

Assessing Grassroot Participatory Democratic in Nigeria by Daily Trust and Punch Newspapers: 2001 - 2012

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Abstract

Popular participation is the most essential component of democracy. Most importantly absence of political enlightenment and awareness about the essence of democracy in our political developments is quite deficient in Nigerian political psyche. Opportunities for grassroots democratic participation are not provided by many newspapers outlets. These papers do not devote ample attention to issues that border on the interest of common citizens because of lacking of adequate awareness from the media in their coverage and agenda setting function. Two newspapers, Daily Trust and Punch both were papers located polar apart in North and Southern part of the country were studied. The research methodology used was content analysis. The study covered a period of 12 years (2001-2012), appraising them in terms of grassroots participation as per the coverage of the two newspapers. Grassroot participation is underreported by both newspaper. Daily Trust underreported agriculture and education vis-à-vis Punch inspite of the fact that North is acclaimed to be an agricultural area as well as the seeming awareness that North is more disadvantaged than the South educationally. Both of them underreported environmental issues inspite of seeming problem of desert encroachment. The papers recommended that efforts should be made to improve literacy and educating of specialist reporters.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy the world over has been acknowledged as the most universally accepted system of government. This is the case with most emerging nation-states whose citizens have often sacrificed their lives, freedoms, rights and privileges just to attain a democratic rule; a rule or goal most political systems including Nigeria cherished (Okpoko, 2006). The wind of democratization blew rapidly, perhaps, due to 'the political earthquake' that destroyed the basis of Marxist Socialism in the Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, and the open acceptance or even embrace of free-market democracy. The democratisation favour in Africa, Latin America and even Middle Eastern countries can hardly be detached from political changes and transformations in Eastern Europe - at least they served as catalysts (Ibid, 2006).

Political-sociologists the world over have accepted the phenomenon of man as a socialised political animal. Man has accepted that there should be an overall authority in the political system under the condition that he must have a say (participatory process) and that such an authority must be properly constituted. It is therefore very important to note that there cannot be effective participation if it is not based on grassroots democracy (carrying every body along); and without participation the system is simply something other than democracy (Dike, 2001).

There is no doubt the Nigerian media, print media inclusive, played important role in creating political awareness among the people. This study is therefore quite timely in analysing the impact of the two selected newspapers on the grassroot participation in Nigeria democratic process.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Popular participation is the main theme and most essential component of democracy. Once a political system is detached from the aspects of popular participation that system could be said to be anything other than democracy. Most importantly absence of political enlightenment and awareness about the essence of democracy in our political development are quite deficient in Nigerian political psyche. Opportunities for grassroot democratic participation are not provided by many newspapers outlets. They are almost absent in government owned newspaper vis-à-vis privately owned newspapers. These papers do not devote ample attention to issues that border on interest of common citizens.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What are the role of Daily Trust and Punch Newspapers on a comparative basis towards ensuring effective grassroots participation in Nigeria's democracy?
- ii. What are the limitations and problems of participation through the press in a democratic setting?
- iii. What is to be done to improve situation?

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- i. To analyse how print media influence or even promote grassroots participation in Nigeria with particular reference to Daily Trust and Punch Newspapers.
- ii. To analyse each of the two newspapers on a comparative basis, on the democratic participation in Nigeria democracy.
- iii. To identify problems and proffer solutions.

Scope of the Study

As an appraisal of a particular issue and/or event in Nigeria, the time scope of the study covers 12years of Nigerian political life, from 2001 – 2012. The study also focused on the two newspapers specifically - the Daily Trust and Punch Newspapers.

Justification of the Study

This study can be justified by the basis of what it seeks to achieve in its aims and objectives. The need to broaden the body of knowledge especially in the area of popular participation in Nigeria's democracy. This is important considering the many interruptions the Nigeria's democracy had suffered. Furthermore, the two newspapers chosen are both privately owned newspapers that enjoy nationwide circulation but each is located polar apart. While, Daily Trust is located in the north; the Punch is located in the south.

Methodology

The research methodology used in this study was content analysis. This include perusing through the two newspapers covering the entire period under review and analyse their contents and appraise them in terms of grassroots participation in Nigeria's democracy as per the coverage of the two newspapers.

Literature Review

Mass media are generally the backbone of democracy. They are channels through which political communication are conveyed to the populace. They supply political information that voters base their decisions on. They identify problems in our society and provide forum for debate. They uncover errors and shortcomings of those in power

Fog (2004) described the functions of media in democracy as surveillance and monitoring of socio-political economic developments in the society, identifying the most relevant issues in the society, providing platform for debate across a diverse range of issues, holding officials responsible to account for the way they exercise power, they provide opportunities for citizens to learn, choose and be involved in the political process, and resist efforts of forces outside the media to subvert their independence.

It is the cardinal duties of the media to report truthfully the daily events in the society to the people in the manner that will inform, educate and enlighten the citizenry about the polity. The mass media are regarded as not only the fourth estate of the realm but as essential social forces that help lubricate the engine room of democracy. They are required to keep the doors for sustainable democracy in terms of information flow, direction and intensity and decide who shares, with whom at what costs and with what consequences. Hence, from here, Prof. Lai Oso (2003) asserted that it seems the mass media have been credited with so much that we have come to accept that without them democracy is doomed. At national, state and local levels the media provide the interactive forum for citizen's participation in democracy.

Media as Platform for Citizens Participation

Citizen's participation is a broad term which merits some more specific examination; but put in another way citizens participated as they were led by journalists. The key decisions regarding what to talk about and from which angle should be addressed are already taken by journalists, citizens are then invited to join in the discussion; then if the media did not include them in the agenda for discussion it means they do not exist and therefore, they will not be discussed and if they are not in the media agenda it means they are not important. The control is with the journalist and the media. Most Nigerian newspapers have a page devoted to readers letters to editors page, through this means they reach the populace and the segments of the electorates.

Citizen Journalism

The idea of the audience as only empty receivers of media messages is also rejected in this context, rather the audience is seen as active co-creator and participant in shaping the media content. This is what it should be and how it should be.

Citizen journalism regards the ordinary citizens not just as a consumer of media content but as a content writer, distributor and user. It involves citizens writing news, features, editorials/opinions, letters and involve in interviews etc on a wide range of issues that border on citizens interest such as politics, health, social welfare, education, agriculture, environment and other issues of importance to the populace or the common man and woman. In citizen journalism, citizen is the source of media content. Newspapers should have platforms or pages to allow citizens contribution or allow response and contribution from the audience to news, feature, editors, opinion etc to topics of discussions. Importantly they contain platforms that allow readers to write news that is not even related to the ones mounted by the media outlet or the government establishments.

Theoretical Framework

The theory used to throw more light into this work was the Democratic-Participant Theory which centres on the role of the press in encouraging democratic participation in the society.

The Democratic Participant Media Theory main thrust is that the media audience should be granted unfettered access to media through interaction and exchange of media messages. This equally means that the media should be democratised. MacBride (1982) (Udende, 2011) describe media democratisation as a process whereby the media audience becomes active partners and not mere objects of communication. The variety of messages exchanged increases and the extent and quality of social representation or political and economic participation in the society expanded.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This presents data collected on the subject. Research content is comparatively based on 730 copies of the newspapers.

In presenting these data, it is quite imperative to state that the data have been grouped into a four-year content data of each of the two newspapers namely the Daily Trust and Punch Newspapers. The entire body of contents of the said newspapers were again sub-grouped into items like news, editorials, features, opinions, letters and interviews.

Apart from the above sub-grouping, each edition of the paper was subsequently along topical - contents such as politics, education, health, social welfare, agriculture, environment while the other variety of topics were grouped under miscellaneous. The analysis of these data is basically on comparative basis in relation with the contents.

The contents data of the two newspapers from 2001 - 2004 showed details of their coverage on the basis of items mentioned above. The essence of this presentation is unmistakably to identify the scope, relevance and effectiveness of the two newspapers' coverage towards ensuring popular and grassroot participation in Nigerian politics. This is bearing in mind the essence of popular participation as a major yardstick in determining democratic dispensation. It is also to gauge freedom of expression, political enlightenment and grassroot participation as stated earlier. The first four-year data of the two newspapers are as follows:

Table 1.1(a): Daily Trust Newspaper (2001-2004)

CONTENTS	FREQUENCY	NEWS ON GPD	GPD %
NEWS	40990	1880	45.9%
EDITORIAL	990	400	40.4%
FEATURES	1530	350	22.9%
OPINIONS	860	260	30.2%
LETTERS	1100	150	13.63%
INTERVIEWS	550	40	7.3%
TOTAL	9129	3080	100%

Table 1.1(b): Punch Newspaper (2001-2004)

CONTENTS	FREQUENCY	NEWS ON GPD	GPD %
NEWS	45110	2960	0.7%
EDITORIAL	800	400	5%
FEATURES	2210	390	1.8%
OPINIONS	260	040	1.5%
LETTERS	2980	890	3.0%
INTERVIEWS	2390	260	1.1%
TOTAL	53750	4940	100%

The data in table 1.1(a) clearly presented to us contents coverage of about 9129 items frequency in the Daily Trust Newspapers. The details of these frequencies showed that news coverage took the greater part of the four years publication of the Daily Trust from 2001-2004 with about 4099 out of which only 1880 were based on grassroots participation in democracy which represent a mere 45.9% of the entire news frequency. While the Punch Newspaper of the same period had 45,110 out of which only 296 were grassroots oriented aimed at encouraging participatory democracy and a mere 6.6% of the entire news frequency of the Punch Newspaper.

The editorial columns of the two newspapers within the same period showed that Daily Trust had 990 and Punch had 800 of which 400(40.4%) and 40(5%) respectively were based on grassroots participation in democracy.

The Daily Trust Newspapers recorded 1530 features and the Punch Newspapers recorded 2210 under the same period. However, only 350 (22.9%) in the Daily Trust and 39 (1.8%) in the Punch were grassroots oriented. The opinion column of Daily Trust had 860 and Punch 260 out of which 260 (30.2%) and 04 (1.5%) respectively are grassroots oriented.

For the letter column where readers put up rejoinders or raised issues, Daily Trust had 1100 letters with 150(13.63%) based on grassroots while Punch had 2980 with 89 (3.02%) raising issues based on grassroots participation in democracy. For instance, under the same period Daily Trust conducted 550- interview column out of which only 40 (7.3%) were relevant to grassroots issue, while Punch had 2390 interviews column with 26 (1.1%) relevant to grassroots issue.

Table 1.2(a): Daily Trust Newspaper

ITEMS QUALITY	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	TOTAL	%
POLITICS	580	120	700	22.7
HEALTH	250	130	380	13.3
SOC/WELFARE	300	110	410	13.3
EDUCATION	250	150	400	12.9
AGRIC	350	200	550	17.8
ENVIRONMENT	400	100	500	16.2
MISCELLANEOUS	100	40	140	4.5
TOTAL	2230	850	3080	100%

Table 1.2(b): Punch Newspaper

ITEMS QUALITY	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	TOTAL	%
POLITICS	580	250	830	17.4
HEALTH	620	320	940	19.7
SOC/WELFARE	320	150	470	9.9
EDUCATION	750	130	880	18.4
AGRIC	640	230	870	18.2
ENVIRONMENT	120	130	250	5.2
MISCELLANEOUS	360	170	530	11.1
TOTAL	3390	1380	4770	100%

The above two tables were based on certain items of news coverage such as politics, health, social welfare, education, agriculture, environment; and the rest items were combined under miscellaneous. The essence of these two tables were to analyse developmental (positive) and conflictual (negative) aspects of the news items. The tables clearly showed that Punch had equal coverage in politics, but wider coverage in health social welfare, education, agriculture and miscellaneous than Daily Trust. While Daily Trust edged out the Punch in areas of environment. The need for Daily Trust to expand its coverage especially in basic areas like education, politics etc. cannot be over emphasised.

Table 2.1(a): Daily Trust Newspapers (2005- 2008)

CONTENTS	FREQUENCY	NEWS ON GPD	GPD %
NEWS	30900	15310	4.9%
EDITORIAL	8820	250	2.8%
FEATURES	1540	370	2.4%
OPINIONS	800	100	8%
LETTERS	1250	110	18.3%
INTERVIEWS	600	260	32.5%
TOTAL	43910	2620	100%

Table 2.1 (b): Punch Newspaper (2005- 2008)

CONTENTS	FREQUENCY	NEWS ON GPD	GPD %
NEWS	44080	2290	5.2%
EDITORIAL	920	290	31.5%
FEATURES	2180	490	22.4%
OPINIONS	1310	800	61%
LETTERS	3070	180	5.8%
INTERVIEWS	2180	300	13.7%
TOTAL	53740	4350	100%

The above two tables presented the wider coverage frequency of the two newspapers within the period of 2005-2008. For instance, the news coverage of Daily Trust for the period under review had about 30,900 frequency with only 4.9% on grassroots political participation, while the Punch had about 44,080 frequency with only 6.7 (2,290 frequency) on grassroots political participation.

The editorial columns of Daily Trust under the same period clearly showed that of the 8,820 editorial frequency only 2.8% (250 frequency) were on grassroots political participation, while the Punch on the other hand had 920 editorial frequency with 31.5% (290 frequency) on grassroots political participation.

The feature column in the two newspapers presented in the same period under review showed that the Daily Trust feature column published 1,540 features frequency out of which grassroots political participation featured 370 times representing 2.4% while the Punch published 2,180 features frequency out of which grassroots political participation featured 490 times representing 2.4%. The various views expressed by freelance, readers and other journalists/commentators for Daily Trust in the same period under review showed that 800 opinions were published with 100 (8%) having relevance with grassroots participation in democracy while the Punch published 1310 opinions with 800 (61%) related to grassroots political participation.

The letters' column of Daily Trust from 2005- 2008 published 1,250 letters but only 110 (18.3%) reflected grassroots participation in democracy, while Punch published 3070 letters with only 180 (5.8%) having reference to grassroots politics. On the other hand, the interview column of Daily Trust published 600 interview frequency with only 260 (32.5%) representing grassroots political participation expressed in the interview while the Punch had 2,180 with only 300 (13.7%) representing views expressed on grassroots political participation.

Table 2.2(a) Daily Trust Newspaper

ITEMS QUALITY	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	TOTAL	%
POLITICS	370	40	410	15.6
HEALTH	40.0	50	450	17.1
SOC/WELFARE	410	30	460	17.5
EDUCATION	420	30	460	17.5
AGRIC	350	100	450	17.1
ENVIRONMENT	250	20	270	10.3
MISCELLANEOUS	100	20	120	4.1
TOTAL	2330	290	2620	100%

Table 2.2(b): Punch Newspaper

ITEMS QUALITY	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	TOTAL	%
POLITICS	410	210	620	14.2
HEALTH	350	150	500	11.4
SOC/WELFARE	150	150	300	6.8
EDUCATION	850	150	1000	22.9
AGRIC	450	250	700	16
ENVIRONMENT	500	200	700	16
MISCELLANEOUS	300	230	530	12.1
TOTAL	3010	1340	4350	100%

The above two tables data are as presented above. They were based on certain news variable such as politics, health, social welfare, education, agriculture, environment and all other variables were grouped under miscellaneous. The essence of the tables were to analyse developmental (positive) and (negative) aspects of the news items in grassroots political participation in democracy.

The Daily Trust Newspapers recorded higher frequency in social welfare than the Punch, while the latter edged out Daily Trust in politics, health, environment, education, agriculture etc. interestingly, Daily Trust news items variety showed that positive development news items for the period under review stood at 2330 and the negative ones at 29 (11%) in terms of grassroots participation in democracy. While Punch positive developmental news stood at 3010 and negative news 1340.

Table 3.1(a) Daily Trust Newspapers (2009- 2012)

CONTENTS	FREQUENCY	NEWS ON GPD	GPD %
NEWS	32990	4070	12.3%
EDITORIAL	840	150	17.8%
FEATURES	3260	860	26.3%
OPINIONS	1000	140	14%
LETTERS	1760	450	25.5%
INTERVIEWS	1160	400	34.4%
TOTAL	41010	6070	100%

Table 3.1(b): Punch Newspapers (2009 - 2012)

CONTENTS	FREQUENCY	NEWS ON GPD	GPD %
NEWS	43270	2200	5.8%
EDITORIAL	920	320	34.7%
FEATURES	2180	420	20.1%
OPINIONS	290	020	6.8%
LETTERS	3010	700	23.2%
INTERVIEWS	2410	280	11.6%
TOTAL	51980	3940	100%

The above two tables presented the wider coverage frequency of the two newspapers within the period of 2009 – 2012. For instance, the entire news frequency of the two newspapers stood at 41,010 (Daily Trust) and 51980 (Punch). But of the major news frequency of 43270 in the Punch only 2200 were relevant to the grassroots political participation in Nigeria, which was merely 5.8% while the Daily Trust major news frequency of 32990 recorded 4070 relevant to the grassroots political participation in Nigerian democracy representing 12.3%.

The editorial columns of the Punch under the same period (2009 - 2012) recorded 920 editorials out of which 320 (34.7%) were on grassroots participatory democracy, while that of Daily Trust stood at 840 with only 150 (17.8%) related to the grassroots participation or democratic tenets.

The features column in the two newspapers between 2009 - 2012 showed that Daily Trust published 3260 with 860 (26.3%) on grassroots politics, while the Punch published 2180 with only 420 (20.1%) on grassroots politics. The opinion column of Punch published 290 articles with 20(6.8%) expressing views on grassroots politics while Daily Trust published 1000 opinions out of which 140 (14%) expressed concerns on grassroots participation in Nigerian democracy.

The column of Punch from 2009- 2012 published 3010 letters with 700 (23.2%) full of concern for grassroots political development of Nigeria, while the Daily Trust published 1760 letters with 450 (25.5%) on grassroots politics. On the other hand, Daily Trust recorded 1160 interviews out of which 40 (3.4%) were grassroots based, while Punch recorded 2410 interviews out of which 280 (11.6%) were based on grassroots events. The total grassroots issue relevant coverage of Punch (2009 - 2012) stood at a dismal 7.5% while the Daily Trust had 14.8%.

Table 3.2(a): Daily Trust Newspapers 2009 - 2012

ITEMS QUALITY	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	TOTAL	%
POLITICS	800	350	1150	18.9
HEALTH	600	120	720	11.8
SOC/WELFARE	530	170	700	11.5
EDUCATION	830	170	1000	16.4
AGRIC	430	530	960	15.8
ENVIRONMENT	530	370	900	16.4
MISCELLANEOUS	300	270	570	8.8
TOTAL	4020	1980	6000	100%

Table 3.2(b): Punch Newspapers 2009-2012

POLITICS	800	250	1050	26.6
HEALTH	400	150	550	13.9
SOC/WELFARE	250	150	400	10.2
EDUCATION	350	150	500	12.7
AGRIC	450	160	610	15.5
ENVIRONMENT	300	250	550	13.9
MISCELLANEOUS	200	80	280	7.1
TOTAL	2750	1190	3940	100%

The above two tables data were as presented. They were also based on certain news variables such as politics, health, etc. as indicated in the two tables above. The essence of the above two tables were to analyse developmental (positive) and (negative) aspects of the news items in grassroots political participation in Nigerian democracy.

Perhaps, due to the anticipatory relevance in the country's current dispensation, Daily Trust recorded higher frequency in political, miscellaneous over Punch within 2009 -2012 period. The current clamour for improved budgetary allocation to agricultural sector in the budget also see Daily Trust reporting grassroots agriculture more than Punch within the period. The remaining news variables had more favourable coverage than the Daily Trust.

Summary of Findings

The summary of research findings in a nutshell, shows that grassroots participation in democracy is fairly reported by the two newspapers chosen as case study. The findings, however, revealed that there is low-patronage of the print media in the northern part of the country, while there is a corresponding high patronage in southern part of the country.

The research findings also revealed the dominant interest of our political elites, the weak governmental structure at local government level (another name for grassroots) and the role of the print media in providing bridge for political consideration of the grassroots people. The research study also noted economic and social incapacitation of Nigerians with regards to education, newspaper - readership and purchasing powers. Absence of adequate specialised newspapers or tabloid such as community-based newspapers were identified too. The factor of newspaper patronage on the basis of regional/sectional and/or religious factors, as well as the consideration for ownership, control and political influence were all identified in the research findings.

Regrettably, even in areas of disadvantage to a region, the newspapers seemed not to be fairing well. For instance. North as the self-acclaimed agricultural base of Nigeria under reported agriculture. The same thing with education, in view of North's disadvantage position, and environment due to the daily encroachment of deserts.

Problem/Limitation

Some do not have the necessary level of education required to be able to participate in grass root democratic government and citizen journalism. Hence, some journalists need training and skills in reporting democratic issues to conscientize and raise the consciousness and awareness of the citizenry.

There are inadequate, insufficient; as well as obsolete equipment with which the journalists have to work with. The number of available staff is not commensurate with. The population that were meant to be attended. There is the need for broader elbowroom for professional practice especially from those working in government-owned media institutions. Journalists are forced to ignore opposition or report members of the opposition in negative light while they are made to praise-sing the government in power and the ruling party. This is not only running contrary to journalism professional ethics but also limits the extent to which journalist can engage in reporting grassroots democracy or engage in citizen journalism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is strongly hoped that this research project would add value and widen scope of the existing knowledge about Nigeria's socio-political, historical and communicational development.

It is quite interesting to note that despite the numerous inadequacies of our media organisations, aspects of developmental or positive news coverage dominated their pages or air-waves. This is a far cry from the perceived negative coverage Third World countries were, and still are,

enjoying in the advanced countries media.

While it is true that media organisations and practitioners contributed a lot in the enthronement of democracy, especially the democratic struggle of the 1990's they should not rest at the attainment of democracy. Sustenance of democracy and the challenges therein, especially mobilisation in democracy, lie squarely on the media. Unless that is done, democracy can and will surely be scuttled by the ever increasing anti-democratic forces in Nigeria.

Citizen journalism is important to grassroots democracy in many ways. Democracy requires unfettered right to expression, and such a right is accompanied by the provision of a public space for expression on a wide range of issues that border on common man, especially those residing in the rural areas of the local government when rights are not accompanied by the public space for exercising them, such rights become dormant. However, opportunities for grassroots democratic participation are not provided by many newspapers outlets. The government newspapers are mostly culprits vis-a-viz private newspapers. When their audience participate, they do so not as initiators in the discussion.

Recommendations

On the basis of this research findings, the study offered the following recommendations to cushion the effects of some of the negative factors impeding against effective media coverage in the area of grassroots participation in democracy. The recommendations are as follows:

- i. A lot need to be done to improve education, literacy and by extension promoting reading culture in Nigeria.
- ii. The military hand-over of over-centralised federalism ought to be structurally reviewed by strengthening the local government as a third tier of government so as to enhance grassroot participation,
- iii. With enhanced education, literacy and reading culture, the need for community based newspapers or tabloids is highly recommended.
- iv. The effect, influence and perception of the current democratic dispensation ought to be changed both on the parts of the leadership and followership. Attaining democracy is one thing and sustaining it is another,
- v. While it is true that the factor of ownership and control is a global media phenomenon, its role in Nigeria ought to be looked into.
- vi. Grassroots participation as a basic tenet in democratic dispensation should be upheld in principle by the print and electronic media.

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