

# GLOBALISING SURVEILLANCE: THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Abstract**

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This article examines the role of the media in the society with particular emphasis on Nigeria and its implication for national development. While employing a panoramic view, it takes as a starting point the concept of globalization vis-a-vis the evolution of the mass media in Africa. The article revisits the professional code of conduct and ethics of the Nigerian media within the context of the regulatory powers of the National Broadcasting Commission and the appreciation of gender by the media. The paper argues that popular images of males and females would move away from reflecting or perpetuating gender stereotypes and move toward celebrating differences and enhancing equality, when more attention is paid to the ways in which media content can be used for pro-social ends.

## **Introduction**

Mass media have globally been recognized as the most effective means of causing attitudinal changes in societies. They are widely used in forming and influencing peoples' attitudes towards meaningful development (Omolade, 2005). Akin to the foregoing is the fact that a dialectical relationship exists between mass media and the spate of development in any society. Mass media have also been acknowledged as a powerful instrument for effecting socio-economic changes and remain one of the most useful instrument with which both the government and the governed receive and disseminate information. These encompass the print media such as magazines, journals, dailies, textbooks and electronic media (films, television, radio, computer, fax, internet e.t.c).

In a related vein, globalization may be an emotive concept, but the social reality is that it transcends all spheres of human society. An indisputable reality is that the presence-of modern technology and telecommunications make the match of globalization unstoppable. This situation is one in which the cliché "if you can't beat them, join them;" is apt.

With the fast development in technology in electronic communication and transportation,, everyone in the world has become more interconnected and interdependent. The trend of globalization is developing very fast, and the aspects are very complex. The physical spheres of human activities are being globalized more broadly and deeply than in any other times of history, and this trend in turn has brought about significant changes in various human activities of economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. With globalization, constraints of geography are reduced, while social and cultural interconnectivity across time and space is increased

## **Globalization of Culture through the Mass Media**

The globalization of culture is often imputed to international mass media. Contemporary media technologies such as satellite television and the internet have created a steady flow of transnational images that connect audiences worldwide. It is a commonly-held notion that global media promote the homogenization of cultures whereby teenagers in other parts of the world embrace a western lifestyle like the use of Nike shoes, consumption of coca-cola, and appreciation of rock music.

The predictions of a Canadian Professor, Mashall McLuhan in the 1960s, that television media would create a "global village" where "time ceases, space vanishes." seemed to have come true, but he could not have predicted the degree of globalization and convergence of technology that now exists throughout media communications. The rise of the global media and multinational media companies has since the 1960s greatly influence (if not transformed) the ways in which people think and interact, as well as how they gain access to and communicate information.

The pervasiveness of the mass media in the contemporary world is one phenomenon that could not be ignored. The manner, in which media have expanded globally, yet converged technologically since the mid-1970s, is quite remarkable in its scope and integration. Millions of people now listen to "local" radio from a computer anywhere in the world. Online users can access

video graphics on any one of millions of websites. Without doubt, media are important to globalization; they provide an extensive transnational transmission of cultural products, and they contribute to the formation of communication networks and social structures.

The growth of any media industry is predicated on the economic potential for growth and expansion. The Encyclopedia of Communication and Information , Vol. 2 observed that part of the reason for globalization is not only

the development of technology, but also the growth of multinational companies that seek to expand economic opportunities.

The formation of a global and independent television station known as the Cable News Network (CNN) in 1980 by Ted Turner had enormous influence on viewers around the globe. The CNN, is considered by many people to be the "flagship" for media globalization; as Turner transformed the Atlanta-based company into a credible international news service. By the mid-1980s, various countries began to subscribe to CNN's satellite feeds. In less than twenty years from its creation, CNN (or CNN International) had viewers in more than 150 nations around the world.

The emergence of CNN also sparked the development or expansion of other international news services, including BCC World, a television service started in 1995 that has grown to reach some 167 million weekly viewers in nearly 200 countries. In Africa, the strongest government media monopoly broken in the last decade is that of the radio (Fatoyinbo; 2006). Government authorities have always considered radio and television broadcasting as their own cherished territory, not to be penetrated by private operators. In almost every country in Africa, private radio stations proliferate, most of them broadcasting on frequency modulation (FM) Channels, with relative low output and coverage area. Similar developments, though not so pronounced, have taken place in television, with privatization of ownership and the proliferation of cable and satellite broadcasting or relay stations.

### **A Periscope of the Role of Mass Media**

Dominick (1993), asserted that the mass media play an important role in the transmission of attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. He emphasized that the media, (especially television) may become important socialization agencies in determining the attitudes of young people.

The mass media remain one of the special organizations, which exist in societies to enforce conformity to important norms. It operates as a backup system for social control; reacts to complaints, mediate and socialize the society. It has numerous far-reaching effects on the social and cultural trends in the society. Whether the media is patriotic or cynical is a question of responsibility. It presupposes the idea that the media in the society ought to exercise responsibility in one way or the other. It becomes somewhat pertinent at this juncture to ask the question: what are the roles and responsibilities of the media?

In principle, the media should be responsible to all constituencies in terms of how it reports news, interprets events and mediates social reality, but often the media's interest and the interests of individual journalists clash with other interest in the environment. Murphy (1984).

The media serve as a middle link between the government and the masses and disseminate information between the masses and the government, so as to ensure a well-informed society. In the service of national development, the mass media serves as agents of social change. They facilitate the transition to new customs and practices and in some cases to different social relationships. The bulk of the mass media is not designed to challenge or modify the social and political structure of a nation, either in a one party state or in a democratic society. This is not to underemphasize the ability of minority groups to have their point of view presented in the mass media; rather it is to emphasize that a fundamental impact of the mass media is to contribute to the patterns of social control.

The influence of the mass media is counterbalanced and tempered by that of interpersonal communication among the people and by that of the specialized media that influence the thinking of small groups. Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, made some earlier observations about the comparative influence of mass media and personal acquaintance in decision-making. They concluded that influence does not flow directly from the mass media to the whole population in an even or unbroken chain. Instead, the media influence some individuals, who may in turn influence others. When people have to make decisions, according to this theory, they seek someone among their peers whose opinion they respect.

### **Evolution of Mass Media in Africa**

Mass Media in Africa have undergone tremendous changes in recent time. The monopoly of the mass media by the government is significantly diminishing as a result of the democracy movements of the early 1990s. Radio and television are improving and are gradually becoming powerful instruments for public information and education. Private newspapers are flourishing in virtually every African country. The foregoing claim was very much attested to by Fatoyinbo (2006), that:

"Ten years ago, in most French-speaking countries in West Africa, there was usually just one national daily newspaper; invariably it was government-owned, with a few privately-sponsored newspapers struggling to survive as weeklies, biweeklies and monthlies. Today in a city like Cotonou, Benin, there are over eight daily newspaper - all but one are

privately owned and almost every year, a new title appears on the street."

### **Mass Media in Nigeria**

The mass media plays an important role in the socialization process in the Nigerian society and the world at large. A significant amount of time is spent by the society in reading or viewing books, newspapers, television, radio, magazines and movie. While it has been argued that the media may both reinforce norms and distorts norms by giving the impression that what is transmitted or printed represents a true reflection of the society, the media remains only one of the many sources available to the individual for defining norms. The foregoing lends credence to the view of Mc-Luhan (1992), that " communication and mass media are sources of change — a cause of development of man". The mass media practically remains the major means by which people obtain information about current events outside the scope of their daily experiences. The media in Nigeria has passed through different stages in its performance as a watchdog of the society and in its evolution as the "fourth estate of the realm" especially during successive military regimes. These range from censorship of unfavourable media reports, periodic proscription of notable newspapers, arrest, detention, incarceration and at times assassination of 'vocal' media personnel considered anti-government. The intermittent suppression of the media during this dark period significantly promoted and popularized the tuning in to key foreign cable stations like VOA, BBC *e.t.c* by the populace in a bid to get an alternative view from the government-controlled media. The media in Nigeria covered the transition programmes implemented by Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo (1978-79) and General Ibrahim Babangida (1986-93), extensively; scholars have argued that its pattern of coverage did not promote democratization. The editorial direction and presentation of key political factors of the periods were more likely to consolidate military rule than to facilitate democratic transformation. In fact, the media generally served as an agent of stability for the military instead of being an agent of change to democracy '

Although many organs of the media are today partly or fully owned and controlled by government, it is noteworthy that the earliest organ, the newspaper, began in Nigeria as private enterprise. Throughout the period, 1920 to 1960, Nigeria did not record any daily or weekly newspaper owned by the government. In the 1920s, when the Lagos Weekly Record and their pioneer papers were criticizing the colonial government, the government did not counter their criticisms by establishing its own newspapers. Instead, the government indirectly sponsored a rival private newspaper, the Pioneer, to counter news and comments not favourable to it.

Government-owned newspapers came with independence when the Eastern Region began to publish the Eastern Outlook, the Western Region, Daily Service and the Northern Region, Gaskiya Tafi Kwobo. Today, several Nigerian states have their own newspapers. Until recently, government did not permit the operations of private radio and television stations. One of the reasons for this is the continued political instability in the country. The country since her independence witnessed several coups, bloody electoral violence, a civil war and frequent changes of government, which made some scholars to argue that the authorities had feared that the private electronic media would certainly aggravate rather than abate instability. Within the last one decade, some private radio and television stations have been established in Nigeria, among which are: the African Independent Television

(AIT), Murhi International Television (MITV), Galaxy Television, Silverbird Television, **Rhythm** 93 FM Radio, Star FM Radio *e.t.c*.

### **Gender and the Media**

The important role that the media play in representing and affecting attitudes and beliefs about gender has been documented in a long history of research that has explored not only the ways in which viewers respond to and are influenced by images of males and females. The portrayals of gender by the media have however shown considerable changes over the years, with female characters now receiving greater and more favourable representation.

As media images of men and women in Nigeria continue to progress and as researchers devote more attention to the ways in which media content can be used for pro-social ends, popular images of males and females may move away from reflecting or perpetuating gender stereotypes and move towards celebrating differences and enhancing equality.

### **The Role of Mass Media in Development**

The mass media remains crucial in all regions and climes vis-a-vis democratic processes. In his study of the mass media and the challenges of sustainable democratic values in Nigeria, Ojo (2003), inferred that regional, geo-political and ethnicist imperatives impact negatively on Nigeria's mass media. Of all the media in Africa, newspapers remain the most combative and aggressive in their efforts to develop editorial independence, open up the society, and make themselves relevant. In Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda and Cameroon, not to mention Nigeria under the late General Abacha, newspapers have been confronting the authorities in their efforts to broaden the debate on national issues. Unfortunately, however, Scholars have opined that the focus of many of the newspapers is still overwhelmingly political and personality-oriented, and less on issues of development. There is much superficial treatment of news and information, as the screaming headlines on the front pages of the newspapers more often than not highlight corruption, political infighting, scandals, or family crises of personalities. The mass media, according to

Ojo (2003), needs a mindset and world view that is much more robust and comprehensive than it currently is for it to be a catalyst in sustaining democratic values in a plural and divided society like Nigeria. The media programmes should reflect the highest standards of fairness set by the news media.

Agbaje (2005), submits that it is as instruments in the hands of the ruling class then that one understands the role of the Nigerian media. Whatever ethnic coloration they reflect is a function of the use to which they are put by their owners and their having to serve as mirror of intra-ruling-class competition, which tends to be expressed in ethnic terms.

The Nigerian media are dominated by the ruling class in terms of ownership. By the time, the 1983 election campaigns took off, there were about 30 television stations in the country, 22 owned by the Federal Government (controlled by the NPN), five owned by State Governments loyal to the UPN, two by the NPP and one by the PRP-turned-NPP government of Kano State. There were also 40 radio stations, all again being government-owned, the NPN three, the GNPP-turned-UPN/NPP controlling one each with the PRP-turned NPP Governments of Kano and Kaduna State also controlling one each.

The interlocking of the communication process with public decision-making is virtually illustrated by comparing the role of the media under a dictatorship with that under a democracy. Under a totalitarian regime, the managers of the public media become the apologists for the Head of State. It is an established fact that politics has been a preoccupation of the media in most societies. Since politicians make the basic decisions that control social and economic change, the media more often than not feel it is their duty to report political activities.

In recent years, African journalism has undergone enormous and generally speaking, positive change. Coinciding with the general rise in education levels of the overall population, and especially of professionals, the training of new recruits in African journalism has substantially improved. The minimum educational qualification for young reporters in several countries is now a university degree or a professional diploma. However, the improvement, which has occurred in the formal basic training of African journalists, has not, in most cases led to an upgrading of professional skills.

One of the factors contributing to this paradox is the lack of specialization among African journalists. Unlike what happens elsewhere in the world, the newsroom in Africa are filled with general reporters. These reporters receive daily assignments to cover events and stories in various sectors, which are sometimes complex. The result is that articles are often not based on solid research, or are poorly written and superficial. ( Fatoyinbo: 2006).

Central to the media assuming its desired and constitutional role, as an agent of national development is the question: who watches the watchdog? There is no gainsaying the fact that the society has a legitimate interest in monitoring and indeed moderating the ends to which media power is deployed. The quest to seriously hold the media to its professed mandate as the public watchdog is as old as the history of the media. The first step to give legal teeth to the media in Nigeria was taken twenty-eight years ago when the first press council decree was promulgated. Yet the search for the right type of a media watchdog is far from settled. In his submission on the media and public morality published in the Guardian Newspaper of March 19, 2006 Idowu (2006), opined that a professionally-minded media may not require more than a committed professional association and a vigilant professional journal to remind it of the sacred mandate entrusted by society. He advocated the need to give the media some credible monitoring involving the State and professional stakeholders. It is advisable that editorial conference be held regularly in each media organization where stories would be discussed to ensure that people written about were treated objectively and in a balanced manner

From the challenges of professional practice such as war reporting, ownership, self-regulation, the deteriorating craft of reporting and the encroachment of advertising into news to such ethical issues as corruption, conflict of interest, abuse of privilege and plagiarism, Idowu (2006), affirmed that the media in Nigeria will grow in stature when those who invest in it have a clearer idea of its potential for developing the society, and are more prepared to make adequate investments. It will grow when its operatives insist on a professional grounding as basis for entering it and managing it and the State shows greater capacity for meaningful collaboration.

While occasional rascality cannot be wished away in the media, deliberate falsehood, malicious reporting must be resisted and indeed punished. The media in Nigeria as a veritable instrument of development must be stimulated to hunger for positive recognition; for direction and guidance in the turbulent waters of publishing.

### **Professional Code of Conduct and Ethics**

One of the key challenges faced by the media, especially the print and electronic media in Nigeria, is the problem of balancing the dictate of journalistic professionalism of printing or beaming all stories fit for publication, that is, informing the public of happenings in its environment; and the responsibility of doing so with a measure of fairness, decency and integrity. A good example that could easily be recalled is the ' live coverage' of the *Bellview* plane crash location at Lisa village in Ogun state by the Africa Independent Television (a private Television Station) and the graphic presentation of mangled human bodies scattered about the crash site.

Some media watchers have argued that photographing and filming the deceased (victims of the plane crash) in various stages of undress and decomposition violate the dead and their dignitary rights with the Nigerian culture. While the foregoing may be excusable within the oft frenzied, competitive world of live coverage of disasters, it is advisable

that the guidelines for the broadcast media be reviewed to include the institution of a time delay "when broadcasting live coverage of sensitive and challenging events". Such time delay will only last several seconds to allow editors to cut any particular graphic or offensive images before they are aired.

Equally, responsible reporting at times of disaster, facilitated by specific global guidelines on ethical reporting of disasters can be developed by a joint body of international humanitarian agencies such as the Red Cross, multinational agencies such as the United Nations, media representatives, and media watchdogs like the National Broadcasting Corporation.

In her review of the media report of the *Bellview* plane crash in the Sunday Punch newspaper of November 13, 2005, Dr. Doyin Abiola, opined that the closure of any media organization should be the last resort as it is in the case in other democracies. She reasoned that rather than close down or fight a lawsuit by CNN over showing people left dead by Hurricane Katrina, the USA government allowed the coverage; thereby reaffirming its belief that a democratic government must not hinder the free flow of information.

Without prejudice to the foregoing, the coverage of disasters should not entail encroachment on affected people's privacy and viewers need not be turned into voyeurs of others grief to evoke their humane response to any disaster.

### **Globalization and International Management Exchange on the Media**

This is a system by which media practitioners and managers are exchanged between organizations situated in different countries as part of a process of high-level management development; for a period of time that must be long enough to make the exchange meaningful and the effort worthwhile. The ideal period may be a tour of duty of about two years. It means international posting for a media practitioner/manager to garner better an international exposure. In a well-developed system, it need not be "one on one". It could be multi-dimensional. A direct link exists between globalization and international management exchange. The most ardent exponents of globalization are the large transnational media, which see the whole as its market in terms of coverage and reportage. The restriction that could be placed on them by national authorities is greatly limited by the breakthrough in satellite communications. The principle of International Management Exchange dictates that it must be a global concept in the first place.

There is a considerable difference between attaching a bright and up and coming media manager to the head office of a multi-national media company or a subsidiary company in another country for a period of training and the concept of international management exchange. Attachment has been known and practiced for decades. It invariably means the "Attache" is primarily watching others perform and learning something in the process. Sometimes, the attache is given some limited responsibility under very close supervision. In the case of international management exchange, the concept is one of moving bright young media managers from one country in the world to another, with the ease while giving them responsibility and accountability on the job from day one as advocated by Omolayole (2004). The training and development that follow the process are concomitant to the scheme and not its objective. The objective is excellent performance in different" social and cultural environments.

### **Interface Between Globalization And Cultural Imperialism**

Some Scholars have opined that the international western media are constantly pushing negative stories on Africa as part of their news coverage policy in the Third World countries. The foregoing notion belies the position of some media researchers that the proponents of globalization are agents are cultural imperialism.

In international communication theory and research, the cultural imperialism theory argued that audiences across the globe are heavily affected by media messages emanating from western industrialized countries. Nevertheless, it seems the concept of globalization has in some ways replaced cultural imperialism as the main conceptual umbrella under which much research and theorizing in international communication have been conducted.

It is however, remarkable to note that, there has been a lot of improvement in coverage and report of happenings in Africa in the last decade, as also attested to by the British Prime Minister (Tony Blair)'s Commission for Africa report. Also corroborating this position in his article on *The World at large* reported in the Sunday Punch of November 13, 2005, Jonathan Power asserted that seventeen sub-saharan African countries attained 5% annual growth in 2003. Senegal, Mali and Ghana have had for a number of years steady 5% growth rates. Nigeria has achieved 5% - 6% the last few years, Mozambique 7% - 9%, Botswana 7% -10% and Tanzania near 6% the last four years.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

In response to the dynamics of globalization and media surveillance, it has become imperative for African Leaders to immediately take up the challenge of positively projecting her image and ensuring better media reportage of events in Africa, from an African perspective

It is equally advisable that the Federal Government should integrate communication into public policy, dialogue process and plan the communication strategy and outreach campaigns for public policy dialogue and consensus building. Akin to the foregoing is also the need for the governments of African Countries, especially the democratic ones, to downplay and control the incidence of unbridled media censorship, which significantly hinders

national development.

Having examined the evolution of the mass media in Africa and the role of the media in Nigeria and its implication for national development, there is no gainsaying the fact the media owe the society the responsibility of reporting issues and events accurately without bias. If and where the media err, it should be honourable enough to admit same. The professional code of conduct and ethics of the Nigerian media within the context of the regulatory powers of the National Broadcasting Commission and the right to freedom of expression and the Press should be reviewed accordingly, to accommodate the emerging social realities.

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