

HOW THE MEDIA HAS ENHANCED POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

BERNICE SANUSI (PhD)

**Department of mass communication
Redeemers University Ede, Osun State, Nigeria**

&

ABIODUN OLAREWAJU

**Department of mass communication
Redeemers University Ede, Osun State, Nigeria**

Abirewaju@gmail.com

+2348050501944

&

OPEYEMI ONIGBINDE

**Department of mass communication
Redeemers University Ede, Osun State, Nigeria**

Abstract

The impact of the media in enhancing political development in Nigeria has been examined in this paper. Using the agenda-setting theory as support, the paper examined the roles of the media, media and political education, and the impact of media on Nigerian political development over time. The study made use of secondary sources of data, where relevant extant literature was reviewed along the objective of the study. However, only the positive impact was looked into. The paper concludes with recommendations on how the media could be more effective and efficient in enhancing the political theatre of Nigeria.

Keywords: Impact, Media, Enhancement, Political Development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

As the general population often relies on the media to supply information about political concerns, social issues, entertainment, and pop culture news, the media has always played key roles across the world. Media freedom and independence in developed democracies are higher when it comes to reporting. According to Oyesomi *et al.* (2014), the media are vehicles of communication that may concurrently reach diverse audiences with consistent messages. There are two categories of these varied communication technologies: conventional media and new/digital media. The three forms of traditional media are print (newspapers, books, magazines), broadcast (television, radio), and cinema (movies, documentaries) while internet and mobile mass communication (email, social media sites, websites, and internet-based radio and television) are referred to as the new or digital media (Abdalla, 2016).

Media offers additional opportunities to connect with a community, target a particular audience, and engage consumers in conversation. According to Tutel (2015), social media is essential for connecting politicians and citizens with one another and giving them easy access to the information they require. Siluveru (2015) made an effort to sift through the data about social and digital media in political communication and came to the conclusion that social media is utilized for fostering social connections and informing users of events. As one of the effects of political development, Stieglitz *et al.* (2016) examined how media is used for political

communication and discovered a close connection between politicians and the citizens through the media.

It is commonly asserted that the media serves as the fourth arm of government, a watchdog, a protector of the public interest, and a link between the rulers and the ruled. It is thought that knowledgeable citizens are good for democracy. Politics-savvy citizens frequently make choices that are reflective of their actual interests. Citizens can easily access a wealth of information by watching the news, listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, using the internet, or using social media (Lindstedt & Naurin, 2017). This information can support and improve government performance and accountability (Snyder & Stromberg, 2018), as well as lessen corruption (Natamba *et al.*, 2018).

Similarly, Joshua (2020) stated that the open and quick flow of information, which has promoted liberty and enhanced human potential, is the primary indication of media technology. The freedom of speech and expression is an inalienable right. These technological advancements have affected politics more than anything else, as well as trade, culture, and religion (Okoro & Nwafor, 2015; Ashiekpe & Mojaye, 2017). The ability to easily express one's opinions about the government, the ability for the general public to perform checks and balances on public officials, the ease with which the general public can demand probity, transparency, and accountability in government, and the promotion of higher levels of political engagement among users are all factors that contribute significantly to ensuring political development in the society (Joshua, 2020).

Folarin (2018) asserted that the media has been used by countries, organizations, and individuals all over the world to draw in voters and raise political engagement among the general population in order to sustain political progress and stability. It has also been extensively demonstrated that media in a country like Nigeria may stimulate and boost political involvement. During general elections, politicians, political parties, and the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) typically labour furiously to engage Nigerians through the media; television channels, radio stations, and social media platforms. The media have been used to coordinate some of the most effective social campaigns against perceived government failures, including the removal of fuel subsidies, commercializing the Nigerian National Petroleum Commission (NNPC), banditry, kidnapping, and others (Joshua, 2020), which have come into effect through policies made by the political class.

Seemingly, Mahmud and Amin (2017) and Ittefaq and Iqbal (2018) highlighted how media has a favourable impact on political growth and transformation in Nigeria. Their findings unmistakably demonstrated how broadly the media was used as a communication network between politicians and voters as well as across other political regimes. Therefore, the media plays a crucial role in political development of Nigeria through education and mobilization, thereby enhancing general participation of both the ruling class and the ruled in the political theatre of Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

An essential component of a democratic political culture is the involvement of the masses in the political process, which according to Obasanjo (1992), members of a community's knowledge and engagement are often impacted by their attitudes, sentiments, abilities, and

exposure to political information. DeVreesea and Boomgaarden (2016) argue that cognitive orientation or political awareness about a country's political system is crucial to its political growth and level of citizenship.

Researchers in the fields of communication, political science, and other social sciences have focused on the issue of how people with little political expertise might become better informed about politics through media exposure. To be considered politically engaged, a person must have a high level of political awareness, however most individuals do not appear to have the necessary political knowledge to satisfy the requirements of a "competent citizen" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Reichert, 2016). Since most people only utilize the media for amusement, it has been shown that many residents are unaware of national politics, news, and current issues.

According to Bathelt (2015), political growth happens when citizens are politically aware, observant, outspoken, and skilled enough to understand and assess their own interests and take action to defend them in political contexts. This is due to the fact that political growth has aided citizens in learning about historical events, improving their understanding of how current events are affecting their communities, and developing plans for how to contribute to more stable and consistent politics in the future. Additionally, it encouraged support for democratic ideals, facilitated confidence in the political system, and encouraged political engagement by assisting individuals in achieving their own goals and making decisions that were consistent with their views and preferences (Galston, 2011).

Therefore, from the colonial era to the current democratic system, Nigeria's media have served as sources of political information and a forum for political growth through participation and discussion. In light of this, social scientists and media experts have focused on how the media affects a nation's political evolution. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate how Nigeria's political development has been impacted by the media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past studies on the media and political development will be reviewed, particularly the roles of media on politics in Nigeria, media and political education, and the impact of the media on politics in Nigeria. The review has been done under different subheadings. Also, the Agenda-setting theory of mass communication is used to hinge the study.

a. Roles of the Media in Politics in Nigeria

i. Monitoring of Government

The Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) guarantees the freedom of the mass media to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people. Thus, it can be said that one of the media's fundamental roles in society is to watch the government. Despite this, Nigerian broadcast media have historically fallen short in this regard. According to Anderson and Ross (2018), this may be ascribed to the long-standing government monopoly on control of the broadcast media. However, given today's fast evolving media environment as well as political situations, the function of the media in monitoring government and governmental operations has become increasingly crucial. The public is now more informed about governmental policies, actions, and lack thereof under various regimes of governance because to the growth of social media and other

internet outlets (Shaw and Maxwell, 1977). Additionally, it has widened the communication gap on a range of national political issues between the government and the populace.

Similarly, the media can keep tabs on, track down, and report on governmental activity using a variety of methods. The ability to compare and contrast current political activity with the past is another benefit of media monitoring. As a result, the media has promoted political growth and awareness through media monitoring services, enabling decision-makers and the general public to acquire correct information, new trends, and popular opinion in the nation.

ii. Grassroots Appeal

According to reports by Akin (1991), 70% of Nigerians live in the rural areas and 95% of them are illiterates. This suggests that rural areas are crucial to the nation's political life and, as such, should receive more attention in terms of programming and connections to the city. The requirement for the broadcast media to inform and educate the public is closely related to this. Disregard for this has over the years resulted in the deceit of the common people by unpopular politicians who buy their votes with salt, milk, and other provisions before abandoning them to their fate once in government (Ebisemiju, 2017).

The political appeal and grassroots mobilization have benefited greatly from the media; with every community involvement or issue-based campaign, grassroots mobilization changes. Such political mobilization has developed over time a strong political involvement, a thriving fan base, better election finance, and the spreading of different political party manifestos (Abdulrauf, 2016).

The political analyst, Frantz Fanon made a point in 1987 when he asserted that "the people must know where they are going and why a specific course has been embarked on. The political class is supposed to inform the public about the various parties, figures, and their programs through electronic media. Lazarsfeld and Merton (2015), who were cited in this regard by Domatob (2019), asserted that in mass communication, this function of public exposure is institutionalized in the mass media. Radio and television expose fairly well-known deviations of public view, and as a rule, this exposure forces some degree of public action against what have been privately tolerated. Nigeria's political issues have been observed and evolved as a result of this.

iii. Coverage of Ethnic Conflicts

Numerous ethnic disputes that have resulted in the loss of many lives and valuables have occurred throughout Nigeria's 63-year history, which has alternated between military and civilian governments. Ethnic problems do not appear out of nothing. They grow over time until they reach uncontrollable dimensions. Some of these crises need the effective application of media-based conflict management tools. The media has occasionally been referred to as the "Third Force" in resolving ethnic strife in Nigeria since communication is so important to this process (Fasanya *et al.*, 2017).

In Nigeria, the media has been a potent vehicle for communication throughout both times of peace and conflict. While it might be used constructively to advance peace and peacefully settle disputes when the moment is right, it could also be used destructively to start, intensify, and maintain open or covert war (Garzia, 2021). Since Nigeria's independence, these two

scenarios have made a substantial contribution to the growth of politics as well as the creation of political parties. This is evident in what played out in crises like Kano Riot of 1953, Census Crises of 1962/63, Action Group Crisis of 1962, 1967-70, Federal election Crisis of 1964, Boko Haram insurgency, and even the latest currency (Naira) crisis that took place in February 2023 following shortage of cash and an attempt by the Nigerian government to force citizens to adapt to newly designed Naira notes. Therefore, it can be established that the potentiality of the media as a means of communication to promote peace or conflict cannot be overemphasized.

iv. The Media and Political Education

The media were more active than ever in their duties, particularly during the Fifth Republic of Nigeria's pre-election activity. By providing outlets for the public to evaluate the candidates, they provided the people the chance to make educated decisions. Whether the election results accurately represented the electorate's choices, however, is a distinct topic for discussion (Fukuyama, 2021). Examples of this include: presidential and gubernatorial political discussions on television. For instance, Channels Television developed a debating platform that was transmitted live online. It gave Lagos State's gubernatorial candidates the chance to discuss significant problems while also giving members of the public the chance to ask crucial questions to the candidates (Manika, 2016).

Another example was the Silverbird Television "popularity survey". Candidates for political office had the option to gauge how well-liked they were with Nigeria's voters through the poll. Such a programme has the effect of outlining to candidates for the various posts what attributes Nigerians value in a leader. According to Ifukor (2017), the findings of these surveys also have a significant impact on how voters behave. Another benefit for the media was the man of the year popularity survey conducted by Silverbird Television and Vanguard Newspapers. The poll, which followed the 2007 elections, was an opportunity to advance any candidate Nigerians deemed was deserving of a name in politics. Even though Mallam El Rufai, the final winner, did not run for office, the vote gave Nigerians and the event's organizers the chance to declare: Nigerians can see a strong leader when they see one. This is undoubtedly one of the political effects of the media on Nigeria throughout time (Odunlami, 2018).

In the same vein, discussion programmes like Lagos Television's Political Trail, Africa Independent Television's *Kakaaki*, Channels Television's Sunrise, etc. provide forums for educating the public on the importance of registering and obtaining voter identification cards in order to elect their representatives to various offices (Omojuwa, 2015; Oyesomi *et al.*, 2017).

b. Media and Political Development

The public square and the media are frequently viewed as the lifeblood of democratic administration (Odunlami, 2018). Dahlgren (2017) asserts that the public may obtain a broad variety of information through the free media outlets and gain political awareness by having access to trustworthy and understandable resources including depictions of social and political issues, news, reports, dialogues, and so forth. In a similar vein, Chaffee and Frank (2016) believed that textual (newspapers), auditory (radio news), and visual (television) news sources should be able to deliver essential information on significant political and social issues. According to the BBC Media Action, an educated populace is essential for political

responsibility, which necessitates a positive connection between the media and the public (Scavo & Snow, 2018).

The media serve important roles as socialization agents for politics in society, just as family, school, the political system, religion, and profession. Because the media is where most people acquire their news and information, access to it has a big impact on knowledge and attitudes (Brewer & Ley, 2010). Scholars assert that access to and use of news media are necessary for political knowledge (Prior, 2005; Moller & de Vreese, 2015). Similar findings were made by Aalberg *et al.* (2013), who found a link between media and political advancement. According to Aarts and Semetko (2020), the educational functions of conventional and new media appear to have increased political interest, dialogue, and ideological complexity in many nations. The more people use television, radio, newspapers, or the internet to access the news, the higher their political awareness, which is essential to both political participation and development in general (Delli, 2018), making the media tools for political knowledge, development, and democratic consolidation (Castells, 2017).

Additionally, the ubiquitous accessibility of political and news material via the internet and satellite television tends to increase residents' familiarity with current affairs. Search engine results and online portals that combined news headlines with entertainment items might unintentionally expose users to political material, as Tewksbury *et al.* (2011) demonstrated. This information frequently has a favorable relationship with political information. Contrarily, Prior (2007) found that people who prefer news and those who prefer entertainment had wider disparities in their political knowledge and election involvement as a result of increased media choice (i.e., cable television and internet access).

In their research of 1100 Japanese undergraduates, Feldman and Kawakami (2016) found that newspaper attention and exposure are better predictors of political growth and engagement than TVs. Similar to this, a Canadian study found a link between reading newspapers and political awareness (Milner, 2019). However, Aarts and Semetko (2020) discovered that the combined effects of television, radio, the internet, and social media appear to lessen the influence of newspapers and magazines on individuals' political behaviour and social development.

Finally, Prior (2005) stated that improved access to and utilization of news media is associated with political growth, which in his opinion is impacted by age, gender, or educational attainment. Young people now primarily use the internet and watch television, with fewer reading newspapers, according to research of a similar nature done in Sweden (Nilsson, 2015). Older Americans, on the other hand, seem to have more political awareness than young Americans. Despite this, the media has elevated public political awareness and understanding, which has considerably accelerated societal political growth.

c. Impact of Media on Political Development in Nigeria

Around the world, political involvement and conversation have become more dependent on the media. The media first had an influence on political growth by allowing various political parties to utilize their websites as a one-way communication route to inform the public. However, new media and technology have led to an evolution in two-way communication. In their various researches, Karamat and Farooq (2016) and Golan *et al.* (2019) found that the

media, especially social media, has given the public the ability to learn about political events, engaging its users and enticing them to participate in offline political activities. Social media has therefore become essential for political discourse, involvement, and development.

According to Mahmud and Amin (2017), the media has a big influence on political growth and stability because it gives aggrieved citizens planning protest access to and supplies them with effective, quick, and reasonably priced tools for recruiting, fundraising, information dissemination, group discussion, and mobilization for collective action. Skeptics, however, downplay the importance of the media (Byun & Hollander 2015; Manika, 2016). According to proponents of this position, using the media, especially social media, deceives people into thinking they are politically active and discourages them from staging actual protests (Morozov, 2011; Evangelista & Bruno, 2019). These divergent points of view imply that other elements, such the degree of democracy and the efficiency of the executive branch, may alter how the media influences political instability.

The three key elements that comprise the influence of media on political growth are political participation, political personalization, and political efficacy. Mahmood and Awan (2017) and Garzia (2021) make the argument that the media has a substantial impact on young people's political engagement through disseminating information, suggestions, ideas, and views regarding political issues and activities. These chances for arguing and criticizing peers and groups have increased young people's interest in politics. Youth may easily express their own ideas and ideals through the media. Making the most informed political decision is made possible by providing a forum for collective discussion and knowledge sharing.

Secondly, personalization of politics which replaces the framework of communal activity with individual action. Political participation, according to Garzia (2021), rose as a result of this tendency in political changes. Utilizing personal ideals to connect with numerous causes including environmental preservation, economic fairness, human rights, and more, media facilitates individual mobilization. Therefore, the use of media in politics contributes to the formation of both collective and individual identities of political growth and involvement. Through this method, new media has "personalized" politics. Additionally, this guarantees the different forms of engagement (Bennett, 2012). Political personalization has enabled widespread engagement, as established by Metz *et al.* (2020). The political candidate may also use internet channels to spread their message, which helps them stand out among other contestants online (Garzia, 2021).

Thirdly, with online media and other characteristics of media like accounts, groups, rooms, and pages, young people may now debate politics in a variety of ways through political efficacy in politics. According to Bimber and Copeland (2011), political engagement and efficacy are significantly impacted by media usage in politics. Additionally, this study discovered that media consumers, and particularly social media users, are engaged in political discourse. Thus, the political effectiveness of respondents has increased as a result of media consumption. In politics, the media has provided an effective platform for users to exchange and gather information and communicate with a target audience that boosts political efficacy and involvement (Kahne *et al.*, 2021).

Studies like Khan and Shahbaz's (2015) research have shown that social media have a substantial impact on the political and media literacy of netizens. Extant research, as found in the studies of Scavo and Snow (2018) and Olaniru *et al.* (2020), have established that social media has a significant political influence on Nigerian citizens. People actively utilize new media for political information, such as exchanging thoughts and debating political problems with neighbours. Despite the challenges associated with using social media, Chinedu-Okeke and Obi (2016) argued that the platforms provide many opportunities for political growth, democracy strengthening, and political reform. The majority of the respondents to their cross-sectional study participated in political debate on different online channels and was active on social networking sites, which had a political mobilizing effect on the participants.

Folarin (2018) also found that the media had an effect on political growth by being critical in organizing electorates, increasing public knowledge of political events, and promoting high levels of citizen involvement in the 2015 and the recently 2023 Nigerian election processes. Additionally, Apuke and Appollos (2017) confirmed how the media has helped democracy advance by enabling the free flow of political information at a lower cost and without superfluous restriction. Inadvertently, the media have increased public interest in government, political parties, groups, and individual politicians' activities; improved public understanding of political events; provided a mechanism for citizen feedback and interaction with the government; and improved citizens' ability to hold public officials accountable for their actions and inactions. Evidently, one of the major effects of online communication media on Nigerian politics and democracy continues to be the change in information power that the media makes possible.

Finally, there are several ways in which the media significantly affects political stability. Firstly, new information and communication technologies affect how people can communicate with their government (Margetts, 2013; Abdalla, 2016); this is likely to have a favorable influence on political stability when the government is aware of people's needs and complaints. Secondly, through boosting government accountability and openness, the media may improve the responsiveness of authorities. They may also aid in reducing the incidence of human rights breaches as they make it possible to report and expose misconduct (Diamond, 2010). Thirdly, some protesters could use social media to reach a wide audience and promote widespread mobilization against decisions or policies that would curtail democratic freedoms and citizen rights (Metz *et al.*, 2020). Some instances in this regard include the #EndSARS protest of 2020 and the protest on Naira scarcity that occurred in mid-February of 2023, just a few weeks before the general election. Conclusively, the impact of the media on political development is stronger and statistically significant for developing countries like Nigeria to ensure the citizens fully participate in the political domain.

d. Theoretical Framework

The Agenda-setting Theory

The agenda-setting theory of mass communication is pertinent to this essay. In 1972, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw originally put out the notion. It surfaced as a consequence of research on the connection between media discourse, popular opinion, and issue ranking utilizing the context of three US presidential elections. By virtue of its pervasiveness and influence, the media influences and decides the path of political development and public discourse. This influence of the media on politics has been described and understood using

the agenda-setting theory of the media. In order to put it into context, McQuail (2005) mentions, among other things, that the agenda-setting hypothesis holds that the news media have a significant impact on the public and political events.

The fundamental premise of the theories is the "salient transfer." This is the news media's ability to shift significant political issues from their own news agendas to the general public's agenda. The daily selection and presentation of political news by editors and news directors shapes the public's perceptions on the most important issues of the day. The ability of the news media to influence which problems are prioritized on the public agenda has come to be recognized as its agenda-setting role. The same result is reached by Littlejohn and Foss (2008), who concur that agenda setting puts the crucial political concerns in the public's awareness in every country.

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), who are cited by Baran and Davis (2012), editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters have a big part to play in shaping political reality through the choice and presentation of news as well as the political class's agenda. Readers and listeners learn not just about a certain issue but also how much importance to give that subject based on the amount of information in a news story and its placement. Therefore, the big media outlets may very likely decide on the campaign's main themes, or in other words, they may set the campaign's agenda.

According to McQuail (2005), who outlines the fundamental tenet, political occurrences in the nation are transmitted to the public through the news media from generation to generation, raising knowledge of political issues, leadership, followership, and public policies. According to McQuail (2010), this is an important part of the political evolution of the society and the foundation for the division of powers in the state.

Littlejohn and Foss (2008) referenced McCombs and Shaw (1972) in establishing the location of the agenda-setting function as a communication policy instrument in the storage and dissemination of political history and events over a long period. So, over the years, as the media go about their daily duty of gathering and presenting news, they have a significant role in keeping and maintaining track records of events and political actors irrespective of origin, tribe, religion, regime of government or form of government being practiced by those in power. This effect of mass media—the capacity to record and maintain records of events in the political theatre—has been referred to as the agenda-setting function of mass communication.

In conclusion, there exists, as posited by Rogers and Dearing (1988), that there is established interaction, connectedness, and triangular relationship among the media, the citizens, and political events which the media maintain that has been instrumental in the development of politics in every society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the paper has been able to review past works on the subject matter with the aim of examining how the media has impacted political development in Nigeria. This has been revealed by looking into the roles of the media, political education, media and political development as well as the impact of media on political development in Nigeria. However,

to enable the media to play their roles more efficiently and effectively in Nigerian politics, some recommendations are therefore made. Firstly, there is a need for the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and other moderating bodies to review the nation's communication policy so as to reflect current realities and global expectations. Then, there is a need to increase transparency requirements regarding political advertisement and campaign financing so as to prevent abuse of data and manipulation. Also, the media houses should oversee algorithms of online campaign contents of political parties so as to increase transparency and reliability of manifestoes to the citizens. Finally, the general public should be properly enlightened on the use of media, most especially social media, on political matters. This will curb the misuse of social media platforms and the propagation of untrue and fallacious political contents via the internet.

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