forms the basis for the call to the practice of ethical journalism. Unfortunately, some media houses could engage in the distortion or omission of the truth (Deuze, 2005). For this reason, journalism hardly enjoys public confidence in what journalists do or fail to do. Thus, journalism ethics is developed with a focus on professional ethics and the values, guiding principles, and codes of the journalism profession. The advent of larger mass media organizations and news cycles that have shrunk from days to hours or minutes have fueled interest in the reexamination of the ethical standards of journalism practice. This is evident in many countries in the world including Nigeria. Communication scholars like Wyatt (2014) and Takwa (2017) have lamented about the practice of journalism in Nigeria, especially the application of journalists' code of ethics in news gathering and presentation.

Pate (2018) remarks that efforts have been made to reduce negative values and institutionalize ethics in our individual and national lives. Above all, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution has recognised the place and role of ethics in our national life. However, Takwa (2017) maintained that there is a lack of proper application of such ethics in the process of gathering, processing, and disseminating news. This is dangerous to the profession as such contradictions end up fueling many crises, which posed a great danger to the security of a nation.

Arguably, the power of the media is to hold the government accountable to the people leading to the powerful effect theory of the media (paradigm), which arose after the First World War. Combatants during the war mobilised the mass media in prosecuting the war. The results, according to McQuail (2010), seemed to leave little doubt about the potency of media influence on the masses: when effectively managed and directed. The belief was further reinforced by what happened in Europe before and during the 2nd World War. By the middle of the 20th century, the potency of the mass media as instruments of



propaganda and mass persuasion and for shaping opinions and influencing behaviour, both at the national and international levels, was already well established (Oso, 2018) From this period, the idea that the media, public relations, and propaganda, can be used to 'manufacture consent' was born and has been growing. Towards this effort, many techniques and strategies have been devised to influence perception, popular thinking, and behaviour. Lasswell (1948) who was a prominent figure in communication studies produced his work detailing techniques of propaganda based on his experience during the war. Many news and information management techniques have been deployed, all in an attempt to influence and manipulate news coverage. Film and entertainment have been produced as tools of advocacy, opinion, attitude, and behaviour change. It is not in doubt that the mass media can influence their audiences. These assumptions started with the powerful effect paradigm which extends from the turn of the century, until the 1930s (McQuail, 2010).

The conception of the media audience before 1930 was based on fear of the deleterious effect of the mass media on a weak, rootless, isolated, atomistic, and passive mass of people. The mass media were assumed to be very powerful in influencing the behaviour of such vulnerable individuals. This image of the audience is of course based on the mass society theory, which argues that with industrialization and subsequent social changes, people have become isolated and alienated. The media were regarded to influence individuals who come in contact with media messages. The minds of such individuals are so open and empty that they were ready to accept any message that hit them. The media message is like a bullet (Oso, 2018).

Despite the tendency to appreciate the power of the media to influence public opinion and behaviour, scholars like McQuail, (2010) and Otegunrin (2022) have revised their position. McQuail dates this revision to the 1960s when social science scholarship began to focus on Mass Communication, particularly in the United States. Klapper's in Otegunrin (2022) influential statement to the effect that "mass communication does not ordinarily serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effect, but rather functions through nexus of mediating factors. Klapper in Otegunrin (2022) set the stage for the reformulation of the paradigm. The point is that it was not that the media were impotent or had no effect, but that the media operate within the pre-existing structure of social relationships and in a given social and cultural context (Oso, 2018). It was argued that these factors took primacy in shaping media choice, attention, and response on the part of the audience. Latter revision has also moved from looking for immediate and direct effects towards long-term cognitive change towards what people learn from the media, effects on climate of opinion, definitions of social reality, and ideology (Aondover *et al.*, 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Within the conceptual context, Deontological and Teleological theories of ethics serve the goal of the paper. The theories provide an explanatory model to explain the issues of power and cultural heterogeneity and how the power and cultural heterogeneity affect ethics in journalistic practice. Deontological ethics is non-consequential, which considered what is wrong as wrong and what is right as right while Teleological ethics is concerned with the outcome of an action than the action itself. As observed by Littlejohn and Foss (2009) the tenets of Deontological and Teleological ethics are fundamental to journalism practice.

As such, *deontological ethics* is a branch of ethics that is absolutist. The theory is derived from the works of the German Philosopher Immanuel Kant based on the assumption of ethical judges of actions devoid of what their consequences are (McNaughton & Rawling n.d.). Deontological ethics is not on virtues, outcomes, or emotions but on duties and obligations. Here, what is right is right and what is wrong is wrong. Hence, adherents have it as a moral duty to stand by the truth.

Therefore, journalists who are inclined to this ethical school of thought have no reason whatsoever to “play soft”. Coinages like public interest, national interest, national security, etc., have no space in deontological ethics, thereby rendering them to serious criticism. Opponents are of the view that journalism exists to make and not to mar society. Hence, any journalistic practice that is capable of tearing society apart is not worth the salt of good journalism. No wonder, their maxims: “*Let justice be done though the heavens fall!*” This is how far a deontologist can go in sticking to the truth. As such, a deontological journalist is ever prepared to call a spade by its name. Therefore, the theory is relevant to this paper as journalists like Rufai Oseni and Reuben Abati of *Arise TV* subscribe to the postulations of this theory based on their journalistic engagement.

On the other hand, *teleological ethics* also referred to as consequential ethics accords about the outcome of action than the action itself. This school of thought believes action is based on the likely consequence. The tenet of this ethical perspective is that people are ethically bound to do what is best for most people. Hence, actions are good when they promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. In this context, no moral act or rule is intrinsically right or wrong. Rather, the rightness or wrongness of an act or rule is a matter of the overall non-moral good produced in the consequences of doing that act (Moreland, 2009). For example, actions such as murder, enslaving others, punishing innocent persons, etc. can be justified if, at all, their consequences are perceived to be good (Otekunrin, 2022). This earned the doctrine criticism, as it allows individuals to hide and perpetrate evils in society because of the consequences.

A journalist operating within the realm of this ethical perspective has the latitude of freedom to make moral decisions. At this level, several stories can be “killed” or reported, depending on their perceived consequences on the masses. Peace journalism for example can be situated within this framework of journalistic practices, such as advocacy journalism, development journalism, etc. to foster development even if it means tampering with the core values of journalism, such as objectivity and accuracy. More so, most repressive press laws can be justified in this context as far as national interest, state security and public good are concerned.

A journalist who subscribed to this ethical position, therefore, can determine his action in any given situation based on how he feels. Generally, such an action will benefit humanity. It is on this premise that Nigerians can truly appreciate the role of Ahmed Salkida and Barrister Aisha Wakili in mediating between the dreaded *Boko Haram* insurgency and the rest of the society, a role that earned them the wrath of security agencies in the country.

## **Methodology**

This paper is exploratory and relied on relevant literature such as journals, historical documents, official publications and records on media ethics and power in multicultural Nigeria for its analysis. The selected documents were content analysed and data gathered

were categorized into thematic areas for analysis and interpretation.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The findings are discussed under the thematic areas that were collated from the materials researched to reflect the ethical and power relations issues.

### **Media and Power in Multicultural Nigeria**

Mass communications are generally discussed as if they were exclusively modern phenomena. Indeed, this assumption is embodied in most social scientific definitions of the mass media. According to McQuail (2010), mass communications comprise the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous, and widely dispersed audiences. Only modern technology, it is widely assumed, has made possible the transmission of communications to mass audiences. Curran (2000) would have us believe that in the pre-industrial period, the communication system was restricted to direct face-to-face communication between individuals. A variety of signifying forms apart from face-to-face interaction buildings, pictures, statues, coins, banners, stained glass, songs, medallions, and rituals of all kinds was deployed in pre-industrial societies to express sometimes highly complex ideas. At times, these signifying forms reached vast audiences. For instance, the proportion of the adult population in Europe regularly attending mass during the central Middle Ages was almost certainly higher than the proportion of adults in Europe now regularly reading a newspaper (McQuail, 2010).

Since the rituals of religious worship were laid down in set liturgies, the papal curia exercised much more centralized control over the symbolic content mediated through public worship. In the central Middle Ages, the controllers are the highly concentrated and monopolistic press of contemporary Europe. Centralized control over mass communications is thus scarcely new. A historical comparison with older communication forms including communications reaching small elites as well as mass audiences is thrown into sharp relief of the impact of communication. The paper argues that new media gave rise to new centres of power, which increased tensions within the prevailing structure of authority.

Within this context, diversity connotes multiculturalism, plurality, and variety. Naturally, these complex diversities would have positive as well as negative consequences on the social milieu of the people. Positively, these diversities form the basis of unity in the nation. Negatively, competitive tendencies and poor management of diversity issues have resulted in explosions that had violently rocked the basis of the country. But these should not be unexpected in a complex Nigeria where the points of shocks are manifold and widespread. In the mix, there are flashpoints of shocks produced by differentiation in the expectations and behaviours of individuals and groups. In all these, the media and other means of information dissemination and exchange occupy a central position in the process of decision-making, opinion formation, and behaviour manifestation (Pate, 2018).

Multiculturalism as understood in this paper is the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes ethnic, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles. However, almost every society is dynamic and ever-evolving, and therefore, is faced with the challenge of appreciating the diverse components of the various cultural

entities that exist in a single entity or country. One of the legacies of colonialism in Africa is that many countries emerged, with Africa currently lodging 54 independent countries (Takwa, 2017). This instantly created a challenge of how to manage the different diverse cultures that were bundled into countries.

In these countries, there are hundreds of ethnic nationalities and a mosaic of cultures that coexist, albeit with long-standing differences, some as old as the history of the various ethnic nationalities deep into the pre-colonial and colonial periods, and some that emerged during the post-independent era. In fact, in most cases, the post-dependence governance in Africa has been so enmeshed in crises that Zartman in Takwa (2017) believes that effective governance lies in how best leaders are capable of managing the competing interest of various groups.

The issues at stake, therefore, revolve around these critical dilemmas: how multiculturalism can be managed to constitute an asset, rather than a burden to national integration and development; and what would be the role of media and reporters in this onerous task of nation-building. What lessons from around the world can a multicultural and diverse country such as Nigeria imbibe to promote a spirit of cohesion and unity, even in the face of a fast-transforming multicultural landscape, and what could be the role of the media?

### **Interrogating the Dangers and Consequences of Unethical Behaviour**

Unethical conduct, immorality, or negative values are devoid of ethical benchmarks. They are dangerous social evils that bridge unethical practices. They can be damaging to society, to the extent of leading to a failed state. The inappropriate behaviour has serious economic implications. In Nigeria today, the cost of corruption is incalculable. Huge sums are stolen, diverted, or wasted based on not being conscientious. Each day, billions of Naira are lost through time wastage, squabbles, naked stealing, and many other acts of indiscipline. Good governance is undermined and democracy is weakened when a system is robbed of trust. The perception and reputation of the country get spoiled as people can see in several international reports like the ones from Transparency International and others (Pate, 2018).

Apart from direct wastage of money, there is wastage in the form of opportunity cost to the nation and society. Indiscipline is recognized as one of the main causes of poverty and underdevelopment in a community (Pate, 2018). Governments of developing nations embark on reform measures to attack poverty. In this direction, the war against poverty cannot be won with endemic corruption and indiscipline. An evil like the disregard for correctness hinders the efficient use of economic resources for national development. Equally, unethical behaviours result in societal intolerance, disdain for alternative opinions, and hatred for individuals and cultures. For instance, ethnoreligious killings and the intolerance exhibited by different groups are an indication of failure to abide by correct religious teachings, deficient sense of social justice, and partisan journalistic engagement.

Unethical conduct among journalists could be for good governance, public trust and social cohesion among the nationalities. Elsewhere, an ethically indicated person is very unlikely to rise to a position of trust and leadership. However, in Nigeria, the story is not similar. This is not good for the collective reputation as members of the global community. When a country becomes notorious for indiscipline, corruption, and crookedness, nothing will ever

be believed from that country. Such a country loses international credibility. Its documents, including certificates, receipts, and news reports, will not be believed. Similarly, unethical behaviour in Nigeria today is backed by corruption and corrupt people in every sector. Nearly 98 million Nigerians live in extreme poverty making the country the world's capital of poverty, and this often reinforces anger in the minds of people with crime impendent (Aondover *et al.*, 2021).

Pate (2018) remarks that media professionals wherever they may be in Nigeria need to have a clearly defined framework that can guide them in approaching and handling issues of national ethics and development. Ethics must be fully understood, starting from individual organisations through the local government up to the federal stage. This means that media professionals must be well educated about their organisations, communities, and challenges in the country for them to be able to advocate and discuss convincingly ethics at the various levels. In other words, apart from knowing their professional responsibilities and organizational commitments, they need to have a sufficient understanding of the Nigeria nation, the attitudes of its citizens, its geography, history, sociological and anthropological setups, and other basic information that can foster the spirit of empathy and inclusion in the process of national development.

The deficiency of such knowledge explains why even arguments on general issues of governance are easily and arrogantly localized into ethnic or religious dimensions with the attendant consequence of dividing the people and causing confusion. Therefore, it is important for individuals, and media professionals to have the direction to support the process of national development in the way they handle situations. Based on correct knowledge and conviction, the journalism profession can easily provide a strong sense of direction and real determination to facilitate the development of their communities and country to greatness based on ethical reasoning and behaviour.

In addition, each journalist should be able to encourage his/her organization to operate on strict ethical standards and focus on programmes and policies that advance cohesion and development. The media should promote ethically oriented interactions among the diverse people of the country to help reduce the level of misconceptions about people's identity and existence in a country. The more people interact with one another, the more educated they become about others and other cultures and the better for national cohesion and integration.

### **Media Ethics and National Development: Issues and Perspectives**

Since ethical issues are supposed to be enforced personally by the individual or media practitioners, it becomes a bit easy for personnel to go against professional ethics in one way or the other. More so, the fact that ethical issues are not necessarily liable under the law like legal issues, journalists tend to violate the ethics of the profession either for individual interest, religious or ethnic interest. Adherence to professional media ethics started becoming a problem right from the inception of the profession itself. According to Agbaje (1992, p. 42), "practitioners included the commercially frustrated local elites driven out of business by unfair competition from European monopolists, the unemployed, those sacked from jobs in ailing European firms, dropouts from other professions" constituted the staff of Nigerian journalism during the colonial and shortly after the colonial period. Therefore, the forerunners of the journalism profession, apart from the fact that they lacked the basic educational prerequisites, did not know or even see the job as a profession. Early



practitioners went into the profession either to make ends meet or to obtain a meal ticket. According to Burra and Ibrahim (2016), this perception continued even after independence in 1960.

Despite the inchoate challenges that confronted journalism during and immediately after colonialism, modern-day media practitioners are to follow or adhere to the ethical standards of objectivity, neutrality, impartiality, and most importantly non-acceptance of gratification. Journalists are to balance stories and report them objectively without any form of ethnic, religious, or personal sentiments no matter who is involved in the event. The importance of objective media reportage is underscored by the fact that policymakers often lean toward making sound decisions on public policy. Objective reportage also helps the security echelon to frame security policies that help in containing developments that pose a threat to national security. Therefore, media practitioners are to remain highly professional and reject any form of gratification because this may affect the objectivity of their reportage. The media are not to give a favourable report to certain stories because it affects a certain group of people nor are they supposed to be culpable in killing important stories because it does not affect a certain area.

According to Oyeyinka (2013), media ownership in the African context especially in Nigeria is a mixture of both private and government ownership. Their influences on the activities of the media are unarguably profound because he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Ownership and control influence could disallow media practitioners to be objective and fearless in their reporting. Dan-Agbese (1995) contends that no publication, no matter how independent it may claim to be, can escape servicing certain stakes either knowingly or unknowingly. This interest may be commercial, political, communal, tribal, or even religious. The consequence is that the dissemination of news could evoke witting and unwitting interest articulation.

While appreciating the impact of the Nigerian media on the emancipation of the people from the iron grip of the colonialists, the media is portrayed as societal agents of dissemination of information by which people shape their opinions and ideals, and are expected to operate within the purview of its ethical code; have been criticized for falling below societal expectations which Adeyemi (2013) termed the seven deadly sins of the media.

Corruption in the media circle in Nigeria is manifest in the “brown envelope” syndrome among media practitioners. Generally, the brown envelope is a monetary bribe handed out to a person to put pressure to do what the bribe giver wants. It is any form of gratification a journalist receives to cover an event, which may influence the judgment of a journalist. The event may be a press conference, an interview of any sort, a workshop, or an impromptu or organized briefing. The coinage “brown envelope” evokes the idea of criminality in the mind of right-thinking persons (Adeyemi, 2013). This nomenclature is regarded because it is derived from the underworld business of wrapping wares in business envelopes (Oyeyinka, 2013). According to Obianigwe (2009), the term “brown envelope” is also used in some African and Asian countries. The broad term that perfectly covers the practice is “envelope journalism” which referred to red envelope journalism, white envelope journalism, etcetera (Obianigwe, 2009). More recently, however, the term “ATM journalism” is becoming popular in society and the term indicates the change to electronic transfer of bribes into journalists' bank accounts.

A study conducted by Adeyemi (2013), shows that media organizations in Nigeria cannot be absolved from blame regarding corruption in the media because some of them do not treat staff welfare with the seriousness it deserves. In a situation where staff is paid miserable salaries that do not come regularly, this sort of situation keeps journalists under constant financial pressure. Thus, media organizations do not frown at various forms of corrupt practices in the media, which contributes to underdevelopment in Nigeria.

The Nigerian press according to Chikaire (2016) is polarized along regional, sectarian or ethnic lines with every side protecting and supporting their kith and kin. He goes on to say that in the coverage of conflict, there is recklessness and partisanship on the part of the press instead of restraint and responsible reporting of events. Ganiyu (2009) also noted that the Nigerian press has not played any vital role in resolving politically-motivated conflicts because journalists are either on one side of the conflict or the other. According to Sobowale (1995), the audience of the media also influences what the media covers. The state of literature discovered that there is no difference in the number of news carried out by both government and private newspapers, but the former hardly publish news that will tarnish the image of the government. This can also be applied to conflict situations like Niger Delta and Boko Haram. Ugbojah (1980) also buttressed the fact that geographical location is the most paramount factor in moulding a newspaper's opinion and reportage, especially in Nigeria. The media only focused on casualties. Miwa (1999) also argues that if geographical expression and speculations affect a newspaper's position even on volatile national issues such as ethnic and religious strife, then their roles become suspicious.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper discussed some of the conceptual and theoretical issues which have underpinned the concerns and the discussion of media ethics and power in multicultural Nigeria. The general assumption is that the media and journalistic practices do not exist in isolation or a social vacuum but in the context of the limitations of the social structure. These values and assumptions in one way or the other form the basis of society's expectations of the media. The media permeate everyday experiences hence their power to structure a sense of social reality. There is a consensus in the existing literature on the power of the media to influence the perception, public opinion, and actions of government, groups, and individuals (Oso, 2018). The controversy is how to understand and explain the effect of this power on people. Therefore, when journalists and media organisations consider journalism ethics in their reportage, the result is ethical journalism. Ethical journalism is thinking journalism. It provides fair, accurate, informed, and reflective coverage of events and issues that are important to people and society. Within this context, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be prompt payment of salaries and good working conditions for journalists, retraining and capacity building and strengthening of ethical rules.
2. Enforcement of punitive actions against erring journalists for deterrent purposes, qualification of journalists, and government resolve to allow the media to function without being encumbered.

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# MEDIA AND POWER RELATIONS IN THE AWARENESS AND COMPLIANCE TO IPOB'S "SIT-AT-HOME ORDER" IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

*Theophilus OKO, Samuel Ifeanyi EZEMA*



## **Introduction**

**T**he essence of any communication is the achievement of the communicator's intended effect on the receiver no matter who the message is targeted at. The goal is to influence the audience to behave in a particular manner or believe in a specific course intended by the communicator. Roberts (1977 p. 349) succinctly states that the purpose of mass communication is the "structuring of a situation for someone else, of influencing him to act, or believe, or feel in a certain way." Thus, communication is said to have some measure of effect on the audience to the extent that the message elicits a noticeable response from the receivers.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) had in recent times, communicated sit-at-home messages to the people of South-Eastern Nigeria through Radio Biafra. It is believed that such messages are part of the group's strategies to prosecute its agenda for self-determination. The group's sit-at-home order entered a new phase when it was announced that it was going to be observed every Monday starting from August 9, 2021. Given that the



South-Eastern people are known for their merchandise and entrepreneurship; and appreciate the fact that not all indigenes of the South-East had access to Radio Biafra's message or understood the English Language, the level of compliance recorded on Monday, August 9, 2021, was amazing. IPOB's messages to the South-Eastern people are usually relayed in the English Language which is not the language of the people to whom the messages are targeted. Again, not all the educated residents accessed the group's message from the media. Consequently, the researchers' interest was aroused. It presented a condition necessary for a study on communication effects.

The object was to utilize the order by the group and its concomitant compliance by the people to re-evaluate two archaic, albeit, extant, communication theories, namely, the Hypodermic Needle and the Klapper's Phenomenistic theories of mass communication.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Communication indeed has effects in one way or another on audiences who have been exposed to such media messages. Where media scholars differed significantly is on the level of effects the media have on the audience. Some scholars have demonstrated that the effects of mass media contents or messages are enormous (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984; Combs, 1985; Noelle-Neumann, 1973). Some other scholars have proved that the mass media have minimal, if not no effects, on the audience who are exposed to them (Hovland, Lumsdaine & Sheffield, 1949; Klapper, 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968).

Apparently, in support of the latter school of thought, Severin and Tankard (1992) categorically stated that the powerful effect theory has been discarded by mass communication researchers. In the communication milieu, this seems to be the dominant and seemingly unassailable view.

The IPOB's sit-at-home order and its consequent compliance presented a good research condition for interrogating the postulations of powerful and minimal effects schools of thought on communication effects. Therefore, the study utilized the IPOB's media messages on sit-at-home and its effects on the people of the South-East to determine why South-Eastern Nigerians were swayed by IPOB's media propaganda.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the extent to which South-Eastern Nigerians attach credibility to IPOB's messages on sit-at-home.
- ii. Determine the sources through which South-Eastern Nigerians received IPOB's sit-at-home messages.
- iii. Evaluate the level to which South-Eastern Nigerians complied with IPOB's sit-at-home messages.
- iv. Investigate the factors that influenced South-Eastern Nigerians' decision to comply with IPOB's sit-at-home messages.

### **Communication and Media Effects**

Communication effects are the notion that mass media messages have effects on members of society who are exposed to such media. Early communication theorists who are proponents of behaviourism considered the mass media as providing external stimuli

that trigger immediate responses from the audience (Baran & Davis, 2009). Typical of any scientific experimentation, research into the effects of communication on the audience must comply with certain acceptable and clear procedures. Wright (1959) opines that any evaluation of the impact of mass media must take into cognizance the overall complex social relationships within which the audience members function before, during and after their exposure to the medium.

Given the successful use of the media by propagandists and demagogues in the World War I era, some people were convinced that "the media could be immensely powerful" (McQuail, 2010, p. 456). It is perhaps the potency of the mass media for propaganda exploited during the First World War that prompted Baran and Davis (2009, p. 80) to define the Magic Bullet Theory of mass communication as "the idea that propaganda can be powerful enough to penetrate most people's defences and condition them to act in ways useful to the propagandist."

Furthermore, Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach and Grube (1984) indicated that after being exposed to a single half-hour television programme, a significant number of American television viewers stated that their attitudes, ranking of basic values and willingness to engage in political behaviour changed. In a more recent study, Nwokeafor (2015) found out that during the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, mass media messages influenced 60% of respondents in their decision to vote for either Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) or All Progressives Congress (APC). It also revealed that 25% of the respondents also indicated that media messages influenced them to a lesser extent whereas 15% opined that media messages did not influence their voting decisions.

Nwafor and Onwubere (2019) made additional input to the studies on the influence of the mass media. Their study ascertained that communication from Radio Biafra, an IPOB radio station, induces sympathy and enthusiasm for Biafra's cause among the Ibo people. Edogoh and Ezeh (2016) revealed that advertising campaigns had a positive influence on voters in Anambra State as they influenced up to 292 (73%) respondents. The findings indicated that the campaign made the respondents take great interest in the advertised candidate and the party.

However, there emerged a new set of communication scholars who did not concur with the postulations that the media have an exceeding influence on the decisions of people. This group not only expressed reservations about powerful effect theories but also proved, through a plethora of studies, that such effects were rather minimal. Hoveland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949) in their studies which used films as stimulus material illustrated that films were "effective in presenting factual information materially improving men's knowledge of events concerning the air war over Britain" (p.53), but noted that "appreciable effects on the ultimate target of the orientation programme increasing soldiers' motivation." (p.54) was minimal if not zero as it failed to influence soldiers' attitude motivation.

In a longitudinal panel research by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1968), findings showed that the mass media played an inconsiderable role in respondents' election decisions compared with personal and interpersonal influences (Severin & Tankard, 1992). An earlier study, (Katz, 1957, p. 63) found out that (1) the voters who decided late in the campaign or changed their minds during the campaign are more likely than others to cite personal influence as having figured in the decisions. (2) Opinion leaders at every

social level have the same reasoning as the people they intend to influence, and (3) opinion leaders were found to be more exposed to the mass media than people who were not designated opinion leaders.

Similarly, Klapper (1963, p. 70) asserted that the influence of mass communication is mediated by such factors as “predispositions; selective processes, group membership and the like... and these factors usually render mass communication an agent of reinforcement.” The scholar expounded that before and during exposure to any mass media messages; the audience members already have their predispositions. In addition to such predisposition, members also indulge in selective attention (exposure), perception (interpretation) and retention of mass media messages. Furthermore, as a social being, each audience member belongs to a group and imbibes the norms of the groups to which they belong. Finally, he or she is likely to be under certain interpersonal influences. A confluence of all these factors goes a long way in affecting the influence of mass communication on the audience which ultimately makes mass media reinforcement rather than a change agent.

Nonetheless, Klapper did not outrightly foreclose the possibility of the mass media causing a change in opinion or attitude in the audience. He emphasized that “it occurs when the audience member is predisposed toward change,” (p. 69). He, therefore, reiterated that “the social effect of mass communication depends primarily on how the society-in-particularly such institutions as the family, schools and churches-fashion out the audience members who mass communication serves” (p. 75). The position of Klapper was corroborated by Pool (1963) who submitted that the main effect of mass media in an election is to draw people's attention to the election. Once people's interests are aroused by the mass media, “their decision in the short run is more highly influenced by personal stimuli than by the mass media” (p. 134). At this level, personal influence by family, friends, and neighbours is the key factor that can bring about change in voting decisions.

Pool (1963) argued that the mass media are incapable of causing a change in voting behaviour, rather such media messages result in reinforcement of already-held opinions. This, according to him is because voters expose themselves to media content that favours the candidates they already support. This lends credence to Klapper's stance on the factors of predisposition and selective process alluded to above. Owuamalam and Obi (2020) in their study found that there is no significant relationship between political information provided by the media and voters' interest to vote in the election (p.29). The findings revealed that a greater majority of the respondents (98 or 29.7%) indicated that the received political information from the mass media did not influence them to vote.

It is discerning from the relevant studies on communication effects that have been reviewed that a preponderance of studies aligned with minimal or no effect school of thought to the detriment of powerful effect models. Does it suggest that the powerful effect models have been eclipsed? If the answer is yes, then Severin and Tankard's prediction should be appreciated. They observed that as communication research advances, “some of the theories on effects of mass communication will not survive the test of empirical research and will be winnowed out while others survive” (Severin and Tankard, 1992, p. 265). Can we safely include powerful effect models among those to be discarded? Not yet. It will be unhealthy for knowledge and scholarship to reach such an arbitrary conclusion. Situations in the present society can compel one to revisit and make certain knowledge

which could otherwise be deemed anachronistic relevant.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The two theoretical frameworks that underpin this work are the Hypodermic Needle and the Phenomenistic theories of mass communication.

#### **The Hypodermic Needle theory**

The name that is given to this theory depends on the convenience of the scholar. Therefore, the nomenclature of this theory changes as scholars that explained them vary. It is "Hypodermic or Bullet theory" (Bittner, 1989); "Hypodermic Needle theory or Transmission Belt theory" (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982); "StimulusResponse theory" (Lasswell, 1927); "Hypodermic Needle theory" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009) and "Magic Bullet Theory" (Wilson, 1993).

The theory emanated from the works of behavioural scientists known as the behaviourist notions (Baran & Davis, 2009 p.80). It "suggests the direct and uniform influence of the mass media on an audience by shooting or injecting it with appropriate messages directed to trigger a desired response" (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 1990, p. 344).

Bittner (1989) observed that the theory was premised on two basic assumptions which were (i) that people receive information directly from the mass media and not through an intermediary; and (ii) that reaction is individual, not based on how other people might influence them.

Essentially, the proponents of the theory are convinced that the mass media is powerful and that the media audience is defenceless. It is on the notion of defenselessness or susceptibility of media audiences that up till this day, advertising messages and public information campaigns are used to persuade, influence or mobilize members of the public through the mass media. IPOB's message on sit-at-home targeted at South-Eastern Nigerians could be seen in that light.

#### **The Phenomenistic Theory**

Joseph Klapper propounded the theory in 1960. The theory states that the mass media do not have a direct effect on their audience and that the media are powerless or ineffective in influencing the media audience as the power to effect changes in the people is attributed to certain social and psychological variables.

Klapper (1960, p 8) synthesised the tenets of the theory in these five points:

1. Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects but rather, functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences.
2. These mediating factors are such that they typically render mass communication a contributing agent, but not the sole cause in the process of reinforcing the existing conditions.
3. On those occasions that mass communication does function to cause change, one of two conditions is/are likely to exist:
  - a. The mediating factors will be found to be inoperative and the effect of the media will be found to be direct:- and
  - b. The mediating factors, which normally favour reinforcement, will be found to be

themselves impelling toward change.

4. These are certain residual situations in which mass communication seems to produce direct effects, or directly, and of itself to serve certain psychophysical functions.
5. The efficacy of mass communication, as either a contributory agent or as an agent of direct effect is affected by various aspects of the media and communications themselves or of the communication situation.

Klapper (1963) identified the factors that mediate the power of mass communication on the audience to include predisposition, selective processes, group norms and opinion leadership. When interpreted to the core, the nexus of mediating variables would include but not be limited to, families, age groups, schools, churches, and other social groups.

As earlier argued, in the case of IPOB's media communication viz-a-viz the sit-at-home order, it is most unlikely that all residents of South-East directly got the message from the media. Assuming that there were people that depended on other people to take decisions on the messages, it is of interest to the researchers to unravel whether Klapper's theory applied to the situation.

### **Methodology**

The researchers adopted the survey research method in generating data used for analysis. The research approach was deemed apposite for the study owing to the need to elicit the opinions of South-Eastern respondents on the various factors that influenced their decision to comply with IPOB's sit-at-home order. The research instruments were questionnaires and an interview guide. They were used for generating quantitative and qualitative data respectively.

The population of the five South-Eastern States (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) which is 22,565, 414 as of 2016 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016) was used for the study. The National Bureau of Statistics had projected the population of States in Nigeria from the 2006 census figures as provided by National Population Commission. The projected population for the South-East stood at Abia (3,727,347), Anambra (5,527,809), Ebonyi (3,490,383), Enugu (4,411,119), and Imo (5,408,756). A sample of 384 was drawn from the population with the aid of the Wimmer and Dominick Online Sample Size Calculator.

Respondents included in the study were selected through a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. First, all the South-Eastern States were selected. The selection of all the states in the South-East was necessary to include the States where there is heightened agitation for Biafra like Abia and Anambra, and states where the activities and agitations for Biafra are less pronounced like Enugu, Imo and Ebonyi. Stage 2 involved the selection of towns/communities from the states. The areas purposively selected were Umunneato/Ariaria in Aba North L.G.A. Abia State; Awka, the capital city of Anambra State; Ngbo in Ohaukwu L.G.A. of Ebonyi State; Abakpa Nike in Enugu East L.G.A. of Enugu State and Owerri the capital city of Imo State. Two criteria informed the choice of the selected areas, they include either that they are the commercial hub of the selected states or the hotbed of IPOB's activities aimed at actualizing Biafra.



The third stage involved the selection of respondents from the selected areas of study. This was accomplished by convenient and purposive sampling methods. Respondents who were met in their places of abode, offices, shops or roadsides by the researchers and their two research assistants and who were willing to cooperate with the team, were selected for questionnaire administration and in-depth interviews.

A quota sampling approach was used to determine the number of copies of the questionnaire allotted to each state. This was derived by obtaining the proportion of each state's population from the grand population of the South-East. The quotient for each state was Abia (63 copies), Anambra (94 copies), Ebonyi (60 copies), Enugu (75 copies), and Imo (92 copies), making a total of 384 copies. Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents, a total of 350 copies were useful for analysis as the other 34 copies were wrongly filled and therefore not useable.

For the in-depth interview, five respondents were purposively selected per state making a total of 25 respondents. What qualified the respondents for inclusion in the interview sections was their awareness of IPOB's media propaganda; their access to the group's information media, and their willingness to be interviewed. The analysis was done with the aid of the Likert Scale format for the quantitative data while the qualitative data were analysed thematically.

## Findings

**Table 1: Showing the age distribution of respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 - 33	126	36
34 - 49	114	33
50 - 65	73	21
65 and above	37	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

Data in Table 1 showed that the respondents were predominantly youths. The aged respondents were relatively few.

**Table 2: Showing the respondents' educational levels**

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	36	10
F.S.L.C	50	14
WASC/SSC	113	32
OND/B.Sc.	97	28
HND/M.Sc.	48	14
PhD	6	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

Data in Table 2 above indicated that the majority of the respondents were averagely educated as the highly educated respondents were in the minority.

**Table 3: Showing the extent to which respondents attach credibility to IPOB's message**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very large extent	146	41
Large extent	122	35
Minimal extent	55	16
No extent	27	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

Data in Table 3 showed that the extent to which respondents attach credibility to IPOB's message on sit-at-home was very high.

**Table 4: Showing the various sources through which respondents received IPOB's messages**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Newspaper	43	12
Radio	54	15
Television	28	9
Social media	42	12
People	183	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in Table 4, a greater number of the respondents indicated that they got IPOB's messages about sit-at-home from individuals as against those that got it through the media.

**Table 5: Showing the extent of compliance with IPOB's message by the respondents**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very great extent	177	51
Great extent	58	17
Minimal extent	75	21
No extent	40	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

Data in Table 5 above showed that respondents indicated that they greatly complied with IPOB's sit-at-home messages. Only 11% of the respondents did not comply.

**Table 6: Showing factors that influenced respondents to comply with IPOB's order**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Support for IPOB	125	35
Fear of attack	62	18
People's influence	133	38
Impact of the message	30	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 contained data which showed that the majority of the respondents were influenced by people into complying with the order. While a significant number of the respondents complied for fear of attack, an infinitesimal number of them complied because of the impact of the message.

## Discussion

The findings of the study in line with the research questions were as follows:

### **Research question 1: To what extent did South-Eastern Nigerians attach credibility to IPOB's messages on sit-at-home?**

From the data shown in Table 3, it could be discerned that a greater majority of South-Eastern Nigerians believed the messages from IPOB on sit-at-home to be credible. This could be a result of the source of information which is known to them and had been consistent in churning out orders which were obeyed in the past.

This was corroborated by an interviewee who opined that even though there were splinter groups in IPOB's camp who occasionally issued counter information, they believed in the one from one Emma Powerful, the spokesperson of the group.

### **Research question 2: What are the sources through which South-Eastern Nigerians received IPOB's sit-at-home messages?**

Data in Table 4 depicted that whereas the people of the South-East got the messages from various media, a preponderance of the respondents (183 or 52%) got the messages from people. The agitation for succession seems to have awakened the interest of the people on radio, especially Radio Biafra and this could be the reason 54 respondents (15%) received it from the Radio.

Similarly, agitation for Biafra rekindled a reading culture among the people as they buy and read the numerous "newspapers" on the activities of IPOB. Thus, the 43(12%) respondents who got the messages from newspapers might have gotten it from *The Biafran Times, Real News, Best in Freedom, Freedom Time, Radio Biafra (Print), Voice of Biafra, Global Star, Vesymnews, Heros Impact, Biafra Heroes* among other such newspapers that luxuriate in the region. In recent times, conventional newspapers also publish news about IPOB's activities.

It could be because of the newly established culture of reading the newspapers that excite secessionist sentiment in the people of Igbo extraction that its percentage slightly outweighed that from the social media (12%). Television ranked the lowest among the sources through which the messages were accessed.

Three respondents from the in-depth interview section who are highly educated gave an insight into why the educated also had to receive the message on sit-at-home through people rather than directly through the media. They stated that the highly educated class do not demonstrate much enthusiasm or belief in the Biafran struggle to expose themselves to the group's media messages. Another interviewee opined that television did not count among the media the people rely on for information because most television stations are owned by the government and individuals who are not sympathetic to the

separatist's demands.

### **Research question 3: How far did the South Eastern Nigerians comply with IPOB's sit-at-home messages?**

Data in Table 5 revealed that there was substantial compliance with the IPOB's sit-at-home order by residents of the South-East. This is substantiated by the fact that 310 (89%) out of the 350 people sampled complied. Nevertheless, a paltry number of them (40 or 11%) did not comply. Details of evidence and level of compliance with the order were provided by respondents during in-depth interview sections. Some respondents explained that on that day, despite media messages from the state government countering the order, roads were deserted, markets closed; banks, schools, secretariats and even government houses did not open for business.

When asked whether there was observed non-compliance anywhere, a respondent who said that he utilized the opportunity to go to the village said that, though the rural residents were conscious of the order, some of the residents went to farms, meetings, village markets, and carried out their routine activities while shelving the ones that would lead them to the town. It can thus, be deduced from this explanation that the compliance level in the rural areas was different from the urban areas.

### **Research question 4: What factors influenced South Eastern Nigerians' decision to comply with IPOB's sit-at-home messages?**

Table 6 presented data which depicted why South-Eastern residents complied with IPOB's order. It did demonstrate that support for IPOB's secession agenda by the residents was high as 125(35%) attributed their compliance to it. However, what is startling from the data is the fact that the majority of the respondents 133(38%) indicated that their compliance stemmed from people's influence.

A respondent in an interview session expatiated that although there had been sit-at-home orders by the group in the past, that of Mondays and for an indefinite period agitated many of the residents as to whether that too would be complied with. This, she said aroused a lot of discussions, questions, and clarifications from people. The outcome of such interactions influenced people to comply. It goes to prove, as some other empirical studies have shown, that interpersonal influence is key to causing a change in the opinion, belief and behaviours of people rather than mass communication, (Hoveland, Lumsdaine & Sheffield 1949; Klapper, 1963; Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968; Pool, 1963). It, therefore, means that the Phenomenistic theory was supported by this finding.

Data also revealed that 62(18%) of the respondents complied out of fear of attack. Some respondents said that the spate of killing, burning, maiming, and other levels of violence recorded on sit-at-home days was usually high. Consequently, they complied because they did not want to be victims. An insignificant number of respondents (30 or 9%) stated that they complied with the order because of the impact of the message. It is proof of the powerful effect of the media as demonstrated by previous findings (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984; Edogoh & Ezech, 2016; Mendelson, 1973, Nwafor & Onwubere, 2019; Nwokeafor, 2015). This is also an index that the Hypodermic Needle theory is still relevant in the communication milieu.

## **Conclusion**

Communication at all levels will amount to a wasted endeavour if, in the short or long run, it fails to achieve the goal of having effects on the audience. Just as feedback completes a communication process, the impact is the *raison d'être* of communication. The impact of IPOB's sit-at-home message on the Southeastern people of Nigeria was palpable. It is reasonable to submit that the message, in a greater way, achieved its predetermined goal. There was substantial compliance by the targeted people of the Southeast. Whereas the impact of the media on the audience is not in doubt, it is instructive to note, as this study has revealed, that interpersonal influence is key to decision-making in society.

## **Recommendations**

Sequel to the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Communicators and media managers should employ integrated media channels to reach their target audience. No one source is adequate.
2. Advertising agencies and other governmental and non-governmental advocacy groups should leverage the advantages of interpersonal communication as complements to media campaigns for desired results.
3. Communication and media scholars should not disregard or jettison any of the archaic communication theories on the ground that they have outlived their relevance. Time and circumstance can reinvent them.
4. Opinion leaders in every stratum of society should be conscious of the influential powers they wield. They should ensure that their opinions on any topical issue serve the general interest of society.



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# PERCEPTION OF "DANCE AFRICA DANCE" REALITY TELEVISION PROGRAMME AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR ACCULTURATION IN PLATEAU STATE NIGERIA

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## **Introduction**

**T**elevision, either as a content production organisation or as a piece of equipment has continued to serve as a bridge between cultures. The cross-fertilization of cultures especially the performative and aesthetics mix very well in the crucible of the art of television production. Television manufacturing attests to the adaptations to the needs of people, the reason for the array of television specifications today from TV Apps to live-size television sets at home, schools, clubs, and stadiums (Graves, 2010).

The emergence of global media channels in the early 1990s influenced the entrenchment of a global culture providing a variety of television programme formats and genres, which compete in various media markets for audiences (Hiebert and Gibbons, 2000). Television entertainment became diversified with new programmes from America, Asia and Europe such as sports, music and drama, keeping the viewer entertained. These programmes also met the needs of the audiences in Africa where they were aired. Attempts to replicate and domesticate these programmes in Africa became popular among content producers in

the television industry as it was in Europe and America. Programming types changed across all Television channels, one of which is 'Reality Television'.

The reality TV genre is revolutionising the entertainment industry across the globe. Murray and Ouellette (2004) assert that it is almost impossible to turn on a television without coming across a kind of reality show. The reality TV genre has attracted public attention in the last two decades particularly the youth who are addicted to watching the show or are participants. In Nigeria, several of these reality television programmes have met the entertainment and empowerment needs of the youth by providing access via mobile phones, the internet and other facilities to vote for their favourite contestants by texting (SMS) or commenting on the programme as it is aired. Examples of Reality television programmes that are aired in Nigeria include, *Maltina Dance All*, *Gulder Ultimate Search*, *Nigeria Idol*, *Naija Sings*, *The Voice* and *Big Brother Naija* among others.

All over the country, the youth appears at audition centres for an opportunity to participate as individuals or as a group. From Plateau State have emerged participants and winners of some reality television shows, from *Big Brother Africa*, *Maltina Dance All* and others. Owing to the interest and participation of youths from the state and achievements made, this paper focuses on the perception of residents on the reality programme *Dance Africa Dance* as an instrument of acculturation.

Langley (1979) asserts that “culture is a weapon, “Culture starts with the people as creators of themselves and transformers of their environment” (p.179) while Arowolo (2022), observed that certain aspects of valued Nigerian culture were being eroded especially as it related to the role of purity in religion and marriage. Arowolo further warned that the enthusiastic assimilation of Western culture by the younger generation was suggestive of a culture whose future is on a knife-edge. For instance, sexualising young people through dance reality television shows is on the rise as opined by Wong (2021).

Before the debut of *Dance Africa Dance* on Zee World some dance-based reality shows existed. They include: *So, you think you can dance* (2005) *Dancing with the Stars* (2005) *Dance Moms* (2011) *Bring It!* (2014) *World of Dance* (2019); in Nigeria the dance competitions, *Glo Battle of the Year Globacom* (2021) *Maltina Dance Show* (2013) *MTN Battle for the Year* (2008) *Dance 234 koga entertainment* (2011) *Celebrity Take 2 (CT2)* *Spirit of David Gospel Dance Company* (2007) (Emmy, 2006)

Idachaba and Dandaura (2010) contend that over the years, Africa has made itself a huge market for Western and European content instead of marketing its local content. Therefore, it subjects itself to perpetual cultural imperialism through the continuous movement of products from the West to Africa.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The philosophy behind any form of dance is to tell a story to portray cultural values or demonstrate the resilience and ethos of a people, group and community (Bresnahan, 2019). However, in a situation or scenario where it becomes a strategic vehicle for exporting dominant culture from countries outside of the African continent, it has vast implications for Nigeria's growth and development of local content. Zee World, the Indian media content industry, has become an overwhelming source of entertainment, transporting and transposing its culture to other areas, especially the African continent.

Nigeria's culture especially as exhibited in various dances may become endangered owing to the interest and increased participation of Nigerian youths in the reality programme "Dance Africa Dance". The dance steps and styles initiated in the programme may be entertaining but can be a subtle way of cultural colonisation. This paper seeks to examine the perceptions of residents of Plateau State of the reality TV Show "Dance Africa Dance" as an instrument of acculturation with the following research questions.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What motivates Plateau State residents to watch the "Dance Africa Dance" on Zee World?
- ii. What is the perception of Plateau State residents about "Dance Africa Dance" as a tool for acculturation in Nigeria?

### **The Concept of Dance**

The early documentation on the origins of dance cuts across three continents: India in Asia, Egypt in Africa and Greece in Europe (Manning, 2010). It is however arguable that other continents never had dance because, as it is today, America is not only dancing but exporting dance to the rest of the world. Music and dance evolved side by side and so the concept of dance in this paper is not devoid of music. According to Welsh (2004), "There are melodies that, when played will cause your heart to droop with sadness for no known reason. Or a rousing jig or mazurka will have your feet tapping in the accompanying rhythm, seemingly beyond your control" (p.8). Dance in Africa defines culture in a way that simplifies the complexity of the continent. Dance for diplomacy can operate as a form of political protest or a way of encouraging peaceful coexistence between nations. Warburton (2017) observed that "a growing body of research suggests that the nonverbal art form of dance can be an effective medium for intercultural communication and exchange between people from different cultures" (p.131) Dance can be exported or exchanged. It can be a colonizing force or a vehicle for dialogue and understanding. It can be many of these things simultaneously in the life of the people it encounters. Beyond the performative nature of dance and the fact that it can happen as an improvised act, what is critical to this study is the fact that dance can be purposefully selected and targeted for a course and the audiences or spectators can view it through a variety of media including stage and screen.

### **Television and Reality Television Programmes**

The Lumiere brothers by their act of filming workers at the rail stations did not only launch the era of cinematography but also of reality show. The invention of the television only helped to domesticate the phenomenon. This is true because television content or programme centred on everyday people who are filmed in real situations almost oblivious of the presence of the camera are the ultimate focus rather than the actors. Reality TV shows today suggest a different definition to include the participation of actors ( amateurs or professionals) performing their acts with the consciousness of the camera. Sarantinos (2004) identified seven reality TV types to include: Documentary, Legal, Competition, Lifestyle, Travel, Transformation/Self-Improvement and Social Experiment; the "Dance Africa Dance" falls under the competition category.

The technical history of television is a story of concept, invention, content production, transmission, and commercialisation of the contents or programmes. Television has played a huge role both in times of peace and war. The neutrality of the gadget as an amoral tool is most often contested because of the nature of the programmes it houses. It is



these programmes popularly referred to as content that end up standing on trial and not the piece of equipment that brings or delivers them to us (Price, 1995).

The emergence of Reality Television around the world in the last two decades has provided immense opportunities for interactions and harnessing of talents in competitive forms, as well as stimulating cross-fertilization of cultures, norms and values (Lewis, 2006). From makeovers, and game shows to fear-centric etc, the media landscape has no doubt a lot to offer to teeming consumers in its staple of programming; each a franchise to be domesticated or localised outside of Western shores.

Global media channels are an influential factor in the acquisition of this global culture which is reproduced in television programmes, thereby allowing many different genres of programming to compete for niche market audiences (Hiebert & Gibbons, 2000). The entertainment industry particularly television became democratised providing all sorts of music, sports, and drama around the clock (Sperring & Strandvall 2006). Thus emerged what has commonly termed the Franchising of television programmes which is an attempt to marry the content of a foreign programme to a local environment or setting. This has subsequently changed programming types and rapidly gained popularity across all TV channels in recent years. One such programming type is 'Reality Television'.

Even with the indigenisation of programmes on Nigerian Television, a huge chunk of current reality tv shows are franchises from Europe, America, and Asia. Some of the earliest reality shows in Nigeria are, Amstel, The Big, Fasttest Shedder, Gulder Ultimate Search, Knorr Taste Quest, Next Movie Star, The Next Titan, Nigeria's Got Talent, Nigeria's Top Model, Project Fame West Africa, RocDaMic, The Real Housewives of Lagos, Tiannah's Empire, Ultimate Love (TV series) and The Voice Nigeria (Emmy, 2006). Other reality TV shows with a variety of performances in Nigeria are The Peak Talent Hunt (2009) and Nigeria's Got Talent (2012).

Research into the form and content of reality shows franchised to different countries has shown that there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between countries where a show originated and where it is adopted. Within the past two decades people, particularly youths are either addicted to watching several reality shows, are prospective contestants on reality programmes, or are active contestants in reality programmes (Hill, 2004, Lundy, Ruth, & Park 2008)

The processes of globalisation (cultural, political and economic) have narrowed boundaries between domestic and global affairs and promoted social interconnectedness such that local events in one country can impact the cultural, political and economic life of another country (Giddens, 1999). Cultural Globalisation is driven by the increasing penetration of media technology, (Internet and Satellite television) and worldwide marketing of Western cultural industries. Marsen (2006, p.178) noted that there is a "gradual corporatisation" of the world. The mass media are directly involved in the globalisation process and the media connect the world through content that is broadcast or accessible in most parts of the globe. Again, Marsen (2006) said,

Audiences worldwide watch the same television programmes and communicate with others internationally in real-time through the Internet. Secondly, the media, in their business capacity, are often owned by

multinational corporations and are regulated according to international standards generally set by agencies that support global uniformity and equivalence in media communication (p.179)

There have been several debates on the impact of cultural globalisation on the identity of nations or countries and how the media facilitate its expansion or limitation. Rajaei (2001) opined that while some perceive this phenomenon as an instrument for the establishment of universal unity and democracy, others think globalisation is brought about by the expansion of new communication systems. In line with this perspective is that of cultural imperialism. The claim is that cultural imperialism affects some cultures and often replaces or substitutes them with a culture that promotes excessive consumption and dominance of economic and information technology (Marsen 2006). It is not surprising therefore, that there is a huge reception of television programmes, films, and music; produced and controlled by multinational and transnational corporations, from Western to developing countries because it is believed to be of high quality and superior to those from developing countries.

Scholars of Reality Television such as Murray and Ouellette (2004), and Reiss and Wiltz (2004) among others have raised important observations about the nature, content and implications of reality TV shows, questioning if reality shows are actually "real" or simply an illusion. Probing the realities, Leing, (2017) noted that:

Stations fight for ratings not because they wish to present programmes to more people but because they want to deliver more viewers to advertisers. There are subtle means of advertising. Sometimes an entire programme is an infomercial for a sponsored product... The audiences are attracted to the supportive culture of the show... The globalisation of world media is having profound, subtle, and dramatic effects on programming visions of reality. A family in Tibet may be exposed to the same programming as a family in Chicago, Illinois, or Cape Town, South Africa. How the shows are produced and, more importantly, how the shows are decoded through the lenses of different cultures, languages, and ideologies can make a show that appears comic, inconsequential, and family fair into something controversial, serious, and adult (p.12, 15).

In other words, there is a growing interconnectedness, which is fostering a feeling of belonging, allowing cultures to be exposed to outside influences. This is an indication of the existence of an emerging global culture or world culture.

Montemurro (2008) also posited that:

Reality television has become a standard genre of programming in the twenty-first century. The popularity of these unscripted programs merits investigation. Reality shows can be seen as significant cultural objects whose production and consumption reflect and reveal the norms and ideologies of contemporary culture. Although what is currently conceived as the reality television genre is perceived as novel, this type of programming has a long history, with its foundations dating back to the early days of television (p.84)

For instance, Jones (2003) conducted to examine how viewers of "Big Brother" shows negotiate the perceived "realness" of the reality show. The study found out that, while the

narratives of such docu-soaps” were indeed popular, the audiences knew about the artificiality of the experience but decided to ignore it because of the pleasure that they derive.

### **Multiculturalism, Bollywood, Zee World and Nigerian's Entertainment Industry**

Multiculturalism means different things to different people. For some, it is directly linked to the politics or recognition of difference (Taylor, 1992). While Kuper (1999) sees it as a loose form of cultural pluralism, Clayton (2020) succulently unpacks multiculturalism 'as the existence of difference and uneven power relations among populations in terms of racial, ethnic, religious, geographical distinctions and other cultural markers that deviate from dominant, often racialised “norms” (p.211). Eagan (2021) defines multiculturalism as the view that cultures, races and ethnicities particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgement of their differences within a dominant political culture. Pate and Oso (2017) see it as the coexistence of diverse cultures.

Bollywood is one of the nine language film sectors of the Indian moviemaking industry. Birthed in Mumbai in the 1930s, it has become the flagship film enterprise in India and an empire in Asia. Its films are available globally both in cinemas, on cable television and numerous streaming platforms. Indians' technology is productively the service of her film industry. Currently, Bollywood is rated as the second-largest film industry in the world second only to the United States of America's Hollywood (Dotun, 2021).

The viewership of Bollywood films started from the cinemas. In the northern region of Nigeria cinema houses like the Kwararafa Cinema, New Era Cinema, the Scala and Rex Cinema in Jos Plateau State Nigeria, became a converging point for other nationalities like Syrians, Lebanese, and Jordanians who found Bollywood films interesting. Despite the barrier of language between the cinema owners and these audiences, Indian movies gained a lot of traction in Nigeria, especially in the conservative Northern region. Dotun (2021) connects the similarities between Bollywood and local cultures in northern Nigeria to include, conservative sensibilities relating to dress, morality, family relations, gender and marriage. It was no surprise then when Bollywood decided on a very brave cinematic innovation to subtitle her movies in English and dubbed the same into the English and Hausa languages.

Zee World is India's media ambassador to the world and the producer of “Dance Africa Dance.” They specialised in cultural diplomacy and the transaction of performing arts enterprise between India and receiving nations. India is not the first to employ the dance competition reality TV approach to promoting cultural diversity however it has become a major player in the industry. Kellogg's “Dance Africa Dance” was Zee World's first reality dance competition in Africa. The show, which aimed to uncover the continent's best dance team, premiered in September 2021. Dancers from African countries including Angola, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, DR Congo, Uganda, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe all participated in the competition. Two dance champions, one team and one solo winner emerged at the end. The Dance Africa Dance was modelled after the “*Dance India Dance*” show, which premiered on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2009 on Zee TV, India.

The format of the show requires that a group of dancers who have registered for the show would present different dance styles in an audition process. The top teams from the

auditions are then selected to perform at the finals to choose the winner. The "DanceAfrica Dance" reality show has so far entertained audiences across fifty-two African countries and other parts of the world (Onwuamaeze, 2022).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The fundamental assumption of the Uses and Gratifications Theory is that mass media audiences are not made up of passive individuals but active participants who exercise freedom in their use and motives for making specific consumption choices. (Balnaves, Hemelryk & Shoesmith 2009; Baran 2005).

It is assumed that the viewers use the media to satisfy needs that are determined by the social environment, namely the desire to acquire knowledge and understanding, as emotional and pleasurable needs. The viewers also do so by strengthening contact with friends and family, strengthening credibility and confidence and releasing tension needs as a diversion or escape. It will not be out of place to say that people get what they want from the media (Pierce, Beatty & Hagner 1982). Concerning this study, the viewers and contestants of "Dance Africa Dance" are seeking to satisfy their need for knowledge of the Indian culture and to extricate themselves from the daily tensions created by social pressures of life such as conflicts, unemployment and ignorance.

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

The Agenda setting theory explores how the views and thoughts of the public can be altered by what they see and hear in the media. Zain, (2014) submits that:

the agenda setting theory is a discussion on how the mass media influences making a certain issue a public agenda. The public agenda is the main focus or prime issue that the members of the society or the public are concerned about (p.4)

Woerner (2022) gives an insight with the example that obtrusive events, dramatic events that are noticeable and effects large amounts of the economy, like gas shortages and high cost of grocery prices, are often used to push one agenda over another. The negative effect of Agenda setting theory in politics is biased messaging, which may mislead audiences to believe one concept over another. While the contents of the "Dance Africa Dance" Reality shows are being exposed to broader perspectives on culture and music, Zee World owners of the show may not be able to control their preferences and biases because their interests are at stake. In this way, it becomes a vehicle for political advertising of the Indian culture.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research was adopted for this study with questionnaires and interviews as instruments of study. The study population is residents of Plateau State. According to 2006 National Census figures the population of the state is 900,000. 18% are between the ages 21-40 years of which about 56% are males and 46% are females, (Gwom & Jugu 2017). The study adopted a non-probability sampling of youths between the ages of 18-25. 50 youths were purposively selected within Jos metropolis because they qualified for the study having been exposed to the Dance Africa Dance show between 2021 and 2022.

Three lecturers who teach choreography and TV/ Film production at the University of Jos and Plateau State University all in Nigeria were also interviewed face-to-face because they had an understanding of the dynamics of television /film production. Of the 50 youths selected 44 responded to the questionnaire which was administered online. An interview guide with four questions was used for the interview. The three respondents were given codes: First respondent PEO, second-DA, third- PAAB. Three themes were selected from the transcribed interview data namely: Cultural Diversity, Entertainment and Dominance.

### Findings and Analysis

The data is presented in charts for a better understanding of the findings and the interview was analysed in line with some of the themes in the study, namely: Dominance, cultural diversity and entertainment.

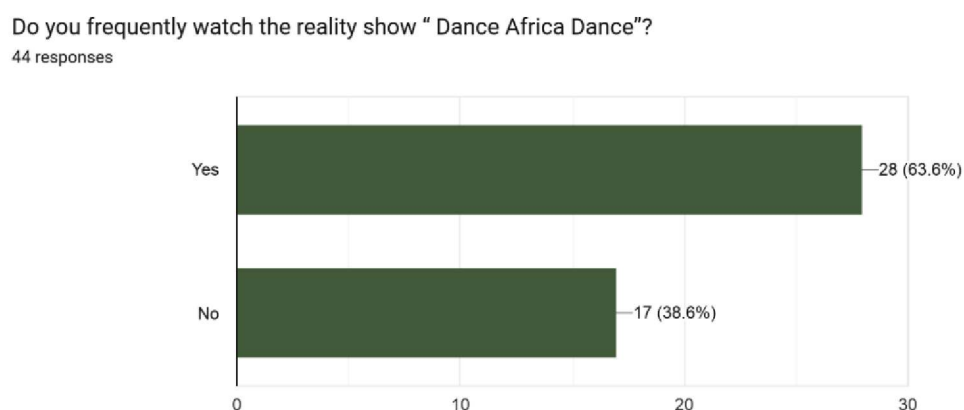


Chart One above shows that the majority of the respondents (63.6 %) frequently watch the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show.

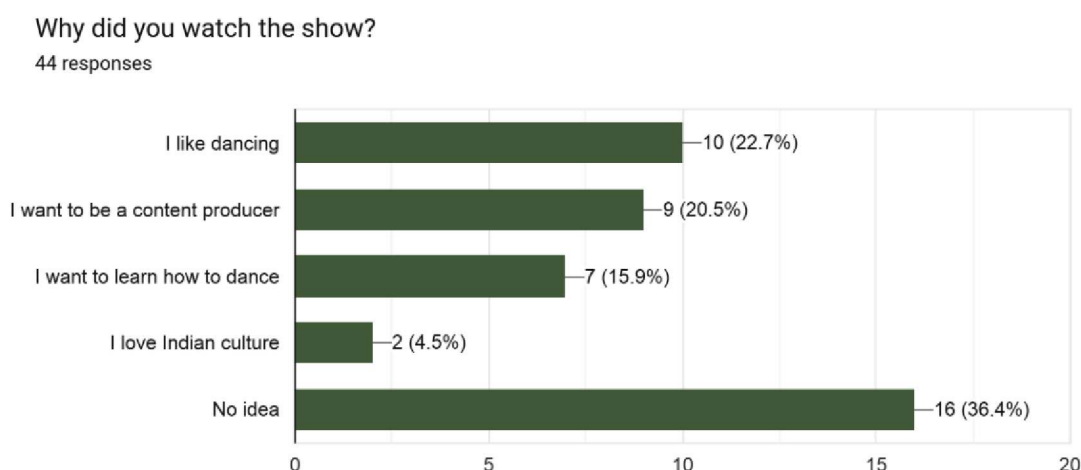


Chart Two shows that most (36.4%) of the respondents could not ascertain the reason for watching the "Dance Africa Dance show. Although some (22.7%), watch the show because they like dancing, very few (4.5%) said it is because they like the Indian culture. It may then be concluded that the love for dancing rather than the Indian culture motivates respondents to watch the show.



What is your opinion of the show?

44 responses

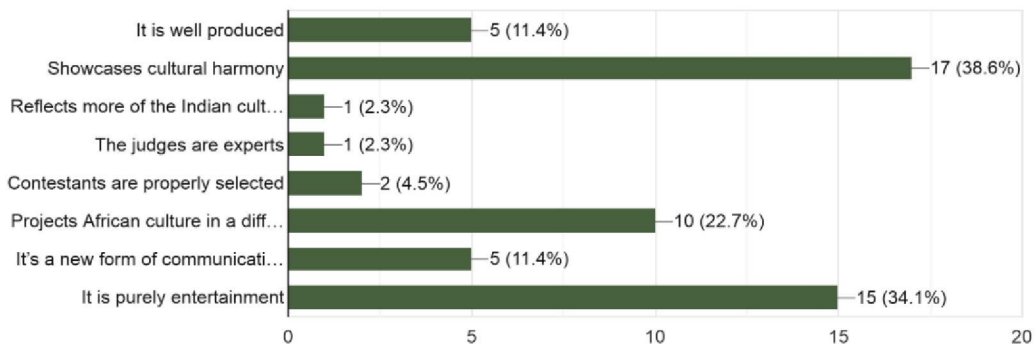


Chart Three shows that cultural harmony (38.6%) and entertainment value (34.1%) lead to the opinion of respondents about the "Dance Africa Dance" show. While (33.7%) of the respondents believe that the show projects the African culture, only (2.3%) said that it reflects the African culture. Therefore, it could then be concluded that cultural harmony, entertainment value and the projection of African culture, shape the perceptions of respondents regarding the "Dance Africa Dance reality show.

What is it you like the most in the show?

44 responses

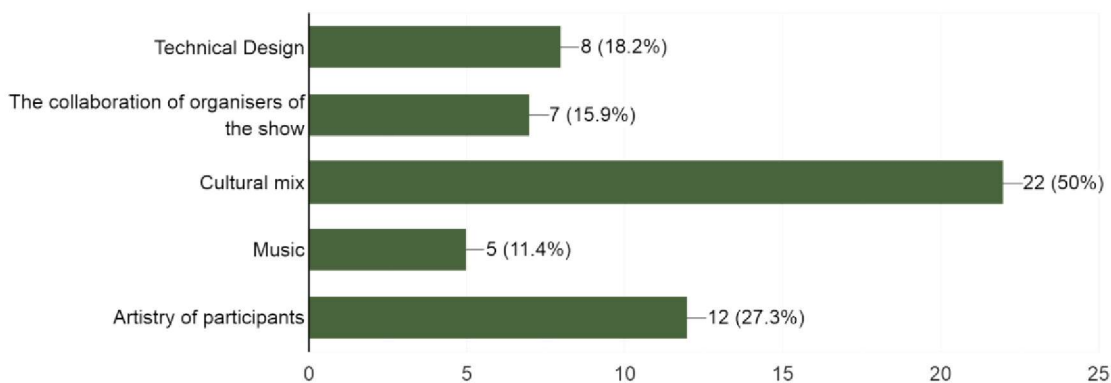


Chart Four shows that half (50%) of the respondents found the cultural mix expressed in the show more interesting while (23.7%) love the artistry of the participants. These findings show that the cultural mix depicted in the show remains a major attraction.

How is the show helpful to you?

44 responses

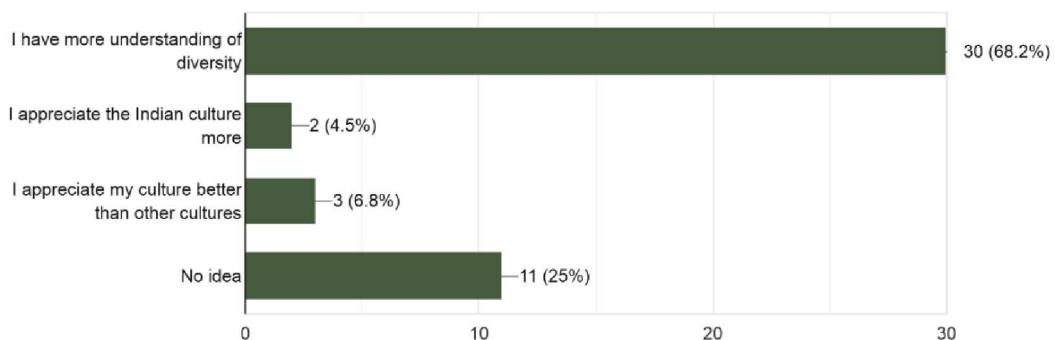


Chart Five shows that watching the “Dance Africa Dance” have helped the majority (68.2%) of the respondents to understand cultural diversity. Against the few that alluded to the appreciation of the Indian and African cultures, it can then be concluded that the show has been a good tool for understanding cultural diversity.

In your opinion what does the show “Dance Africa Dance” represent?

44 responses

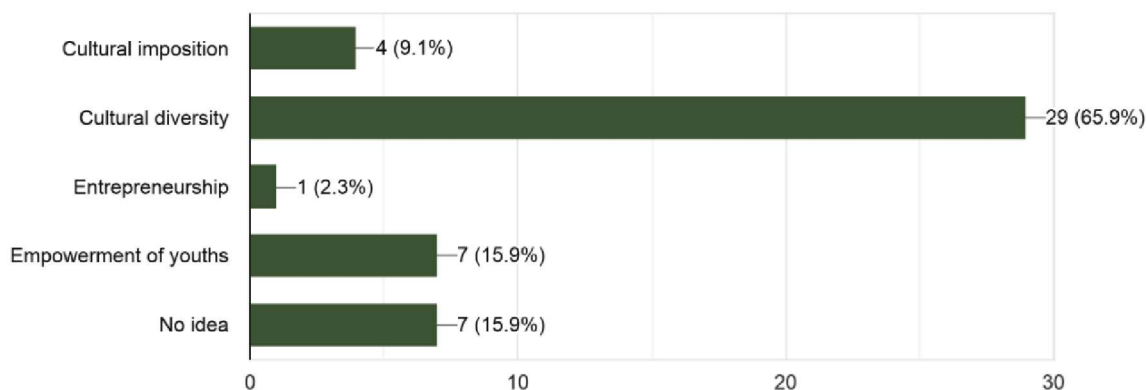


Chart Six is consistent with findings as the majority (65.9%) of the respondents perceive the “Dance Africa Dance” Chart five shows the opinions of respondents on what “Dance Africa Dance” reality show as a vehicle for showcasing cultural diversity positively. However, the opinion of a minority (9.1%), which perceives the show as an element of cultural domination, provides a marginal reason for further examination.

## Discussion

The first research question asked, “What motivates Plateau State residents to watch the “Dance Africa Dance” reality show? Chart One, Chart Three and Chart Four indirectly answer the research question with Chart Two directly answering the research question. Chart one data shows that a high percentage (63.3%) frequently watch the show. This adds to existing knowledge of the popularity of Indian reality TV shows. According to the study by Samprathi and Ravi (2021), the youth are huge fans of Indian reality TV. Reality TV programmes appeal to young viewers because they feature people and events that apply to their everyday life. Chart Three shows that the perceptions of residents of Plateau State to the “Dance Africa Dance” reality show are that it showcases cultural harmony besides its entertainment value and projection of African culture.

No doubt television has its basis in culture and local content values however, some television programmes from America and Europe have elements of acculturation for countries of the global south including Nigeria. Studies such as Miller (2007) have established reality TV to project dominant culture. The study's findings, which is a dissertation on reality TV cultural values, conclude that reality television portrays cultural values and myths as well as preferred ideologies of the ruling class through narrative elements woven into these programmes. An understanding of this relationship between reality television and modern culture can be gained through television analysis. Data from the qualitative research also show that part of the motivation for watching the show besides the fact that “it is appealing...it is about cultural harmony and cultural values”(RESA)

Chart Four data concludes that the most liked aspect of the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show is the cultural mix (Indian and African culture). This is a pointer to reality TV's role in globalisation. This finding aligns with Lwahas (2017), who posited that reality television is a true component of modern global popular culture in the process of globalisation, as seen by the rising adaption of such shows and the involvement and participation of people, particularly young people. The responses from the qualitative data show that "DAD" is a "reflection of urban popular culture because the African and indeed Nigerian dances are robust" (RES A). The data reveal that dance unites and helps in the construction of national identities as well as ethnic nationalities in popular theatre; a part of a global movement where dance narratives are sold.

Chart Two directly answers the research question and concludes that the majority of respondents watch "Dance Africa Dance" reality show for no particular reason even though some (22.7%) attribute their reason to their love for dancing. The data from Samprathi and Ravi's (2021) study showed that the majority of respondents who watched reality shows do so for entertainment making other motivations secondary. In the same vein respondents to the interview were emphatic in stating that the show is a performance that "brings to our living rooms the inventiveness and creativity of choreographers and dancers, acrobats and costumiers including artists..." (RES A)

As regards research question two which investigated the perception of residents of Plateau State about the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show as a tool of acculturation in Nigeria, Chart Five, and Chart Six provide answers. Chart Five data concludes that a majority of respondents (68.2%) have more understanding of cultural diversity from the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show. This shows that the Nigerian cultural space is exposed to the cultures of other nations and in this case India. Cultural diversity or multiculturalism remains a salient topic due to its propensity for cultural erosion. However, people react and choose to live together irrespective of their customs, morals, religions, languages, beliefs, arts and the manner they live together. (RES A) interviewed affirmed this statement that, DAD is a performance to be enjoyed from two vistas in entertainment and content development for the entire continent and beyond". For (RES B), the show is another way for India to further articulate and protect its culture. "The "Dance Africa Dance" is an experiment..."

Chart Six data showed that the majority of respondents (65.9%) admit that the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show showcases cultural diversity. Television, more than any other medium, is seen to better showcase our cultural values, according to media researchers. Media content reflects our most fundamental social norms and beliefs, and reality television is especially suited to exposing these norms (Lindemann, 2022). The theme of cultural diversity is further buttressed by qualitative research. (RES A) states that "The show challenges participants to dig into their culture and bring up dances that are representative of the people where they come from...they come together to bring up dance movements that show quite a remarkable understanding between various ethnic representativeness"

## **Conclusion**

The researchers were able to establish three themes and concluded that: cultural harmony, entertainment value and projection of African culture defined the reasons and perceptions of the respondents about the "Dance Africa Dance" reality show. The media

narratives surrounding the “Dance Africa Dance”, are an attempt to use a fusion of Indian and African dance styles as entertainment and a way of promoting cultural diversity. This is evident from the responses analysed. Though the programme is packaged and distributed by the Indian media industry Zee World, the perception of respondents is that diversity in dance steps is shaping a better understanding of dance culture, which embraces different ethnic nationalities and is therefore acceptable.

The interculturalism at play, therefore, dances, which are indigenous to different countries, are essential for appreciating cultural harmony and partnerships at a global level. What becomes of our indigenous dances within our multicultural milieu are opportunities for inventiveness and creativity that programme producers, choreographers and dancers in Nigeria and indeed Africa can explore.

### **Recommendations**

This research has thrown up some very salient points to revisit on the perceptions of residents of Plateau State about the “Dance Africa Dance” reality show as a tool for acculturation. The researchers will like to recommend the following:

1. India and Nigeria share a lot in common, for example, population. Our film industries are at each other's heels and popular pressure in reality television shows should unite our different multicultural composition. African and indeed Nigerian dances are robust therefore; collaboration with other countries will further encourage cultural harmony between national identities and facilitate youth popular culture where dance narratives are sold.
2. Nigeria and indeed Africa have the content but lack the technology (production, good lighting and sound production or aesthetics) to tell their stories on the world stage. Nigeria needs to export its musical dance shows by ensuring that content packaging meets the standards of international audiences.
3. The Ministries of Information and Culture and Youth and Sports Development can explore the opportunities both economic and otherwise to channel the energies of our youth to reimagining the country through dance.

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# COMMUNICATION, MEDIA, AND POWER RELATIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: ONE COUNTRY, MANY VOICES, DILEMMAS OF FREE EXPRESSION

*Kwame KARIKARI*



## **Introduction**

**T**here is hardly an African country which has not experienced one form or another of political crisis resulting from inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflicts. It is almost a cliché to repeat the fact that, besides the seemingly intractable problem of social-economic development, manifesting in widespread mass poverty, the most challenging burden that has confronted post-colonial African states is that of welding the diverse ethnic communities (or nationalities) into harmoniously co-existing “nations”.

Nowhere have the crises of inter-ethnic conflicts been as pronounced and as recurrent as in the following three of the largest and most populous countries on the continent: The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Nigeria. In the latter, the difficulties of inter-ethnic relations have been compounded by bloody conflicts ostensibly inspired by differences in faith. Yet, nowhere else has the violence of inter-ethnic conflicts been so hateful as to lead to expressed attempts at exterminating the other -- genocide -- as in Rwanda: in the 1960s, 1970s and, most shockingly of all, in the 1990s.

It is only in Rwanda, relatedly, that we have found on the African continent media that have systematically and consciously served as instruments, an arsenal, to cultivate, promote and direct hatred in executing inter-ethnic conflict. The Rwanda example is also a useful lesson in the study of media as a veritable weapon of ideological and political repression in the hands of the powerful in society. <sup>1</sup>[See, Allan Thompson (Editor) 2007, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*. London, Ann Arbor, MI, Pluto Press and Kampala, Uganda, Fountain Publishers. Many of the chapters in this volume examine the question of the relationship between the powerful and media in promoting inter-ethnic hatred, studying the role of the notorious Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines, RTLM, in the Rwanda genocide, as a case study.]

Since the 1990s, the mass media landscape in Africa has been transformed fundamentally from one of state monopoly and small numbers to an environment of overwhelming multiplicity. The liberalization of ownership of traditional mass media came in the wake of global transformation in communications technologies with the invention of digital technology, or the internet and its derivative facilities for communication. These developments combined have fostered a wave of voices and expressions in all but, embarrassingly, Eritrea where the state maintains a vicious monopoly on media.

These progressive developments for media and expression have occurred also as continent-wide popular agitations enabled changes in the political environment, forcing the retreat of military and authoritarian self-perpetuating regimes to accept or adapt to constitutional democratic systems with defined term limits for the executive and legislative arms of government.

Thus, in this context of the multicultural societies of countries governed under multi-party constitutional democratic systems, which ostensibly provide for freedom of speech, expression and access to pluralistic media, it is pertinent to reflect on the nature and character of the state and power in our multicultural societies and the roles and functions of communication and media in managing relations among the communities in our societies.

### **The State, Power in Multicultural Society**

One of our own defines multiculturalism as “the coexistence of diverse cultures, 'where culture includes ethnic, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles.’” [Zebulon Suifon Takwa. *An Overview on Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting of Conflict in Nigeria*. In Umaru A. Pate and Lai Oso (Editors) 2017. Ibadan, Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited. Pp. 821.]

As it is, central to the concept is ethnicity from which all the attributes (language, manners or behaviour, moral codes of intra-group relations) derive. And, “In so far as ethnicity designates cultural affiliation, it locates us historically within a given cultural milieu. It defines language, customs, values, beliefs, clanship, lineage etc, and provides people with everyday references and anchor points in their social interaction. It can be used positively to give people confidence in themselves or negatively as a rallying point for chauvinist or xenophobic purposes. In societies where linguistic and cultural affinities are tied to geographically located groups, as capitalism and the cash nexus homogenize and totalize social and economic life, ethnic boundaries can sometimes become flashpoints of contending interests when exploited by elites and leading classes to mobilize

constituencies for the pursuit of narrow interests, and access to resources.” [Kwesi Kwaa Prah, 2006, *The African Nation. The State of the Nation*. Cape Town. The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, p. 307.]

As peoples living in our countries today, we have no choice but to accept our ethnic origins and differences and the imperative of living together in peace. The burdensome challenge, that is, the challenge of governance, is in the management of our coexistence in diversity: the management of the competing interests and claims; of contrasting, sometimes opposing demands for special attention and treatment; of differences in cultural realities and practices; of just, fair and unconstrained participation in the governance of the aggregated whole. It calls for an assessment of the nature and role of the state and the nature and manifestation of power relations and therefore the media's role or functions in these arrangements and processes.

To fulfil these functions, effectively or otherwise, depends on the nature and capacity of the state in Africa. This is important because we have seen how, under certain trying situations external forces have been invited or intervened to rescue governments in Africa from collapsing. Thus, it is not implausible to contend that the post-colonial state in Africa, by and large, is still in the process of formation, maturation or consolidation. This is due to historical as well as social, economic and even cultural factors. The first important post-colonial political development to hinder the growth and development of the state was the wave of coups d'etat and violent civil conflicts that took place in all but a handful of countries across the length and breadth of the continent. For example, it has been recorded that between 1966 [when Nigeria and Ghana had their first coups d'etat] and 1993, there were sixty-three successful military coups in Africa and twenty-four violent conflicts. Armed conflicts took the lives of 10 million people and many more were wounded in these conflicts, with over twenty million people becoming international refugees or internally displaced persons in their own countries. [Colin Legum, quoted by Thabo Mbeki in Address of the President of South Africa, at the Opening of the Africa Conference on Elections, Democracy and Governance: Pretoria, 7 April 2003. Cited in Kwesi Kwaa Prah and Tegegne Teka (Editors) 2003. *Chasing Futures. Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Problems and Prospects*. Introduction. Cape Town. CASAS and AddisAbaba OSSREA. P. xi-xii]

The political and social conflicts ravaging the continent would largely find their origins in the dire economic conditions and wholesale poverty afflicting the peoples of the continent. On the shorthand, these economic deprivations were manifestations, primarily, of the neo-colonial, that is dependent, economic relations in Africa were subordinated to under global capitalism, indeed a continuation of colonial economic relations in different guises. By the beginning of the new century, the social, economic and political conditions of African countries were so precarious that some African social scientists opined that what was “noticeable in Africa today is the fact that the post-colonial state is everywhere in decomposition.” [Prah and Teka, *ibid*, p. xiii]

The popular movements of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century agitated for constitutional democratic rule embedded in the rule of law, respect for human rights and inclusiveness in governance. The African Union as well as its affiliated regional blocs adopted charters that endorsed the peoples' aspirations and demanded compliance by governments. [The African Charter on Elections, Democracy and Governance adopted...] The result is that, despite the checkered and often tortuous record of application and practice, nearly all



African countries have adopted constitutional democratic forms of government highlighted by defined term limits for the executive and legislative arms of government, periodic general elections and guarantees for human rights and freedom of expression and media.

This development, in my opinion, is progress that must be upheld, defended, protected and deepened through constant critical reflection and struggle. For, the experience in the management of the constitutional democratic order so far suggests that the state in Africa continues to be bedevilled by factors that make it incapable of consistently and transparently sustaining democratic development and governance. These factors include the dependency of most African states on and subordination to external political and economic powers, and thereby the absence or fragility of their sovereignty, the social class character of the state; the ideological mindset characterized by a deficit in commitment to patriotism and democratic ideals and culture; tendencies toward ethnocentric as opposed to wider 'national' interests and concerns; ethical vulnerability concerning the protection of the public good; and an aversion to ideas and intellectual reflection. These factors are visibly manifest in the Character of political parties that compete for power and which govern under the new constitutional dispensations prevailing in our countries. Political parties in Africa today may define themselves as espousing any number of ideological precepts. In practice and theory, they are generally bereft of or, in the case of former liberation movements, have abandoned, any enlightening ideas and principles of organizing and leading society for progress. These attributes, usually compounded by factors external to Africa, account for the continued incapacitation of the state in Africa as it confronts the numerous challenges of development generally and those arising from the contradictions of the multicultural realities of our countries.

This is a broad general overview of the political-economic setting in which we examine the media's relation to the state and power and their roles and function in promoting harmonious relations and coexistence among the different communities, sects and factions of the multicultural society in their contestations, competitions and contradictions for existential and other interests. In other words, it is the context within which to assess the media's role and function in the development of democratic governance and relations in a multicultural society.

### **Background to African Media and Communities, and Situation Today**

The emergence of authoritarian governments from the early years after independence in the late 60s and 1970s unleashed a wave of trampling on the democratic and human rights of citizens nearly everywhere. The freedom of the mass media in most cases was among the first line of rights to be attacked. This explains why the restoration of press freedom assumed such a prominent place in the debates and processes for constitution-making across the continent. As a result of popular clamour for the right to free speech and expression in the public space, by the end of the last century the entire continent, minus a few countries, was awash with privately owned newspapers and broadcasting stations. In addition to this development, the contemporaneous introduction of digital or internet-based communications technologies expanded boundlessly the possibilities, and potential capacity, of citizens to exercise the freedom of speech and expression to participate in public affairs discussions. Whether this potential has been realised and effected requires further investigation.

For, though the mass media have generally been assumed to have contributed to social and political progress since their introduction into Africa, in most societies their function as institutions for community self-expression and cultural self-assertion appears to have been less than complementary. Right from its introduction in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the newspaper remained an exclusive cultural product for the small elite literate in colonial languages of the medium. Up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the small number of newspapers published in African languages across the continent rarely count among the largest circulating titles.

In Africa, the newspaper is a quintessential urban medium. Introduced by colonial officials, Christian missionaries or established by the emerging African literate elite, the cultural influence of the newspaper in Africa was effectively primarily limited to the elite. They served as useful instruments for propagating anti-colonial ideas. Considering the ideological and political formation among the popular social forces, concerning the new political ideas they introduced, such as nationalism and Pan-Africanism, the influence of newspapers could be significantly limited. The obvious reasons are the language of the press and mass illiteracy which was partially mitigated only after independence. In Europe, industrialization and the introduction of literacy among the hordes of the emerging wage-earning working class made the newspaper a true mass medium and newspaper reading a mass cultural activity. This development did not occur anywhere in Africa.

The role of the newspaper as a medium for informing the public, serving as a forum for discussing important issues of public interest and as a watchdog over people in public authority, has been immeasurably immense. The point here, however, is that the print medium has never been a truly mass medium of the masses in Africa. Its character, as a medium limited to the elite or sections of the literate populations, has hardly changed even with the political liberalization of the 1990s onward. Much less, as a general rule, has the newspaper served as a medium for the education, cultural advancement and organization of the community in the multicultural society.

Broadcasting, by its very nature, readily functions as a true mass medium of the mass. But then it was also introduced by the colonial states and continued to serve after independence as state-controlled instruments of rule. Having been under the monopoly of authoritarian and other undemocratic states for decades, radio and television could hardly serve the purposes of democratization. Such that even when the state broadcasters set up "local" stations in rural districts they did not, and could not, function to promote democratic empowerment of the communities. So, over the years, citizens learned almost no systematic information from the media about their communities in our countries because the character of the media was hardly local or community oriented in outlook, content and appeal.

### **Media And Power in APluralistic Context**

In a democratic multicultural society, the very nature of pluralistic media demands that media reflect the diverse interests, aspirations and viewpoints of the various communities. Yet, as McChesney put it, "Democratic theory generally posits that society needs a journalism that is a rigorous watchdog of those in power and who want to be in power, can ferret out truth from lies, and can present a wide range of informed positions on the important issues of the day. Each medium need not do all of these things, but the media

system as a whole should make this readily available to the citizenry...How a society can construct a media system that will generate something approximating democratic journalism is a fundamental problem for a free society, as powerful interests tend to wish to dominate the flow of information.” [McChesney, Robert W, (2008) *The Political Economy of Media*. Enduring issues, emerging dilemmas. New York, Monthly Review Press, p. 25]

The implication of our argument here is to find out whether the mass media played any significant role in the political development of democratic culture for self-governance in the communities of our multicultural society; the extent of their contribution to the cultural advancement of the diverse communities; whether they played any watchdog functions in exacting accountability from local political, traditional or other public authorities and officers.

Today, under the constitutional multiparty democratic conditions established in our countries since the 1990s, many, if not most, urban commercial district towns have a radio station or more. Some even have a television station. The question is: To what extent do they devote their output, such as News, to the needs and concerns of the locality, the community, in which they are based? Do they pursue social and economic issues of interest to the communities, and to the benefit of which segments of the society?

In other words, what is the character of the media under today's constitutional democratic system? What is the nature of their relations to the structure of power and authority in our multicultural societies? The answers to these questions may be found in an examination of, first, the system of media ownership prevailing and second, the ideological, political, social and cultural orientation of the media's output over time.

Whether, indeed, the media system approximates democratic pluralism may be discerned from diversity in ownership as well as a representation of the diverse interests, concerns and perspectives on public affairs existing in the society, especially of multicultural communities. For, as noted elsewhere, the pluralism of the media is not a simple question of numbers or multiplicity. “...It demands that variety, difference, contrariety and divergence are permitted, tolerated and even encouraged.” [Karikari, 1993, *Africa Media Review*]

Thus, even in the case of Ghana's much-touted acclaim for promoting press freedom, the media system's pluralistic credentials have come under critical questioning by academics and leaders of the media regulatory agencies. [see Karikari in Akpabli, 2020 *Plenty Talk Day 4 Ghana*] Just as democratic governance and culture provide the ideal environment for enabling the harmonious coexistence of all communities in a multicultural society, so does an open pluralistic media system facilitate best the representation and expression of the interests, views and aspirations of all communities in the media.

As inferred above, press freedom and freedom of speech and expression for the citizens are the fundamental conditions for media to function effectively in a democratic multicultural environment. But democracy, specifically press freedom exists in real social, economic, political and cultural conditions that are not always enabling for all and sundry to fulfil those freedoms. Chomsky [quoted in McChesney, p. 83] for instance asserts that “the capitalist media are far more about generating support for elite policies than they are about empowering people to make informed political decisions.” So much so that there is

“incompatibility between a corporate-run news media and an ostensibly democratic society”.

### **Challenges to Press Freedom**

Besides, quite often, the media's freedom and capacity to perform its functions are constrained by social forces and other non-state centres of power. In Ghana today, as we assemble here, there is serious contention between the freedom of a radio station in Kumasi, the second largest city, and the council of the powerful Asante traditional authority whose capital is Kumasi. The king's council, bypassing laid-down constitutional and legal processes, arbitrarily closed down a radio station for broadcasting material the king's men found unpalatable. Other traditional authorities have in recent weeks and months acted similarly with mute silence from all authority instituted under the republican constitution. Such extra-legal obstruction of the media's freedom abounds and occurs in various forms all over, including more violent, and even fatal interventions by other non-state actors.

But, sometimes, it is in the actual process of performing the regular function of reporting or publishing information that may induce the kind of self-restraint that undermine the freedom to exercise independent editorial judgment which then could lead to the insidious practice of self-censorship. This may be provoked by threats and fear of life-threatening dangers from the environment, or by a consideration that the exposure of certain truths or facts may result in unwanted consequences for the public or a section of the community. Several contributions to Pate and Oso's work on “Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting Conflict in Nigeria” [2017, Ibadan, Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited].

The peculiarly violent conflicts that manifest themselves in ethnic and religious forms in Nigeria, for example, seem to induce a tendency to avoid certain factors, even as they may be the truth, to, as it were, avoid inflaming passions, according to other studies. Demarest and Langer, Belgian researchers, note that journalists exercise considerable responsibility in Nigeria media houses “not to overly frame conflict in religious or ethnic terms”, and that the Nigerian media they studied, *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *This Day*, “rarely use inciting language depicting diversity or a particular religious/ethnic group as the cause of conflict”. These same researchers observe in their study that most conflicts in Nigeria “appear to have been caused by the presence of severe political and economic “horizontal inequalities, corruption, and elite competition for resources and power”, but these “underlying structural causes are discussed even less frequently”. The explanation is that, “Nigerian journalists, out of a sense of responsibility, consciously aim to avoid divisive and potentially escalatory language, but that a dearth of capacity and resources impede independent analysis concerning drivers of conflicts.” [Leila Demarest, Armin Langer. *Peace Journalism on a Shoestring? Conflict reporting in Nigeria's national news media. Journalism. Theory, Practice and Criticism. Volume 22 Number 3. March 2021, pp. 671-688*]

A contributor to Pate and Oso's volume {Toyosi Olugbenga Samson Owolabi, p. 96-117} proposes that “The media, through its power of advocacy, can take the attention of the feuding parties away from issues that tend to divide them to those that bind them together and guarantee their joint future.” This suggests, in my mind, that to achieve unity and peace, the media must ignore those issues that triggered the conflict, to begin with. But what if those issues are questions of justice and rights of a community or communities?

On the other hand, however, the essence of the proposition suggests a consideration of the idea that press freedom, and freedom of expression, have limits and may not be exercised at all times. It seems to me that the challenge though is not the exercise of the freedom not to publish or say. The challenge is if exercising that option to say or not to say or publish is freely and independently decided and chosen by the media organization or journalist and in the absence of any external prompting by any force or authority.

### **Conclusion**

The last point though, raises the problems of dilemmas of the exercise of the right to free speech which are much of the time questions of ethics or impositions by forces of intolerance which abound in society all the time. Intolerance is quite often the bane of constraints on the exercise of the freedom of expression and press. But, as a US defender of press freedom put it, quoting US Supreme Justice William Brennan, "... debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials." And that indeed even "false statements are inevitable in free debate". [Bollinger, Lee C., 2010. p. 16]

However this may sound to any of us, the important point is that, in our deliberations on concepts and propositions of rights of freedom and democracy, we do so often by borrowing from traditions, experiences and debates of foreign cultures. The caution, therefore, is that we ought to acknowledge that the development, progress and maturation of these ideas and practices took place over time and using political, cultural and social struggles, conflicts, and controversies in those societies from which we borrow these ideas and ideals.

The lesson from the US, or for that matter, any of the older democracies we borrow from, for instance, is that: "During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both the press and press freedom underwent enormous unprecedented transformations." But "Freedom of speech and press did not expand consistently over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They ebbed and flowed, largely in tandem, with a retreat in times of war and national stress and advance in times of relative peace and prosperity." [Bollinger, p. 45-46]

Thus, the struggles for the freedoms we cherish for our societies, hoping they will enhance, facilitate and promote progress for our peoples, must bear this in mind lest we become despondent when progress is slow, obstructed, derailed or disrupted. The challenge, and the task, as I see it, is: how to continually challenge and refine these ideals and ideas drawing from our peculiar and particular histories, struggles, cultures, traditions and the fundamental interests and aspirations of our peoples for freedom, justice, peace, unity, socio-economic progress, well-being and welfare. For us as intellectuals, the task is how to maintain a commitment to pursuing those principles and ideals and garner and sustain the courage to defend, advocate for and promote them in the face of difficult, and sometimes dangerous, forces and circumstances.

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