THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY

Being a Lecturer Delivered by Yusuf O. Ali Esq; SAN[1] at the Award of Excellence and Integrity Programme organized by the Magazines and Newspaper Distributors Association of Nigeria. Kwara State Chapter[2]

Introduction

I feel highly honoured to be invited to deliver this lecture to such a distinguished audience. You will undoubtedly agree with me that the chosen topic, "**The Role of Media in the Development of the Society"** is one that fundamentally affects not only the members of this illustrious body, but every citizen of this great country of ours, because the flow of information is important for the development of any society and the media facilitates this. Without a wide array of information, people's opinions and views would be limited and their impressions and conclusions of the world around them stunted.

Historically, the most common form of the distribution of information was word of mouth, with the news often beginning with the words, "Did you know...". Indeed, word of mouth is still one of the most powerful tools in the sharing of information today, but technology has allowed for this exchange to take place in an instant, forging the way for bigger and better media houses with the instant access to information.

Today, we are living in a world dominated by the media, which is increasingly occupying the central stage in our lives. The media has an iron grip on the imagination as well as thinking faculties of the society. The programmes and features served by the media groom people, it instructs them not only as to what they should eat, drink and wear, but also influence how they think and act. At times,

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[2] Held at Circular Hotel, florin, on 23 November, 2013.

it misguides them to commit heinous crimes. The media acts as an effective catalyst of change in the society.[3]

The main concern of this lecture, as shown by the topic of discussion is therefore, to ascertain the role ofthe media in the development of the society. In order to achieve its objective, this discourse will be divided into some headings which shall be taken seriatim as follows:

1. The media.
2. The media and development.
3. Functions of the media in the society.
4. Impact of the media on the society.
5. Developmental Role of the media.
6. Suggestions and Conclusion.

The Media

The media has been variously defined by scholars of mass communication as a collective means of communication by which the general public or populace is kept informed about the day to day happenings in the society. The media is also said to be an aggregation of all communication channels that use techniques of direct personal communication between the communicator and the public. The word "media" comes from the plural of the Latin word medium, and it is used as a collective noun to refer to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, films, the International Network (Internet), etc.[4]

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[3] Varun Naik 1256 Words Essay on Role of Mass Media in Indian Society available at <http://www.shareyouressays.com/2916/1256-words-essay-on-role-of-mass-media-in-indian-society>, accessed on 9th October, 2013.

[4]Busakorn Suriyasarn, Internet and National Development, Thai Media and Telecommunications, May 1998.http://www.busakorn.addr.com/thatitcom/internetnationaldevelopment,htm>

While talking of mass media however, the word "mass" means a large number of people or a collection and "media" means organs or channels. Hence mass media is a collection of organs of communication and information dissemination that reaches out to a large number of people. The information circulation is not only confined within members of the public, but the media also serves to coordinate the information flow between government and the public and vice versa, in our own case, between leaders and the led and vice versa[5].

There are two broad categories of media

(a) the Print media: which comprises of Newspapers, Magazines, Journals and periodicals; and

(b) the Electronic media: which includes the Radio, Television and all related modern means of communication such as the computer and the Internet.

The term "Press" is also used to refer to both category of the media, the print and the electronic media.

The current world equates the term media to the mass communication industry, including newspaper, magazine, television, radio, journalists and other related professionals[6]. The media, which is also called the sword-arm of democracy, commands awe and respect of nations as well as individuals. It is the most powerful investigative machinery that exposes the injustice, oppression, partiality and misdeeds of society. It is also an effective instrument which has the potential to bring about the downfall of despot rulers of the world. In a materialist world of today

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[5] Isa Muhammad Inuwa, Role of the Media in National Developments, available at http://www.gamji.com/article6000/NEWS7617.htm> accessed on 9th October, 2013.

[6] Jisha jagadeesh, Role of Media in the Development of a society, available at http://www.jishajagadeesh.blogspot.com/2011/11/role-of-media-in-development-of-society.html> accessed on 9th October,2013.

in which everybody is hankering after power and prosperity and indulging in every kind of malpractices, its media which brings at these things to notice and make public opinion against them. It creates public awareness[7].

The media have thus, been variously described as the "The Fourth Realm of the Estate" (Le the fourth pillar in support of the essential tripod of government, the Executive, the Legislative and the judiciary) agenda setter, watchdog, force multiplier, and gate-keeper, all in an effort to demonstrate their influence on society. Conversely, the media have been viewed as avenue for sensationalism, propaganda, and bias, factors inimical to the development of the society

The Media and Development

Development refers to a change process geared at improving or making better, the life and environment of man. Dudley Sears (1985), posited that development involves the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentialities. The media comes in, in development process through what is called "development communication". This is the type of communication which is consciously packaged by the sender, such that the message content or the information sent, could persuade, encourage or convince the receiver or target audience, to adopt an attitude and participate in actualizing a development plan or goal. At certain instances, the message sent aims at making the target audience adopt a positive attitudinal change towards a development purpose.[8]"

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[7] Van Nak 1256 Words Essay on Role of Mass Media in the society available at <http://www.shareyouressays.com/2916/1256-words-essay-on-role-of-mass-media-in-indian-society>, accessed on 9th October, 2013.

[8] Isa Muhammad Inuwa, Role of the Media in National Development, available at http://www.gamji.com/article6000/NEWS7617.htm> accessed on 9th October, 2023.

In effect, the media is a tool people can use to provide a forum or platform for the subjects of public debate. Thus, the media can play a great role in selecting the subject of public debate. So, we can say that the media retains power to guide and misguide the collective mind-set of the society. The question thus arises whether the media guide us positively or negatively[9]?

The media tells us not what to think but what to think about. In other words, the amount of attention given to an issue in the press affects the level of importance assigned to that issue by the media audience. The main thrust of Agenda Setting theory is that though media may not completely change ones point of view on particular issue, it tends to change his perception of what is good. That is to say in simple terms, the fact about the inherent influencing power of media, makes it to be seen and applied as important instrument in developmental policies.[10]

Functions of the Media in the Society

Though there are two main functions of mass communication, which are overt and latent functions of communication, six specific functions of the mass media could be identified here. These are:

1. Surveillance of the environment. This is the collection and distribution of information within and outside a particular environment

2. Correlation of parts of the society. This includes the interpretation of the information, the prescription of conduct and, the comment on social value:

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[9] Jisha jagadeesh, Role of Media in the Development of a society, available at http://www.jishajagadeesh.blogspot.com/2011/11/role-of-media-in-development-of-society.html> accessed on 9th October,2013.

[10] Isa Muhammad Inuwa, Role of the Media in National Development, available at http://www.gamji.com/article6000/NEWS7617.htm> accessed on 9th October, 2023.

3. Transmission of social heritage. By communicating information through the mass media we are transmitting social and cultural values, which aim at sustaining the society;

4. Educating the masses. Education on the policies of governments and on the rights and responsibilities could be carried out through the mass media;

5. Entertainment function. The mass media also entertain the public by providing emotional relaxation, intrinsic and cultural enjoyment (i.e. provision of momentary escape from problems) and killing boredom; and

6. Mobilization function: This function of the mass media is very important to developing communities everywhere. It seeks to bring the people together and helps to advance national development.

It could be seen from the foregoing functions that the media provide information and education, personal identity, entertainment and most importantly, integration and social interaction, by giving insight into the circumstances of others and helping with the development of social empathy."[11]

Impact of the Media on the Society

Positive Impact: The media serves the society by highlighting the prevalence of such ills as nepotism, cronyism and corruption in institutions and by carrying on relentless campaign against them. It has been instrumental in bringing an end to the oppressive regimes of cruel rulers. It has unearthed political scandals, kickbacks received by highly placed men. Heinous crimes have been exposed due

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[11] joe Kingsley Eyiah, The Role of the Mass Media in Community Development, available at <http:/www.modernghana.com/news/114130/1/the-role-of-the-mass-media-in-community-development.html> accessed on 9th October, 2013.

to the active role of the media, it was the media which exposed a greater percentage of the corruption cases that we have witnessed in Nigeria. Moreover, editors and writers of articles expose the excessiveness of men and power. They serve the society by ensuring justice to those victimized by the government machinery. The media unearthed the integration scandal that inundated to the fall of Richard Wilxon from the America presidency in the early 70s. The power of the media, particularly the visual media is awful. No one, howsoever powerful he may be, can effectively combat z. The renowned singer Michael Jackson, after undergoing the humiliating ordeal of child molestation charges against him, aptly asserts the power of media thus "the incredible, terrible mass media". Nobody can deny the power of the media. The media is so powerful that it can instantly mould public opinion, bring far-reaching policy reversals of governments, and even push little known personalities into seats of power after boosting their election prospects with the most effective use of its image-making.

The media serve the society through its watchdog-type function. The media has the capacity to hold governments accountable, forcing them to explain their actions and decisions, all of which affect the people they represent. While the media has historically been viewed as being overly aggressive and insatiable in its plight for the latest and hottest news, its function as a watchdog is essential in a democratic society, where people must know what their governments are doing.

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[12] Varun Naik 1256 Words Essay on Role of Mass Media in Indian Society available at <http://www.shareyouressays.com/2916/1256-words-essay-on-role-of-mass-media-in-indian-society>, accessed on 9th October, 2013.

Negative Impact. There is no denying the fact that with its biased and motivated coverage, the media sometimes does much harm than good to international relations and national peace and harmony.

The advent of press freedom appears to have given rise to unprecedented abuse of the media by unscrupulous mass communicators and authoritarian leaders in the society. This potential for mischief is attributed to the fact that, media is controlled by media barons, corporate giants, industrial houses and government the wielding dictatorial powers. Often, the media lords use the power of the media to serve their own ends, which are always at odds with humanitarian considerations. At times leading to fuel fires of hatred, strife and anarchy, instead of spreading the message of love and brotherhood. The news of the world scandal in the United Kingdom is a good case in point.

Those media men seeking short-cut to name and fame act for them, neglecting the sanctity of their profession. Sometimes media persons work hand in glove with political leadership, bureaucrats and other influential persons. Naturally, their write-ups and editorials are motivated. Through their write-ups, they justify all acts of mission and commission of their patrons. This is particularly discernible in the editorials of several newspapers and magazines. The media men, in fact, try to please their patrons and lords.

The glamorous lifestyle of celebrities and pomp and show served by the media is causing great erosion in social norms and moral values. The younger generations being encouraged by the stunning luxuries of film villains and their varied methods of collecting wealth, resort to some evil methods, often fall prey to criminal tendencies and get increasingly brutalized. In their quest for such life, they sometimes come into contact with anti-social and anti-national elements.

Thus, instead of doing well to society, they themselves are lost in darkness. In a way it causes loss of human resources to society as well.

Furthermore, the portrayal of women in the media, to some extent, is responsible for increasing violence against them. The scenes of atrocities and torture against women are very common in film and TV. Here, the woman is atrociously portrayed as an object of entertainment, required to dance, sing, expose herself and vanish. Scenes of indecency on the part of women are almost mandatory in films, musical videos and fashion magazine. This is pictured in such a manner that they arouse the excitement in the viewers. Besides, scenes of gruesome killing and vulgar dialogues are integral part of visual media. All these are contributing to the moral downfall of the society.

The media to some extent, has deviated from its path of avowed impartiality and clean journalism. They often indulge in petty means to gain material benefits, i.e. to boost their sales. At times, what most papers give their readers is simply sensation-creating stuff. They publish stories about the private life of celebrities and obscene photographs. There is a circulation war among various newspapers. To emerge as winner they involve in mean activities.

Indeed the media has lost its sense of moral responsibility. In the past, the media was considered the champion of the rights of the oppressed and principles of morality and justice. They worked for some noble causes. Now newspapers give doctored news analysis to influence the minds of the readers. Even the film makers mistakenly assume that the society does not have the ability to understand

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[13] Varun Naik 1256 Words Essay on Role of Mass Media in Indian Society available at <http://www.shareyouressays.com/2916/1256-words-essay-on-role-of-mass-media-in-indian-society>, accessed on 9th October, 2013.

quality movies and end up producing only bizarre movies. Don't you think that a biased media, who think that our people do like a particular kind of news and films, misguide us? Do any of these media add any value to the growth of our nation? Are they not making us debate on gossips and silly things when there are a lot of real issues?

Developmental Role of the Media

Through its three basic roles of educating, informing and entertaining, the media make the society, society members as well as the leadership of the society, aware of the importance and need to undertake certain process or processes of development. Also attached to these three basic roles of media is the role of persuasion, where the media is seen as virile tool for applying persuasive efforts to influence people's actions towards a particular direction. The media is therefore, seen as a means of furnishing the public with necessary information to achieve development or change goals.

The role of the media in development of the society lies in the capacity and capability to teach, manipulate, sensitize and mobilize people through information dissemination (Ucheanya 2003, as cited by Chinenye Nwabueze) The media also chart a course for the public in line with the agenda setting. thereby creating in the minds of the people, issues that should be viewed as priority issues including development programmes and policies[14]." Instances of this role being presently played by the media in Nigeria is the general millennium goal pursuit towards the year 2015, as proposed by the United Nations and

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[14] NWABUEZE C. 2025- Mass Media and Community Mobilization for Development: An Analytical Approach – International Journal of Communication ISSN 1597 - 4324

incorporated as national policy by governments of member countries around the world.

Policies of the millennium goal touch on different aspects of health, education, children and women and the likes. Though not free of some propagandist motives, health issues such as the HIV/AIDS, Polio Immunization and The H5N1 Bird Flu Virus issue became the leading stories disseminated by the media. Other related issues include wars, famine, women and children health and rights as well as democratization activities which has been receiving prominence and greater attention from the media.

Furthermore, in a democratic society, people should know all their options, if they are to govern themselves, and the media is a vehicle for the dissemination of such information. The assumption in some societies is that the press speaks for the people, thus the Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press Acts in the United States and in many other countries. With press freedom we will know what the differing views in society are, opening the floor to debate, and discussion, all of which are healthy functions of a democratic society.

Finally, one of the most powerful strengths the media has in any society is the ability to effect change, both on a social and governmental level. Other roles of media in enhancing development include:

1. The media leads to formation of attitude through establishing of values for the society. Thereby, building a climate of change in the society or nation. This involves the dissemination of news and information in response to a basic human need, which is the "right to know".

2. Protection of Social Justice, in that the media is not only expected to record, compose or report account of events and stories just as the historians do, but the media is also expected to analyze issues and facts contained in the news, in line with the need and interest of Social Justice. Thus, ensuring that public and private conduct is directed towards the greatest possible measure of justice age in the society.

3. Discouraging negative issues such as ethnicity, dictatorship in leadership like military rule and of course, embezzlement of public funds, which is the disturbing trend presently indulged in by politicians occupying positions of responsibilities and related public offices in Nigeria.

4. Informing people about development projects and programmes is another major role of the media which can enhance development. Such programmes designed and proposed by policy makers could be entirely new to the people who need to be enlightened, educated and mobilized by the media. Instances of such programmes are the Universal Basic Education (UBE), the Nomadic Education, National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), Fighting Drug Addiction and Trafficking and nationwide campaign towards boosting agriculture and food production.

5. Offering solutions to problems. The media is not expected to only criticize government officials and condemn their actions, without more. But as watchdogs of the society, the media should review, analyze, appraise or criticize, as the case may be, activities of government agencies and programmes with a view to offering solutions in the areas where they are failing or lacking. [15]

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[15] Isa Muhammad Inuwa, Role of the Media in National Development, available at http://www.gamji.com/article6000/NEWS7617.htm> accessed on 9th October, 2023.

These days, when politicians are abusing their power and privileges and looting their countries, the evil nexus of mafia and crime syndicates is adding to human misery and where ordinary human beings have been reduced to such helplessness that they can do nothing but become silent spectators, the role of the media assumes greater significance. The media champions the cause of have-nots and acts as the supervisor of their rights and privileges, that it why it has been called the fourth pillar of democracy.

Problems Restricting Developmental Role of the Media

Few among the numerous obstacles to objective media reporting and progressive functions of the media are:

1. Restrictions from the so-called "state security" laws tend to prevent full rights of expression and writing or broadcasting the facts as they are by "calling a spade a spade".

2. Lack of adequate remuneration and protection for media practitioners by the media managers often lead to suppress of facts and succumbing to collection of gratification (the notorious brown envelope syndrome) in order for the reporters to have their ends met or pay for transportation and facilities for sending their stories.

3. Crossing the interests of media owners or proprietors is another problem whereby executives of government owned media prefer to have their lead story carrying big portrait of the governor or president on the TV screen or front page of Newspaper in order to maintain their position in office. On the other hand, private media owners often have governors, ministers and commissioners friends, at which the helpless reporter willing to report facts or expose an act of dishonesty committed by any of these people could not

have his story published or aired because it crosses their (media owners) personal interests.

4. Lack of self-censorship is also a problem militating against objective and developmental output by Nigerian media. The media are seen as good in criticizing others but scarcely do they criticize themselves in terms of observing the code of ethics of the profession. While a section of the media engages in bitter criticism and harassment of those in position of power to earn their recognition, others stoop to paying cheap lip service to the authorities that be, with a view to gain gratifications. It could be said that while the former case could fetch charges of defamation in the court of law, the later could expose the practitioner to ridicule and debasement.

It should be understood that is impossible to have totally unbiased media, because even in the developed countries, media were seen for conducting opinion polls or making comments that favour certain political parties or candidates. However, the conscience of the media itself needs reorientation to shed off the characteristics of the ravaging societal problems which in some ways, affect the media themselves, [16]

Suggestions

The media must serve essential functions in the society by accepting and fulfilling certain obligations to the society. These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high professional standards of truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance. In accepting and applying these obligations, the elements of the mass media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established

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[16] Isa Muhammad Inuwa, Role of the Media in National Development, available at http://www.gamji.com/article6000/NEWS7617.htm> accessed on 9th October, 2023.

institutions. They should therefore, avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder or give offence to any group of people in the society because of their faith or ethnicity.

The path of sycophancy, bootlicking, blackmailing of individuals and arrogance of political affiliation lies is detrimental to the good functions of the media and must be avoided if the role of the media in our community development is to be made meaningful. We must realize that the media has a very constructive role to play in the development of any society. Instead of celebrating politicks, scams, crimes, disasters and other destructive concerns, our media must put forward a constructive debate. It must act as a unifying agent.

The media should be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of the society by giving access to various points of views and to rights of reply. It is therefore, incumbent upon our press, to keep our communities connected to the past by communicating the stories and traditions we hold dear; and at the same time, connect our communities to the present and to the future by delivering images and news of our people around the world and forming the foundation and values for our children to carry on.

It should be understood that the relevance of media in almost all spheres of human endeavour cannot be overemphasized, more so in the area of National Development. As Sogolo rightly pointed out, "in a plural and diverse society such as Nigeria, we need an information order built on cordial relationship between the state and the media, between leadership and followership, between the elite and the people at the grassroots level. In all the the media have an important role to play, always taking into consideration the socio cultural conditions under

which they operate, without losing sight of the universal commitments of the profession.1"

Conclusion

the While my focus in this presentation has been on the role of media in society, it is also important to acknowledge the responsibility of the media in society. The media have the responsibility to report the unbiased, accurate information as it is received from reliable sources. It is their obligation to obtain all sides of a story, and to report on both the good and bad stuff. "Responsible journalism" requires a balance of the good and bad stuff.

The role of the media is very significant in a democracy. It is the guardian of public interest. Thus,the media should focus on performing the noble role of enlightening people, broadening their vision and making them vigilant towards the larger goal of creating a civilized and prosperous society. Here we are in democracy, but living in virtual anarchy. The media must demonstrate its active role in order to bring this country out of virtual anarchy, to real democracy and prosperity.

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[107] Isa Muhammad Inuwa, Role of the Media in National Development, available at http://www.gamji.com/article6000/NEWS7617.htm> accessed on 9th October, 2023.