Research Article

Towards Improving Governance in Nigeria through the Media

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Although the media is popularly regarded as the fourth estate, it has not reached its potential in Nigeria as a driver of democratic principles. This conceptual analysis sort to interrogate the seeming symbiotic relationship which exists between the media and democratic governance in the country. With the aid of the free press theory, the researcher discovered that forming public opinion, media independence and naming and shaming of corrupt public office holders are crucial to enabling the media play its invaluable role as a catalyst for good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gatekeeping, gatewatching, governance, media, press.

INTRODUCTION

Since Thomas Carlyle made a case for the media as the fourth estate of the realm, and Edmond Burke used it in the parliamentary debate of 1787 on the opening up of Press Reporting of the House of Commons of Great Britain, the media has been on the spotlight. In its agenda-setting feat, the media sets the ball rolling for gatekeeping and gatewatching (Channel, 2010, pp.ii & 3).

This implies that what passes as news or information to the audience is to a large extent determined by the press and its operators. The mass media can influence actions, change the course of events and even destroy (Nkechi & Okereke, 2013, p.33). Generally, the media plays a critical role in society (Egbala, 2014).

Governance

The pros and cons of media practice reveal arguments for and against the media as a force to reckon with in fledgling democracies. As it is true of every human endeavour, there are good and not too good sides of the media. However, the indices of good governance cannot be measured without the critical role of the media. This puts media practice on a high pedestal. Whether the media in Nigeria is still on that high horse is to seen.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND AIM OF THE STUDY

This study reviews the role of the media in fast tracking good governance in Nigeria. Apparently, "owners" of the media or press in Nigeria dictate what information gets to the common man which makes objective reporting a far cry. To any kin observer, the media in Nigeria is controlled by the government, rich individuals (Nkechi and Okereke, 2013, p.36) and religious organisations. Sadly, being in the employment of any media house (private or public) in Nigeria is being a worker in the vineyard of political, economic or religious profiteers (Osueke, cited in Dyikuk, 2014, p.8).

As such, the study seeks to:
1. Investigate the extent to which the media has contributed to democratic governance in Nigeria.
2. Interrogate the excesses of the press in a bid to achieve its agenda setting role.
3. Propose certain ways of revamping the invaluable role of the media towards fostering good governance in the country.

4. Advocate for media independence in Nigeria through balanced and responsible reportage.

CONCEPTUAL SPADEWORK

The Media

As the plural form of the word "medium" which is "a means; a middle quality or degree; something through which a force is transmitted," (Lormer, 1995, p.621) media refers to an interpersonal device used to transmit messages (Rodman, 1948, p.8). Broadly classified as the print which comprises of Newspaper, Magazine, and Periodicals, Electronic Media which includes the Radio, Television as well as the recent arrival, Social Media, mass media is the means by which news information and other news materials are communicated to large audiences. It plays the principal role of informing, educating and entertaining the citizenry (Egbala, 2014).

In this paper, media is conceived as all visual, auditory and audiovisual platforms for gathering, processing and transmission of information to large audiences. These platforms include the print, electronic and social or new media as already indicated.

Governance

In this paper, we shall conceive governance as the ability to manage people and goods and services well. Governance entails a representative process whereby a person is chosen by the people to lead the community. Usually, governance is representative leadership which creates an opportunity where an animator is chosen by the people. The people's choice removes the possibility of the animator usurping power. It is a situation where a leader draws strength from the community and does not act over and above the community.

Since this definition favours democratic governance, this paper understands governance in the light of democratic governance which is usually a representative government. The popular cliché of democracy as, government of the people, by the people and for people credited to Abraham Lincoln, gives democracy its distinctiveness and popularity around the world. Democratic governance operates on representative leadership. Nigeria practices democracy.

Good Governance

In this paper, we shall understand good governance as a representative process through which a visionary and charismatic individual is unanimously chosen by the people to lead the community. Good governance is constituted by a representative process which creates an opportunity for an animator to ensure the equitable distribution of goods and resources as well as freedom of expression for all, especially minority groups. Since good governance is contingent on people's choice, it removes

the possibility of a person usurping power through coercion, manipulation or the barrel of the gun.

To ensure good governance, a good leader draws strength from the community. He or she does not act over and above the community. This is why good governance is often described as the ability to manage people well. Against all criticisms, democracy is the favoured system of governance which fast tracts overall development through what is popularly known in Nigeria as the dividends of democracy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theory is a tested proposition which explains certain phenomena. While there are many theoretical orientations in communication studies, this research adopts the libertarian media theory. Also known as the "free press theory," the libertarian theory is traced to Sierbert, Peterson and Schramm who formulated it in 1963. The theory which is a direct opposite of authoritarian theory is tied to the philosophy of rationalism and natural rights (Asemah, 2011, p.143).

The libertarian theory is traced to the industrial revolution which not only gave rise to urbanization and modernization but as well, created a society that was dependent on the media for new ways of thinking, social relations and economic concerns (Okoye, quoted in Asemah, 2011, 143). Galadima (1999) gives the advantages of this revolution as:

a. It made printing more available to the people and equally cheaper
b. It brought about railways and streams engines, which conveyed people from one place to the other, and
c. It brought about the development of urban areas. This in turn led to the development of more printing press. Because the people needed information, the working class was eager to know what was happening around them (cited in Asemah, 2011, p. 143.).

Starting from the 18th century, the apostles of free press like John Milton, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and John Stuart Mill fought unanimously for freedom of the press. By the 19th century, they had achieved it. They observed that truth was a product of the intellect not the elite and that it is the responsibility of the state to provide the individual the opportunity to reach goals that are socially acceptable. This means that you must not have power before you can determine what is true or false. As such, truth is no longer an instrument of power but a property of the will. Journalists must, therefore, be seen as porters in search of that truth.

Libertarians believe that the press can only function well if it remains a free market of ideas devoid of government control and that the media exist to check on governments. Since this is the case, it is required that they be free from government control (Sambe, 2008, p. 38). As such, they

advocated that the mass media be owned by anyone who can afford it. Built on the two principles of its role as the fourth estate or branch of government and the right to know, the libertarian theory makes the following assumptions:

a. Publications should be free from prior censorship;
b. There should be no compulsion to do anything;
c. Publication of error is protected equally with that of truth in matters of opinion and belief;
d. No restriction should be placed on the collection of information for publication provided it is done by legal means;
e. There should be no restriction on export or import or sending of messages across national frontiers; and,
f. Journalists should be allowed to claim a reasonable degree of autonomy in their places of work (Daramola, quoted in Asemah, 2011, p.146).

The libertarian media theory is anchored on the surveillance role of the media. Accordingly, Asemah, describes surveillance as the collection and distribution of information on events in the environment within and outside the operation of the media. He contends that it falls within the duty of journalists to constantly monitor the environment so as to be able to gather news stories or events that take place in the society. This accounts for journalists been referred to as the watchdog of society. One important example of the surveillance role of the media is the coverage of presidential campaigns (2011, p.12). In like manner, Sambe (2008, p.38) quotes the *New Standard Encyclopedia Dictionary* as defining surveillance as a careful watching of someone or something which is usually carried out either in secret or discreetly. The act is carried out on something so as to prevent it from falling below standard or prevent it from going astray.

Importantly, the author provides us with an extensive resume on the surveillance role of the media upon which the libertarian media theory rests:
The mass media are the eyes and the ears of the public. News media provide information and alert us of the changes that take place around us. The newspaper has long been called the watchdog of the free society. Magazines give extensive coverage on topics that are of special interests to subscribers. Television conveys an impact of immediacy in its news reporting; viewers feel that what they see is happening at the moment, even though they may know that a great deal was recorded earlier on the film or video tape. Radio gives us our most immediate connection with the outside world. We turn to the radio for confirmation of a fast-breaking news, story or denial of a rumour (Sambe, 2008, p.37).

This author argues that the surveillance theory ensures that the media surveys the environment in order to report occurrences such as news stories, development, danger threats to national stability as well as threats to public welfare in order to reduce uncertainties among the audience. This puts the audience in a position of reacting to conflict and change in a rational manner. It does this by scouting around to seek what is referred to as SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity and threat) of a particular environment.

To perform this function effectively, the news media brings news about every facet of life particularly politics. This information helps people to understand government policies and helps them to participate actively in the affairs of the state. In its surveillance role, the media checks the corruption of power by government officials. It also mobilizes, educates and enlightens the citizenry by either surveying or purveying opinion polls as well as political information. Thus:
In performing its watchdog or surveillance function, therefore, the mass media in Nigeria keeps watch over the government, its three arms and the entire society, so as to keep their performances up to the expected standard that would encourage the development of the country. This means that for them to achieve that purpose, all channels of the mass media will enjoy the liberty to publish or express their opinion freely. It is then that they will check on government and the society as expected (Sambe, 2008, p.38).

A major criticism of this media theory is that journalists like every other person, can abuse freedom. They can do this by invading into people's privacy, publishing sensational stories or writing seditious stories. However, the libertarian theory envisages a situation whereby freedom goes with responsibility since journalism is such a noble profession. To this, serious questions such as those raised by Sambe (2008, p.38) come to mind: Is the Nigerian mass media a libertarian media? Has it existed to check on the government? And, is it free from government control? Perhaps the enactment of the *Freedom of Information Act* (FOI) by the Federal Republic of Nigeria concerning media practice provides a clue. Since the libertarian theory proposes a free press, an open market of ideas, a free hand for journalists to ply their trade and survey the affairs of public office holders, this theory is apt to improving governance in Nigeria through the media.

METHOD OF STUDY

This conceptual study draws from existing data on the subject under review to advance scholarship on the role of the media in improving governance in Nigeria. It highlights the high and low points of media practice in Nigeria while advocating for policy-based practices in the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Dynamics of Good Governance

Governance is the process by which power and authority are exercised in a society. Through it, the private sector and citizens' groups articulate their interest, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations. This view is articulated by Tejumaiye and Adelabu when they posited that "governance is about process, not about ends" (2011, p. 63). In a generic sense of the word, "govern means the tasks of running a government or any appropriate entity. Governance is sometimes used as a synonym for government. However, governance is a broader notion than government" (Tejumaiye and Adelabu, 2011, p. 63).

The British Council goes further to establish that governance is the interaction between the formal institutions and those in civil societies. For this organisation, therefore, governance refers to a process whereby elements in the society wield power, authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and social upliftment (Tejumaiye and Adelabu, 2011, p. 63).

According to the *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,* UNESCAP (2009, p. 1), governance is the "process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implanted (or not implemented)." While governance speaks of corporate affairs nationally or internationally, the term is an intermediate one that is often used in international development literature to describe how public institutions control and manage human affairs through facilitation of equitable distribution of resources, formulation of laws and ensuring the freedom of citizens. This affects all the sectors of society.

Good governance aids the processes for making and implementing decisions. It involves not only making "correct" decisions, but also carving out best processes for making those actions. Good decision-making processes and governance forms a nexus that makes for positive effects on various aspects of role clarification, good working relationships, consultation policies and practices, meeting procedures and quality service delivery. Some authors have lend credence to the fact that the concept of governance often emerges as a model of comparative analysis between ineffective economic or political bodies with viable economies and political bodies which centers on the responsibility of governments to meet the needs of the generality of the people instead of a selected few.

In 2000, Agere (quoted in Wikipedia 2014, p. 1) upheld the view that although the meaning of good governance varies from one practitioner to another, in international affairs, it looks into the relationship between governments and markets, citizens, private or voluntary sector and between elected officials and appointed officials. He contends that the World Bank is more concerned with economic reforms and social resource control which is why in 1992, it underlined three aspects of the society which they feel affect the fabric of a nation's governance namely:
1. Type of political regime;
2. Process by which authority is exercised in the management of economic and social resources, with a view to development; and
3. Capacity of government to formulate policies and have them effectively implemented.

In their book *Contesting "good" governance* Ookuha and Rosendahl (quoted in Wikipedia, 2014, p. 1) express the opinion that standards are common to western democracy as measures of "goodness" in government. They used the methods of anthropology to conclude that: "while governments believe they apply the concepts of good governance while making decisions, cultural differences can cause conflict with the heterogeneous standards of the international community."

Characteristics of Good Governance

According to the *United Nations Development Programme*, UNDP (1997, p. 1) *Governance for Sustainable Human Development,* there are nine characteristics of good governance. These characteristics which are also called elements of good governance are:
1. **Participation:** All men and women should have a voice in decision making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively.
2. **Rule of Law:** Legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws on human rights.
3. **Transparency:** Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.
4. **Responsiveness:** Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders.
5. **Consensus Orientation:** Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures.
6. **Equity:** All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.
7. **Effectiveness and Efficiency:** Processes and institutions to improve or maintain their well-being.
8. **Accountability:** Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organisations are

9. accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. This accountability differs depending on organisations and whether the decision is internal or external to an organisation.

10. **Strategic Vision:** Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development. There is also an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.

Types of Governance

For the purpose of this paper, governance is viewed from two perspectives: Despotic (authoritarian) and secular (democratic).

Despotic (Authoritarian) Governance

Despotic governance is an autocratic kind of governance in which the leader either comes into power by force or usurps power through the barrel of the gun. According to Ngara (2004, p. 50 and 52), the authoritarian leader has absolute control, makes all decisions, cannot be questioned, derives authority from power which he uses to control state apparatus and is dictatorial, despotic and tyrannical. Despotic governance is often associated with military interventions in democratically-run states as was the case in Nigeria for many years. Most times, these governments are called juntas since power is snatched and these despots are referred to as rulers not leaders. These kinds of rulerships are run by military decrees. Military humanitarianism in this mould are known for self-styled kangaroo military-courts where both defaulting civilian and members of the rank and file of the armed forces are haphazardly tried and condemned to death.

The days of General Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha were replete with cases of abuse and deaths. For many a Nigerian, the thought of these juntas come with melancholic-remembrance. The annulment of the June 12 elections which denied M.K.O Abiola as winner of the most peacefully conducted presidential elections in the political history of Nigeria readily comes to mind. General Sani Abacha's self-styled dictatorship was a nightmare to Nigerians. The deaths of Abiola and his wife, Kudirat, Ken Saro Wiwa, the Ogoni environmentalist and playwright, Bola Ige and Dele Giwa (the investigative journalist) further call to mind how despotic governance was occasioned by the culture of impunity in Nigeria. The emergence of counter groups like the *National Democratic Coalition (NADECO)* created an excuse for arrest, detention and persecution of those considered as opposition to the junta. This is why:
In reflecting on the legacies of post authoritarianism, it is significant to note that although there has been temptation to equate it with the military, the fact that whether in or out of uniform, the behavioural patterns of dictatorships all over the world are the same at least in terms of intent. What is central is the fact that they govern an unwilling citizenry and then deploy all resources to compel compliance or devise atrocious means of containing what is perceived as oppositions (Kukah, 2011, p. 14).

Bickford (1999), provides us with an account of how despotic regimes seek to perpetuate themselves in power: "post authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Asia and even some parts of Africa have covered a substantial part of the journey and have moved in transitions from dictatorships to designing programmes of democratic consolidation for their countries" (cited in Kukah, 2011, p. 9). Authoritarian or dictatorial regimes have zero tolerance for the media. Through the use of decrees, specific individuals and media firms were targeted for torture and closure respectively.

Primarily, these decrees came as a result of failed business relationships, personal squabbles with the despots in power or lack of loyalty to the junta in power. Some of these decrees were: Concord Group of Newspapers Publications (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree 14 of 1992, The Punch Newspapers (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No 7, 1994, and The Guardian Newspapers and African Guardian Weekly Magazine (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree 8, 1994 (Kukah, 2011, p. 212). Kukah goes on to argue that this is the reason why in the last fifty years, the human race have had to contain with human cruelty through the agency of the state and its instruments of coercion. He captures it more aptly when he states that:
Authoritarianism, of which military and civilian dictatorships are a manifestation, create the socio-political conditions for the perpetration of these inhuman acts. Torture has been seen as a fall out from authoritarian rule. The authoritarian state creates the necessary conditions for the perpetration of torture and other forms of inhuman acts by first producing an ideology which then becomes the new gospel to which all citizens must subscribe. The necessary apparatus and paraphernalia for the sustenance of this ideology are then created by the setting up of infrastructure and institutions which can be deployed to execute the will of the state and its ideology.

He further paints the vivid image of despotic regimes thus:
A personality cult is built around the head of state and sycophancy becomes the norm. Usually, the state then creates *Special Forces* who then act well outside the circle of conventional security agencies. They are usually trained, well equipped, pampered, have more access to financial resources, live in comparison to others and are usually above the law because they have direct access to the inner sanctum of power. The membership of these agencies is fluid and complex. They are usually

answerable either to the head of state directly or his top most security officer. This was what General Ibrahim Babangida wanted to achieve when he sought to create the controversial *National Guard* in 1992 (Kukah, 2011, p. 319).

In a survey titled, ''*The five worst leaders in Africa''* Forbes Magazine (2012, p. 1) gave the following names: Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Mbasogo, Angola's Jose Eduardo dos Santos, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, Swaziland's King Mswati III and Sudan's Omar Al-Bashir. Although he did not make the list, Blaise Compaore who took over in Burkina Faso after Thomas Sankara was killed in a coup met his waterloo on October 31 when over 100, 000 protesters in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulassi ousted him from office to put an end to 27 years of dictatorship.

It would be recalled that Jerry Rawlings took over power through two coups, ruled for over ten years and still went to serve as elected president of Ghana for two terms of 4 years each, while Yoweri Museveni who led the five year rebellion in Uganda and eventually took power in 1986, is still at the helm of affairs – General Sani Abacha wanted to experiment with a similar thing when he met his death in 1998 under mysterious circumstances (Kukah, 2011, p. 343 - footnote 4). In Gambia, it took the International Community and African Union (AU) bring an end to the 22 years in power of former Gambian President Yahya Jammeh.

Secular (Democratic) Governance

According to Lipset (cited in Haralambros and Holbon, 2008, p. 526), democracy is ''a political system which supplies regular Constitutional opportunities for changing the government officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office.'' As such, democratic governance is representative government. The popular cliché of democracy as, *government of the people, by the people and for people* credited to Abraham Lincoln gives democracy its distinctiveness and popularity around the world.

Democratic governance is representative government. Elected representatives drawn from various communities represent the interest of their people through consultations. In democratic governance, elected officers are accountable to the people and could be recalled should they be found wanting. The democratic leader takes decisions after consultation, shares power with senior managers, allows participatory decision-making and co-operative governance, is accountable for actions and decisions and derives authority from the legal system,

the electorate and the political party (Ngara, 2004, p. 50 and 51).

He also maintains that the basic function of government is:
1. To ensure that everyone in the community has access to the basic necessities of life namely; food, shelter and clothing.
2. To ensure that all individuals and groups enjoy the basic freedoms and these include:
a. The right to freedom and security;
b. Freedom of religious belief and opinion;
c. Freedom of expression;
d. Freedom of association;
e. Freedom of movement and residence;
3. To ensure that every citizen enjoys the same human rights, namely:
a. The right to education;
b. The right to be respected as a human being;
c. The right to just treatment by the authorities and law enforcement agents;
d. The right, within reasonable limits, to enjoy the culture of his or her own people and use his or her language.
4. To see to it that the laws of the land are observed and the citizens are protected from those elements, whether human or non-human, that threaten the security of the person.
5. To see to it that social amenities such as hospitals, schools, places of entertainment and policing are provided.
6. To facilitate economic development so that more wealth is provided and there is a better life for all (Ngara, 2004, p. 82).

In a democratic dispensation, the people have a say in the affairs of the state. The hallmark of democratic governance is freedom which touches on religion, association, free press and public opinion among other things. As such, freedom is the launch-pad of democratic governance as it makes for the integral development of the human person. It is within the purview of freedom that every human being grows to his or her full potentials.
According to Powell (1982, p.3), there are five basic criteria for identifying contemporary national democracies worldwide and these include:
1. Legitimacy of government rests on its claim to represent the desires of the citizens. Government exists and is, therefore, accountable to do what the people want;
2. there is regular and competitive electoral process for choosing political leaders and voters can choose from alternative candidates;
3. most adults can participate in the electoral process both as voters and as candidates for election;
4. citizens vote in secret, free from coercion; and
5. citizens and leaders have freedom of speech, assembly, press and organization.

Importantly too, a necessary ingredient of democratic governance is the maximization of human capital development. Globally, it keys into the Millennium Development Goals (MFGs) of the United Nations to press forward the growth of human potentials. As well, at the heart of democracy is the development of the human person around infrastructural development - what is known in Nigeria today as the so-called dividends of democracy. These border on economic growth, healthcare delivery and education, security and safety, food supply and husbandry as well as housing and transport. Good governance unites what Rosengren calls various value orientations such as; religion and politics, arts and literature with economy and technology and scholarship and science. Creating jobs and wealth-creation as well as distribution of goods and services are at the centre of good governance.

Nigeria: A Brief Overview of Democratic Governance

Nigeria has been loosely or broadly segmented into North and South; no thanks to the colonial imperialists. The aim was simply to grease the erstwhile indirect rule system that later bore the golden goose, Nigeria, but whether she will lay the priceless egg is still very debatable. History shows that the indirect rule system suffered a deadly blow in the South due to its failure to offer a more convincing alternative than the established system that hitherto was in existence. The North conversely was the lucky bride as its romance with the colonialists enjoyed conjugal bliss of no small tasteful honey moon. This excited the local emirs already in place poised to facilitate "Divide and rule."

The country has 521 languages. 510 of those "are living languages, 2 are second language without mother-tongue speakers, and 9 are extinct" (Gordon, 2005). From 1914 to 2014, Nigeria sailed through turbulent waters. In the area of governance, military interventions punctured the flow of what would have catapulted the dreams and aspirations of the new-fangled West African State. The sprite of bribery and corruption gave way to a culture of impunity which infiltrated every strata of society. These irregularities set the stage for political bickering, nepotism and sectionalism. Religious fanatics also crept into national life and laid the eggs of discord. These and other reasons fanned the embers of selfishness leading to the civil war that took place from 1967 to 1970. It took the resilience of Yakubu Gowon to declare, "No victor, no vanquished," after the war. From Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 to the incumbent Mohammadu Buhari in 2017, the country has enjoyed democratic governance despite many political hiccups.

Nigeria practices democracy. "The nation has moved from two protectorates to one country made up of three regions, then four to 12, 19, 21, and now 36 states and a federal capital territory along with 774 Local Government Councils. In 1995, the military government adopted one of the recommendations of the Constitutional Conference for that year and created what it called six geopolitical zones. These are; South- West: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo; South-East Zone: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo; North-West: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara; North-East: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe; North-Central: Kogi, Benue, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau, Federal Capital Territory; South-South: Akwalbom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers (Kukah, 2011, p. 341).

The American Presidential system of government being practiced in Nigeria today allows for a President with his Vice President, Upper and Lower Legislative Houses and three tiers of government namely, Federal, State and Local Government. It equally has three distinct but complementary arms of government – the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary.

Since the democratic experiment in Nigeria in 1999 when Olusegun Obasanjo became president, the 54 year-old country has been facing challenges such as power sharing, intra-and-inter ethnic conflicts, religious crises, political upheavals and bribery and corruption occasioned by a weak political class that lacks the will power to fight the culture of impunity.

Against all misgivings, one of the beauties of Nigeria's fledgling democracy is the enactment of the *Freedom of Information Act, FOI* - the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria concerning media practice. Advocacy for this Act was originated by ordinary Nigerians whose extraordinary resilience in the face of serial reversals ultimately earned the respect of the legislators and the elite. The move which began in 1993 encountered setbacks during the Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha military juntas respectively. It however, snowballed into a full blown Act in 2011 in the democratic dispensation of President Goodluck Jonathan (on 28th day of May 2011). It was signed by him and assented by Salisu Abubakar Maikasuwa, Mni, Clerk to the National Assembly on 27th day of May 2011.

The Act makes public records and information more freely available and protects both personal privacy as well public records and information. The FOI protects serving public officers from adverse consequences of disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and establish procedures for the achievement of those purposes. It is under this cover that investigative reporting now thrives as a tool for good governance since investigative reporters have the leverage to access information and dig out facts without fear or favour.

Governments Interference in Media Independence

The presence of government in the media is as old as Nigeria itself if not older. Much as the government has been the god-father in the press in Nigeria, apparently, its

control and dominance over and above private initiatives in this field has merits and demerits.

Merits and Consequences of Government's Involvement in the Media

Studies have shown that the merits of government's involvement in broadcasting. Some of the reasons are:
a) Regulation and management of frequency distribution or signal;
b) Avoidance of inference by foreign powers (media imperialism);
c) Channelling national development to certain objectives based on development media theory of the press; and,
d) Expensive nature of establishing broadcast stations or print outfits.

Despite these seeming plausible reasons for government's participation in the media, certain consequences abound. These we shall also consider (Dyikuk, 2014, p.8).

The consequences of government's participation in the media are:
a) Likely interference in the internal operation of the station or service;
b) Overdependence on foreign programmes;
c) Lack of competition, d) Waste of money due to bureaucracy (redtapism); and,
e) Unprofessionalism since government's interference does not encourage creativity. Most times bureaucratic organs like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) militates against progress as far as private ownership and objective reporting are concerned (Dyikuk, 2014, p.8).

"Owners" of Media Outfits in Nigeria

Establishing a media house (print or electronic) is very expensive. Despite this economic handicap, some individuals own media outfits. Because of the cost implication, not many persons own such even if they want to. No thanks to the high cost, on the television broadcast, we have stations like African Independent Television (AIT), Channels Television, Silverbird; we have radio stations like RayPower, Rhythm FM, Joy FM to mention a few; the list on the print equivalent include Magazines like TELL, Verbatim, Newswatch International, *TheNews* and Ovation; some Newspapers include, Daily Trust, Sun, The Nation, Punch, Guardian et cetera. Most of these media firms are owned by ex-military officers, political heavyweights or business tycoons (Dyikuk, 2014, p.8).

Despite the large open market in Nigeria, the challenge of finance keeps dwarfing the potentials of media establishments in the country. Aside from government-owned media outlets, a substantial percentage of the media is owned by a few moguls whose business in the media is plainly financial (Nkechi and Okereke, 2013, p.36). This is where patronage comes in – instead of using the media for disseminating information, education, entertainment and mobilization, it is used for advertising corrupt politicians as saints to be elected into the heaven of public offices.

In this case, the media becomes self-serving and too patronising. Journalists or broadcasters are limited in what they can do as the *big oga* keeps giving instruction on which news should be carried or not; which personality-profile be broadcast – sometimes, important national events are compromised as regards media coverage for event of cronies. Since the business-angle supersedes objective all-round reportage, primetime is used for highly paid advertorials. News slots of what is of benefit to the Nigerian masses is subverted for programmes that promote the Chief Executive Officer, (CEO) or Managing Director (MD) and his ilk.

The third cadre of those who "own" the media in Nigeria is religious organizations. Arguments for and against this are compelling but are beyond the scope of this study. The focus here is excessive use of the media for religious purposes otherwise known as aggressive-televangelism. The fact that huge money is involved and most religious organizations get both local and international donations from members, most religious bodies either own media outfits or buy substantial time or slots for evangelism.

Without prejudice to its merits, what stands as a pitfall here is radical indoctrination and insensitivity to the faith-beliefs of others. Most free-to-air cable channels are rife with ideological and hypnotic homilies and miracles with little information meant for personal edification and salvation. The emphasis is on miracles, anointing and breakthrough. Recruitment for work as a media-person in these religiously-inclined stations is mostly based creed – there is often one instruction, "you either fan the flames or be fired" (Dyikuk, 2014, p.8).

The Media as a Catalyst for Good Governance in Nigeria

Media as the fourth estate of the realm constitutes vehicles for mobilization and crusading for social change. Journalism in its agenda-setting programs sets the ball rolling for gatekeeping and gatewatching. Whether it is the traditional or new media, investigative journalism impacts on governance. For instance, with the development witnessed in post-modern period in the media environment, social media is now referred to as the fifth estate of the realm; the first four being the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the mainstream media (Nwabueze, 2014, p.175). The fifth estate is a ''concept used to recognise the emerging socio-political significance

of the social media in the modern world as a powerful tool for communication, sensitization, and awareness-creation, contributing immensely in shaping the nature of governance in society'' (Nwabueze, 2014, p.176).

This assertion opens a window for citizen journalism, a situation where non-professional journalists work hand-in-hand with professional reporters in shaping democracies around the world. To this end, Al-Rodhan states that: ''today, information and news, public policy, and national and international political discourse are no longer the exclusive domain of politicians and professional reporters. The emergence of blogs has allowed regular citizens with no political or journalistic background to reach substantial web audience, make their voices heard, and have a real effect on the public '' (2007, p.4) as well as public opinion. The media is in the fore front of social and political transformation. On the print platform, magazines such as *Newsbreed* and *Newswatch* had trailblazed the journalism of confrontation as well as investigative reporting. *TELL* magazine which was parented by journalists from *Newswatch* came to the fore thanks to the indomitable efforts of Dele Giwa (founder and first editor-in-chief) and his colleagues, Dan Agbese, Ray Ekpu and Yakubu Mohammed (Kukah, 2011, p. 485). Although *TELL* magazine branded its kind of journalism as *advocacy* or *guerrilla journalism,* the underlying current is that *Newswatch, TELL,* and other new magazines on the newsstand in Nigeria like *Verbatim* magazine are all investigative news magazines.

In his book *Witness to Justice:* Appendix V – *The media and human rights: A case of TELL,* Kukah emphatically states thus:
Perhaps, more than any other institution, the media has always stood out as the major contributor to the struggle for the return to civil rule. The stories of victims and perpetrators are told through the media. Whatever contributions institutions such as the faith communities, individuals and groups have made may not have been impacting if the media had not highlighted these contributions in the course of the struggles. Victims of the excesses of the state through its security agencies depended on the media to draw attention to these excesses. Their conditions were exposed by the media. It is to the media that we have had to turn even in seeking documentary evidence of these realities. The contributions of this single agency cannot be quantified (2012, p. 484).
The above submission lends credence to the fact that investigative reporting has a role to play in good governance. In fact, the mass media in Nigeria played a critical role in ousting the military from power (Nkechi and Okereke, 2013, p.36).

Nwabueze (2012, p. 16-22) outlines nine points which he describes as the back-bone of the watchdog role of the media in any society:
1. Investigative reporting leads to changes in the society: The content of investigative reporting can lead to policy change or tremendous development in the socio-political and economic spheres of society. The investigative report by *Sahara Reporters* in 2014 exposing the public treasury by buying expensive cars of the former minister of aviation Mrs. Stella Odua which led to her replacement by President Goodluck Jonathan is a case in point – although the court later declared her guiltless.
2. It encourages transparency and accountability in public office: Investigative reports keep public office holders on their toes. Naming and shaming of corrupt public officers makes people afraid of the stigma often associated with such dubious acts. Hence, it brings sanity to civil service and democracy.
3. It makes the media more credible: It does this where investigative reporting expose injustice or negative effects of government policies or inaction(s). A typical example was the exposure of the deplorable condition of Police Training School, Lagos by Channel's TV in 2013 which led to President visiting the college – at the end of the day, the college was given a facelift.
4. It helps the media play the watchdog role: Because of its painstaking effort of exposing corruption in the society, the media is truly the watchdog of society. Its whistle blowing is such that it makes people conscious of their actions which makes for a better society.
5. It increases competition among the media: Media experts and journalists are agreed about the fact that the audience is more attracted to indepth investigative news stories. Since no one wants to be out of market, both broadcast and print media houses seek to engage in investigative reports to satisfy the audience and remain relevant.
6. It brings about increase in sales volume: Cases abound where indepth investigative news stories have had to be reprinted by some media houses because of patronage and huge sales. While this increases sales for print medium, it increases the audience size for broadcast.
7. It widens the scope of a free press: Since there is no hard and fast rule about the coverage of investigative news stories, their coverage which enables the investigative news reporter to explore areas and places in search for facts allows for a wide range of freedom. The reporter is able to search through both reachable and difficult sources.
8. It curbs excesses of a free press: The competitive nature of the media space forces journalists to sharpen their skills in investigative reporting so as to remain relevant – failure in this regard leads to loosing of the desired audience and redundancy.
9. It fosters development in any society: Since investigative news stories are covered in the interest of the common good and all, it serves to protect society from those who steal from public treasury and so leads to development. Through investigating reporting, policy makers are able to channel attention on development and meeting the needs of the

populace. It also fosters development communication - That is, "…the conscious packaging of messages with a view to empowering the target audience with relevant information on how to participate in the development of their environs and the society at large" (Nwabueze, 2012, p. 21).

Accordingly, to underscore the place of investigative reporting for good governance in Nigeria, Sambe (2008, p. 38) surmises that: "in performing its watchdog or surveillance function, therefore, the mass media in Nigeria keeps watch over the government, its three arms and the entire society, so as to keep their performances up to the expected standard that would encourage the development of the country."

There was never a time in the history of Nigeria that the media faced a backlash or near annihilation like during the military. At various times, the military closed down some media houses which exposed their excesses. For instance, *TELL* reported how distributors, agents, vendors and printers in Lagos, Ogun and Oyo states were under constant harassment by the junta – a word the magazine used to describe military regimes. Particularly, the magazine notes that:
The junta's security goons are having a field day suppressing all voices of dissent. While some have closed up shop to avoid jungle justice, others have gone underground. But unfortunately for the regime, a more darling group has come out with a private radio which claims to be operating offshore from the Atlantic Ocean – what this has proved is that a whisper suppressed today may turn out to be the whirlwind of tomorrow. As the story indicates, more innocent people in Lagos would suffer for the emergence of Radio Freedom (that's the name). Very soon, sellers of pocket radios, walkmans, car stereos and digital satellite receivers would be the targets of the super-wise security men who would want to know why they are selling "anti-government" products (*TELL*, No. 24, June 10, 1996, p. 7).

This graphic presentation demonstrates not only the role which the media played in the return to civil rule in Nigeria, but the price journalists paid for the country. OnomeOsifo-Whisky, (cited in Kukah, 2011, p. 493) one of the founding fathers and directors of *TELL* has this to say: "By 1993, we were then about to know what it mean (sic) really to stand as an *adversary press.* In August 15, 1993, the SSS and the police came together and tore down all these doors." It will be recalled that the same magazine reported the 24th week in detention of its editor-in-chief, Nosalriebor who was arrested on December 23, 1995 (*TELL*, No. 24, June 10, 1996, p. 30).

It is important to note that on the one hand, the magazine was out to set an agenda for the country. On the other, the military did not find it funny. This picture is better painted in the words of Dare Babarinsa, one of the founding fathers of the magazine:

At that time many people did not believe that Babangida had a hidden agenda, different from his own transition programme. And this magazine brought this to the front burner, that there was a hidden agenda, that the transition programme was going to be scuttled and that the government was doing everything to destroy that transition programme. So we were labelled as opposition press. Those who perceived us with scepticism originally when they were seeing the handwriting on the wall, now regarded Tell as an authority in political transition programme (Kukah, 2011, pp. 492-493).

That is not all, the second generation journalist adds that: So I will say that by 1991 when we did the story on the imperial presidency, it was one of the thing (sic) that started, then the interview with Olusegun Obasanjo, in 1992. "Babangida's regime is a fraud." … all the convoluted system that finally resolved to an emergence of political parties, in which the government itself was given birth to as political parties, an unbelievable system, I don't think that had ever happened in any part of the world. Nigeria, the entire country was put into an experimental laboratory for political engineering that was based on fraud. So at that point on, we were practicing Advocacy journalism to ensure the birth of a properly (sic) democracy. Unfortunately, that was not to be (Kukah, 2011, p. 493).

As a corollary, *TELL* quoted Archbishop John Onaiyekan, now Cardinal, as saying: "those who rule should not forget that opposition to the ruling authorities does not really mean disloyalty to the nation or lack of patriotism. No one has the monopoly of the truth and that is why everyone should be allowed to have his or her say" (*TELL*, No. 24, June 10, 1996, p. 30).

Since media information is the basis for forming public opinion upon which governance feeds in functional democracies like Nigeria, Galadima and Goshit made a case for the "agenda-building" praxis which Lang and Lang (1983) coined as a derivative of the agenda-setting function of the media (2013, p.163). They report that Lang and Lang, in their seminar work, described agenda-building as a collective process whereby the media, government, and the citizens influence each other in a reciprocal manner in the evolution and formulation of public policies through consensus-building which is the common denominator. The major premise of agenda-building is that media power is to be harnessed primarily for the identification and definition of social agenda for public discourse (Galadima and Goshit, 2013, p.164). This becomes the driving force of every true democracy. Although the emergence of citizen journalism keeps challenging the traditional media, it is up to professional

journalists to maintain their traditional role as gatekeeper, in framing and presentation (Channel, 2010, p.6). The media has contributed to the advancement of democracy in Nigeria in the following ways:

1. The media has demonstrated the power for the identification and definition of social agenda for public discourse in the country in that Nigerians are more politically aware.
2. The media has been able to enhance public debate, freedom and political participation (Sonay, 2017, p.1) of the masses in national development especially during the 2015 General Elections.
3. Although unregulated, the internet and new technologies have given Nigerians enormous opportunities for community exchange (Sonay, 2017, p.19) and also challenging political office holders to accountability.
4. Since it serves as an impartial umpire during political campaigns and elections, the media in Nigeria is looked upon as an agent for social transformation and as the last hope of the common man.
5. From independence through the civil war, military juntas and the advent of democracy in 1999, media has always been at the fore front of the struggle for national development through their reports, opinion and commentaries (Egbala, 2014).

Role of the Media in the 2015 General Elections

There is no other time in the history of politics in Nigeria that the media was a force to reckon with than during the build up to the 2015 general elections which brought incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari and his Vice, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo under the aegis of the All Progressives Congress (APC). In what appeared as the crescendo of political awareness in the country, the masses backed by political bigwigs sort to change the narrative of impunity, bribery and corruption as well social and economic insecurity which truncated national growth in the country. The election came a time when Nigeria's democracy was gradually being deepened due to the confidence of the electorate on the electoral process by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Also, the 2015 election came to the fore because of the great challenge it posed to all Nigerians especially the Nigerian Media. The security threat posed by the Boko Haram sect which plagued most North-Eastern States of the country future left Nigerians with little or no option than to look for an alternative (Egbala, 2014, p).

To achieve this, the APC, aware of the impact of the media, resorted to the use of social and new media platforms to saturate the cyberspace with the "Change slogan." Aware of the penchant of young people for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp to mention just a few, the party exploited the media to its advantage. Interestingly, politicians from the two parties kept using the traditional media to oppose and attack each other in an unwholesome manner. Unfortunately, some media houses took sides with politicians from their political-party which ended up reducing their credibility in the eyes of well-informed audiences.

That notwithstanding, by the time the elections were near, even the village woman was chanting "Change! Change!!" Therefore, when the elections in which the APC defeated the incumbent People's Democratic Party (PDP) President, Goodluck Jonathan were over, it did not come to many as a surprise. Suffice it note to that the packaging of the current ruling party in terms of its election campaigns were appealing as Nigerians were tired of the old "regime" and wanted trying something else. The mechanism of media-saturation as a handy tool helped delivering victory to the government of the day.

Challenges of Media Practice Vis-à-Vis Good Governance

Neither media practice nor good governance comes easily. In its bid to make for good governance, certain bottlenecks stand in the way of the press. For instance, media experts and academics are agreed about the challenges of journalism, which include:

1. Dangerous and risky: Unearthing corrupt practices in high and or low places as well as uncovering what perpetrators would rather no one knows about comes with a price. As it was earlier noted, the untimely death of the former Editor-in-Chief of *Newswatch* Magazine, Dele Giwa, through a parcel bomb in Lagos, Nigeria is linked to an investigative story the veteran journalist was embarking upon of some military top-shorts who were involved with hard drugs around mid, 1986 (Ganiyu, 2010, p. 130). Giwa was out to ensure the return to civil rule takes place in Nigeria at the time but unfortunately met his untimely death.
2. Involves cross checking sources: Investigative reporting involves cross checking facts with reliable sources to ascertain that two or more sources correspond. When two or more sources are consulted and compared, truth is nearer home. It is then a conclusion can be drawn from the existing data at hand. Investigative news stories concerning shady deals of top government officials have to be investigated through and through to be sure of the sources and veracity. Public office holders also have to be careful so as not to attract the attention of the media.
3. Time consuming and expensive: Since a good investigative story involves checking and cross checking of facts, it is time consuming. As against conventional or straightforward news stories, investigative reporting takes months and sometimes years to fully uncover. This means that there is no rush or haphazard investigation. The investigative reporter ought to take his or her time to do an all-round

investigation. Investigative stories also involve long travels and finances to cover as well giving tips to those who may demand for such before they provide the much needed information.

4. Backing stories with original documents: It is essential to not only get photocopies of documents related to the matter under investigation but originals as well. This will add credibility to the story. Photocopies could be counterfeited but insisting on getting originals of certificates or documents will in the end vindicate the journalist should there be any litigation when the story gets to the eye of the public.

5. Courting unofficial sources: While it is good to rely on official sources of information like government officials/parastatals, the police or public and private chief executives, it is important to court unofficial sources of information as well. Sometimes, vital information concerning a story may be forgotten from rumours or gossips in beer parlous, restaurants or night-clubs. The onus lies on the investigative reporter to carefully discern what he/she is looking for.

Media practice enables a journalist to make judgement based on facts and evidences and so, provides a guilty party. This only comes about when a journalist is caught up by a righteous indignation in favour of the poor who are not in the wrong.

Nwabueze (2012) provides what could serve as an antidote to these stumbling blocks in media practice: The police be informed in the event of threat to the life of a journalist, his family, the media house or its employees; group investigation should be considered where potentially dangerous stories are concerned; reporters should seek alternative sources of information if a particular source proves hostile; reporters be motivated by a good salary to make them embrace investigative journalism; security officials/public officers should be reoriented to work with the press and not see reporters as enemies; reporters should know when to operate undercover; reporters should be careful so as not to always be seen in joints or other familiar hangouts.

Comparative Analysis of Previous and Current Studies of the Role of the Media in Good Governance

Previous Studies	Current Studies
1. In 1996, private radio stations operating offshore from the Atlantic Ocean called Radio Freedom fought the military junta to a standstill.	1. The media fosters development communication through conscious packaging of messages with a view to empowering the target audience with relevant information on how to participate in the development of their environs and the society at large (Nwabueze, 2012, p. 21).
2. The emergence of blogs has allowed regular citizens with no political or journalistic background to reach substantial web audience, make their voices heard, and have a real effect on the public '' (2007, p.4).	2. The mass media in Nigeria played a critical role in ousting the military from power (Nkechi & Okereke, 2013, p.36).
3. In performing its watchdog or surveillance function, the mass media in Nigeria keeps watch over the government, its three arms and the entire society, so as to keep their performances up to the expected standard in ay that encourages development of the country (Sambe, 2008, p. 38).	3. Investigative reporting expose injustice or negative effects of government policies or inaction(s). A typical example was the exposure of the deplorable condition of Police Training School, Lagos by Channel's TV in 2013 which led to President visiting the college – at the end of the day, the college was given a facelift
4. It is up to journalists to maintain their traditional role as gatekeepers, in framing and news presentation (Channel, 2010, p.6).	4. Through agenda-building the media harnesses the identification and definition of social agenda for public discourse (Galadima & Goshit, 2013, p.164).
5. Investigative journalism has a role to play in deliberative democracy through informing the public, thus opening up issues and topics for debate" (UNDP, 2010, p.1).	5. Investigative reporting leads to changes in the society. The investigative report by *Sahara Reporters* in 2014 exposing the public treasury by buying expensive cars of the former minister of aviation Mrs. Stella Odua which led to her replacement by President Goodluck Jonathan is a case in point – although the court later declared her guiltless.
6. Journalists engaged in advocacy journalism to ensure the birth of a proper democracy in Nigeria (Kukah, 2011, p. 493).	6. The fifth estate as a concept recognizes the emerging socio-political significance of the social media in the modern world as a powerful tool for communication, sensitization, and awareness-creation, contributing immensely in shaping the nature of governance in society'' (Nwabueze, 2014, p.176).
7. On the print platform, magazines such as *Newsbreed* and *Newswatch* had trailblazed the journalism of confrontation (Kukah, 2011, p. 485) to change the status quo.	7. Since 1999, the media has been at the fore front of the struggle for national development through their reports, opinion and commentaries (Egbala, 2014).
8. Journalists paid the price for democracy (Kukah, 2011, p. 493).	8. The media has been able to enhance public debate, freedom and political participation (Sonay, 2017, p.1) of the masses in national development especially during the 2015 General Elections.

| 9. The media has always stood out as the major contributor to the struggle for the return to civil rule (Kukah, 2012). | 9. The internet and new technologies have given Nigerians enormous opportunities for community exchange (Sonay, 2017, p.19) and also challenging political office holders to accountability. |

Source: By author

The table above as arranged by the author presents a comparative analysis of previous and current studies of the role of the media in good governance. Since it indicates that the media played a pivotal role in the return to democracy in Nigeria, the research agrees with the views of these authors that the media indeed is indispensable to improving governance in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The media in Nigeria can impact positively on good governance if it lives up to its responsibility. This study proposes six basic steps towards improving governance in Nigeria through the media namely through:

1. Forming Public Opinion: "Investigative journalism has a role to play in deliberative democracy through informing the public, thus opening up issues and topics for debate" (UNDP, 2010, p.1). This can be achieved through media campaigns by the National Orientation Agency (NOA), INEC and other relevant government agencies aimed at rebranding peoples mindsets towards civic duties and public office as a place of service not looting.

2. Initiating Public Debates: The press in Nigeria will cease to be the proverbial toothless bulldog which cannot bite if it engages in initiating meaningful debates for public office holders. These fora should be where seasoned journalists will, in the mould of BBC's Steven Sackur, put these public servants on hot seat by asking them straight questions about their mission and vision for the people they are representing. The power of the media is noted through its ability to reach the masses and create public debate, thereby becoming an essential tool in the process of deliberate democracy (UNDP, 2010, p.1).

3. Thorough Investigation: The numerous cases of bribery and corruption in the country are as a result of the dearth for investigative journalism in the country. Most media houses are quick to publish unvaried reports to the unsuspecting public. Because some journalists are lazy, news commercialization becomes an escape route for reporting stories. The onus lies on operators of media firms to ensure that only stories which have been verified are published. As Sackur (2017) opines that "a good interview starts with exhaustive research and ends with intense exchanges that can be a revelation."

4. Proper Legislation: To end the ugly trend where the media sits on the face when it should be up and doing, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the Nigeria Press Council (NPC) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) must be on top of their game by sanctioning media houses which compromise or do not measure to international standards. Effective mechanisms have to be introduced to improve transparency in election and enable people have access to information and activities of government (p.286).

5. E-Governance/Voting: For the media to play its role as a driver of social and economic transformation, the introduction of E-Governance and E-Voting remains an imperative. This would ease access to information as well as enhance transparency in governance.

6. Naming and Shaming: Nigerian politics will change if political office holders are named and shamed. This naming and shaming would involve making sure that those suspected of looting the common wealth are investigated and tried and if found guilty, are made to face the music.

7. Media Independence: Since this study has disclosed that the media in Nigeria is being controlled by the government, business moguls and religious bodies, it behoves the relevant government agencies to ensure the independence of the media-in the country. This would not only enhance media practice in Nigeria but allow media practitioners hold onto journalistic-ethics while mobilizing society towards entrenchment of democratic principles. The spirit and letter of the *Freedom of Information Act* should always be invoked.

CONCLUSION

The media has no doubt made a tremendous impact in all aspects of human life. It has made the ordinary Nigerian information-conscious and more politically aware. People no longer depend on news sources for information but are able to access and interpret what happens around and beyond them. It has been established that given the chance, the media is a driver of social and economic advancement of any country. This is possible if the required checks and balances are in place. This also entails invoking the timeless creed of media practice namely, objective and balanced reportage.

This paper has demonstrated that the pivotal role of the media in society hinges on social responsibility which the free press theory promotes. As the fourth estate, the media in Nigeria puts politicians on their toes so as not to take their constituents for granted. Thanks to the media, facts can now be validated, ideas could be exchanged, learning can be accessed, political power is demystified and good governance made possible.

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