

Media Ownership and Control in Nigeria: An Overview of the Marxist and Pluralist Theories

Apuke, Destiny Oberiri

Department of Mass Communication, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria, P.M.B 1157, Jalingo

Abstract

The issues of media ownership and control can never be overemphasized due to the dwindling situations surrounding media practice in Nigeria. The media is said to take the coloration of where the practice is being carried out i.e the way the media operates in Nigeria cannot be the same as the way it will function in other countries such as Soviet Union, United States, Britain etc. The study is aimed at reviewing the various types of media ownership and how it is being controlled either privately or publicly and how the control affects the media operation linking it to the Marxist and Pluralist theory. The study revealed among other things that although Nigerian private media flourishes but their continuity depends on not overstepping or overriding on the government power. Individual own the media while government policies influences its operation. The study recommends that both private and government media should be allowed to practice freely without any internal or external forces. The media should not allowed to the hands of the rich at the expense of the poor.

Keywords: Media Ownership, Soviet Union, Nigeria, Government policies,

INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the study

The issues of media ownership and control can never be overemphasized due to the dwindling situations surrounding media practice in the country. The media is said to take the coloration of where the practice is being carried out i.e the way the media operates in Nigeria cannot be the same as the way it will function in other countries such as Soviet Union. Asemah (2009) describes the media as a channel or technological devices through which messages are conveyed to a large heterogeneous audience, they are the vehicles used for conveying message from a source to a large destination. The Mass Media is divided into the electronic and print. The electronic media are mechanically or technologically operated devices of Mass Communication these are Radio, Television, while the Print are Newspaper, Journals, and Magazines etc. This research seeks to explore the issues facing media practice in Nigeria and a way forward to it.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study is aimed at reviewing the various types of Media ownership and how it is being controlled either privately or publicly and how the control affects the media operation linking it with the Marxist and Pluralist Theory.

When the Marxist and Pluralist theory is analyzed it gives a wider understanding of the role Mass Media has on the society in a society and its ownership either private or public.

2. An Overview of Pluralist Theory:

- (1) Society are sensibly autonomous
- (2) The citizen can use power in their own right in a variety of ways.
- (3) The press is privately owned and comparatively liberated of the state control
- (4) Government is subjected to habitual criticism from analytical reporters
- (5) Individual can generate their own input via telephone calls, mail etc.

3. An Overview of Marxist Theory:

1. Marxists are extremely decisive of industrialist societies and consider that the Mass Media stand in the way of obligatory collective change.
2. Capitalist societies give only the notion of democratic system. There is no real democracy.
3. In reality, the State defends the wellbeing of the industrialist class, (the Bourgeoisie) at the disbursement of the operational class (the Proletariat)
4. The Mass Media are said to add to a process of socialization which encourages subjugated groups to accept their own mistreatment without inquiry.

4. Media Ownership in Nigeria

Before 1992 media ownership was under the government were until Babangida took over as the president. Presently, The Mass Media operate via: Private (which falls under the Pluralist theory), Government Media (which falls under the Marxist theory).

4.1 Private Ownership and Control of Media In Nigeria

These are media owned and run by private individuals or organization. They tend to act more sensitive than the government media because of profit making if they don't act as watchdog they won't be rewarded. So the private media fight tooth and nail to see they keep the business moving, for instance Journalist are paid more if they sought for advert so why wont to run helter -Skitter to sought for news when they know they will be rewarded for each and every acts they take. They see audience as consumers and this is linked with the pluralist theory in which it states that " *The press is privately owned and relatively free from the state control*" the aim of the private media is profit maximization. It is expected to act as a guard that is, we should rely on the media to keep us alert on various issues concerning the masses. Example of the private media is Guardian Newspaper, Niger Delta Standard, Radio/TV Gotel, Channels T.V, Silver bird, MINAJ, Ray Power etc. The question is how free is the private media?

4.2 Private Ownership of the Media and the Pluralist Theory

The privately owned media falls under the pluralist theory in which the media is neutral, fair and balance. By implication media report issues as they are by not taking side and this is evident during the Fuel Subsidy Channels reported the demonstration carried out by Protestants while NTA did not. They where only reporting those who accepted the fuel subsidy. Some protestants where killed in Kano and Lagos in which private media aired it but NTA did not. Through the private media the government is subjected to regular criticism unlike the government media which act as mouthpiece the government. As the pluralist theory implies, individuals can make their contributions through phone calls.

5. How free is the Private Media?

Nigeria is a country that practice mixed-economy that is the means of production is partly owned by government and individual.

Though Nigerian private media flourishes but their continuity depends on not overstepping or overriding on the government power. Individual own the media while government policies influences its operation.

Many agents of Nigeria's press have been imprisoned, exiled, tortured, or murdered as a result, among them being Ogoni activist and television producer Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed for treason by order of the Sani Abacha dictatorship in 1995 (resulting in the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations and sanctions from abroad). Even under the somewhat less-oppressive current civilian government, journalists have continued to come under fire, be it from the government (as with the June 2006 arrest of Gbenga Aruleba and Rotimi Durojaiye of African Independent Television under charges of sedition) or from other popular establishments such as the self-imposed exile of This day's Isioma Daniel following the riots in Northern Nigeria over "sensitive comments" which she had made in an article regarding Muhammad and the 2002 Miss World pageant; a fatwa calling for her beheading was issued by the mullahs of northern Nigeria, but was declared null and void by the relevant religious authorities in Saudi Arabia, and the Obasanjo faced an international public relations smearing especially within journalistic circles in the aftermath, which was not helped by the Amina Lawal controversy which had occurred prior to the riots, which had seen over 200 dead. However, as with most other countries, blogging has increasingly become a much safer, and much easier, conduit for Nigeria's growing Internet-enabled minority to express their dissatisfactions with the current state of affairs in Nigeria (e.n.m.wikipedia.org nd).

So we can say that Nigerian private media is free to an extent.

6. Government Owned Media

The government owned media are those media that are completely financed and supervised by the government such as Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Co-operation of Nigeria and other state own radio and Television such as TSBS and TTV respectively.

The media acts as the voice of the elites that is the bourgeoisie uses it to air their view to the working class.

In an ideal manner the government media ought to be more vibrant, and champions of the truth. But due to them being under the arm bit of government tend to do as the government wishes in other not to lose both license and sponsorship.

Nigeria as a study uses the NTA to air the Presidents and other governors and ministers respectively.

The Marxist theory points out that the media in any society is not neutral; it is fashioned in a way that it will support the dominant class and that is exactly what happens in government owned media.

No government media blamed Good Luck Jonathan during the fuel subsidy, they where only

propagating that “The subsidy will be used to improve the country. If really it will improve tell us how, and where and when it will improve us.

The Marxist believes that the media professionals who are enjoying the elusion of autonomy are socialized into it. To them the media is not fair, neutral and balance.

If Nigerian Government owned media are fair why they don’t air both the rich and poor people’s voice.

As the theory states capitalist state like Nigeria gives impression of democracy but there is no real democracy. In reality the government media defends the interest of the capitalist class at the expenses of the working class.

The government owned media contributes to a process of socialization which encourage exploited group to accept their exploitation without question and this is evident in Nigerian government owned media they tend to socialize people to see what the ruling elites are doing are good that is they should accept the way in which they are exploited without complaining

7. Recommendations

1. Both the private and government media should be allowed to practice freely without any internal or external forces.
2. The media should not be let in the hands of the rich at the expense of the poor.
3. Government media should take the course of championing the truth in the society rather than remaining a pet dog to the government.

8. Conclusion

The issues of media ownership and control can never be overemphasized due to the dwindling situations surrounding media practice in Nigeria. The media is said to take the coloration of where the practice is being carried out i.e the way the media operates in Nigeria cannot be the same as the way it will function in other countries such as Soviet Union, United States, Britain etc.

References

- Asemah (2009). *The Principles and Practice of Mass Communication*. (2nd Edition). Published by great future press. Jos
- Baran, S. (2002). *Introduction to Mass Communication, Media Literacy and Culture* (2nd ed) New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- Bitner, J. (1989) *Mass Communication: An Introduction*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Publishers.
- David Trend (1995) *The crisis of meaning in culture and education*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- e.n.m.wikipedia.org (nd) Media in Nigeria