

Media and Society: The Controversy in a Political System

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the misconception people have about the mass media of communication. Often, the media which include radio, television, books, newspaper, magazines, billboards, Internet and social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Quora, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok, are blamed for every societal problem not minding the fact that the media are not the manufacturers of these problems but rather mirror on what affects or is happening in the society. Though social media have come to justify the claim that the media generate problems in society. The study evaluates the audience's perception from academic works done on media and the political system. Several aspects of the society such as advertising, politics, youths, crime, diseases, values and ethics were examined vis-a-viz the media. The researchers adopt a library research approach relying on secondary data for this study. Conclusions were however, drawn from empirical data that were obtained from already existing studies used as secondary data for this research.

Keywords: Media, society, misconception, controversies, political system.

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1. Introduction/Background to the Study

Mass media are channels of communication. In every human society, the mass media occupy a special place because of the special roles they play. Among the roles otherwise known as functions are information dissemination, education function, entertainment function, correlation function, surveillance and agenda setting function as well (Ekherafor & Ngonso, 2013). Mass media can be classified into three groups; the print media (newspapers, magazines, books, leaflets, pamphlets, fliers and handbills); the broadcast or electronic media include (radio, television, film and cinema) and digital media which include: the Internet, social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Quora, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok.

Many years before the arrival of the Digital media-the Internet and social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Quora, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok, humans have depended so much on the mainstream media, particularly the radio, television, newspaper, magazine, book, billboards, leaflets, pamphlets, fliers and handbills. We can attest to this, from the number of radio sets per household and listeners. Radio over the years have been a good companion to many, for instance, in Nigeria, the Fulani herdsmen carry their radio about just to ensure that they listen to news in their local language, particularly news on BBC Hausa. They also enjoy their local music and other forms of entertainment. In the upland region of Nigeria, motorcycle riders popularly known as Okada riders create artificially a space on their motorcycle for radio just to ensure that they have access to musical entertainment. The riverine communities who use canoe or

outboard engine boats as means of transportation are not left out in the use of radio. They equally tied transistor radio to their boat as they enjoyed news and musical programmes on their radio sets. Farmers also carry their transistor radio to farm. In offices, radios are found in one corner or the other while work is going on, workers enjoy different programmes on the radio. Petty traders, business men in their stores and in their business environment hang their radios on the walls or put it on their tables while enjoying all of the station's programmes for the day. You may have seen mason men on their building sites positioning their radio sets on one side of their scaffold and doing their work while enjoying different programmes on radio. Our cars all have in-built radio sets which enable us to listen to any radio station while driving. Modern technology has not significantly changed any of these situations. These examples show the importance of radio in our society.

Television is another unique channel of communication. Since its arrival in the late 50s in Nigeria through the Western Nigerian Government led by its Premier, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, television has been a major source of news information and entertainment. Its arrival in the global scene was another wonder the human society has witnessed. Television as a mass medium is unique in many ways. It is an audio-visual medium with the characteristic of transmitting live events into the homes of the viewers. Its audio-visual impact attracts children, youths, teenagers and women to the medium. It is a glamorous medium that presents events in a most colourful and attractive manner. The number of television sets per household, availability in public and private offices, restaurants, bars, clubs, and worship centres testify of the importance of television in human society. Human society is an information society. Every business strives on the availability of information. As much as humans cannot do without food, human still depends on the media today to find food. As a matter of fact, human physiological needs such as food, shelter, warmth, sex, water, and clothing are even more sourced for, in today's society through the mass media. Egielewa and Aidonojie, (2021,p.415) assert that the right to access information and public record if not adequately guaranteed, there is a tendency for human rights abuses and perpetuation of corruption. Egielewa and Aidonojie attributed the above position to the relevance and potency of information. Since the days of Gutenberg, print media have provided man with the needed information for human existence. For instance, books have housed information on all issues of life. Books include academic books, religious cum spiritual books, books on politics, human welfare, and science books. Humans read these books for their intellectual and spiritual growth. The importance of books are seen in the manner with which all humans pay attention to education. According to Atairret & Dickson (2022), right to education is fundamental. While, Williams and Egembe (2022, p.29) see education as "one of the avenues of cementing strong cultural relations between nation states".

The size of public and private libraries, the number of existing and functioning printing presses and the funding set aside for book publishing by government and non-governmental organizations also attest to the place of books in the human society. Newspapers and magazines are another form of print media that human society finds it difficult to ignore. Newspapers and magazines are important channels of communication in human society. Human society depends on newspapers for news information and other forms of entertainment such as cartoons, riddles and puzzles. The number of newspapers available in our present day society, and newspaper subscription by individuals, government, and non-governmental bodies all attest to the important roles this medium plays in our society. On the other hand magazines are other forms of the print media. Magazines are similar to newspapers though they are not dailies. They are published weekly, forth-nightly, or monthly. Magazines provide detailed information about an issue earlier reported in the news because magazines allow for thorough investigation after the news breaks forth. The number of existing magazines, subscriptions by individuals, government, and non-governmental bodies are pointers to the importance of this medium in our society. Leaflets, pamphlets, fliers and handbills are also very vital media of communication. The amount of Leaflets, pamphlets, fliers and handbills printed and consumed daily shows how important these channels of communication are in human society. Churches for instance print a lot of leaflets, pamphlets, fliers and handbills are evangelical tools (Ngonso & Egielewa, 2023). Digital media which include: the Internet, social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Quora, Linkedin, YouTube, Snapchat, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok are now liberating the human society of information scarcity. In the era of mainstream media, human society was predominantly an elite information-controlled society but with the digital media, the media space has been redefined. It is now a citizen-information space because everyone who desires to speak up, to write, to air his opinion does not need the trained journalists, editors and newscasters to lobby before he or she is heard. Social media now creates platforms for anyone to say what he or she wants to say. In spite of the liberation brought to

the media industry, many still express worries with misconception about all media forms. This paper will explore certain areas in the society within the political gamut where people misconstrue the media, hence, controversy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Advertising

The society today is built on activities, each of these activities are shared with members of the society through the mass media. One of the major activities that society depends on the media is advertising. Advertising messages can be transmitted through the radio as radio jingle, television as TV commercial, newspapers, magazines, books, leaflets, pamphlets, fliers, handbills, billboards, film and cinema and now digital media which include: the Internet and social media. Advertising provides the public with information about products and services, their availability, their prices, and the place where the products and services can be found. Advertising therefore can be said to be a non-personal form of communication paid for by an identified sponsor through the mass media. Today society depends on the mass media for this information. However, advertising has been misconstrued by members of the public as a mere propaganda by the media, not minding those behind advertising such as the advertiser and the advertising agents rather blame their misconception on the media. Meanwhile, Ngonso, Egielewa & Dauda ((2020) in their study found that social media are used by artisans to advertise their crafts. For instance, “outdoor media outlets present large displays of advertisement to passing pedestrians and vehicle users, showing large, ostensibly witty slogans and distinctive visuals (Bassey, 2021, p.206). In spite of the positive impacts of the media, certain portion of the population still sees social media as a whiplash of digital civilization due to several nude and pornographic materials shared on social media (Ngonso, 2020).

2.3. Politics

Politics is another area the people want the media to keep them abreast with. Politics is the engine room of development of any society and the media has always been confronted with the issue of development even when it is obvious that developmental efforts are principally the function of the government, many still insist that the media should take up the fight for development. This was part of the reason why development media theory was formulated to address developmental needs of third world countries. In Nigeria for instance, in the last general elections, integrity issues on the part of the electoral body was a major concern to members of the public as well as the media. Bassey (2020,p.224) maintained that, “the media are expected mobilise the electorate sufficiently for the electoral process through adequate reportage and surveillance of the process to ensure acceptable outcome of *election*”. Why is this so, according to (Adebowale,2022; Ataire,2021) election is an integral part of democracy and voting the political right of every citizen. Though this is an obvious fact, many still believe that certain media houses took side with certain candidates. TVC news for example was fingered for supporting APC, AIT was fingered for supporting PDP and Arise TV was fingered for supporting the Labour Party. This development has sparked off accusations on the part of the media. Social media has not also helped the issue even as some say that Labour Party supporters are social media supporters. Many also think social media have provided platforms for verbal and online abuses among political actors and their supporters. Among other things the mainstream media are also confronted with the issue of setting an agenda for the society. Several attacks have been meted at the media and the practitioners on the need to set political agenda. This may not be unconnected with Williams and Egembe (2022) assertions that, political actors are individuals with emotions, biases and other human attributes. Possibly when media uncover their wrong political doings, they are left with nothing than to attack media practitioners. But Bassey and Iwok (2019) also believe that the media should fairly reports political defection by politicians. Udouo and Bassey (2011, p.40) in their work state that ‘in a multi-party democracy, the press is expected to be fair and objective in reporting activities of political parties’

2.4. Teenagers and Youth

The teenagers and youth constitute a larger proportion of the most population of every given society. The youth also consume media contents more than the adult folks partly because they have so much free time at their disposal and have little and nothing to think about life and much more seen as the major users of the media. Studies have also shown that teenagers and youth use social media more than others. This has brought another accusation or raised a controversy about the use of social media by teens and youths. Social media has been

blacklisted as promoting false celebrity amongst youth. Nzekwe et.al (2017) and on the other hand. In a study conducted by Ngonso (2019) on the effect of social media on teenagers and youths: a study of rural Nigerian secondary schools that are frequently exposed to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp to make their day. In a similar study conducted by Ngonso, Egielewa & Oludare(2018) found that Nigerian youths increase their cognitive ability through the use of social media. Egielewa,et.al(2021,p.71) assert that, “social media use has become varied, use for business, health, and in recent times, for educational purposes because of their usefulness to teachers and students”. Other studies conducted to ascertain the use of media by youths have equally shown that youths are addicted to film, cinema and television. Scholars also believe that excessive exposure to TV contents by youths have contributed to irrational behavior of the youths (Ngonso,2017), while on the other hand, some also believe that TV only reinforces the pre-conceived belief(Uchenunu & Ngonso,2021)

2.5. Crime

The society’s blame game on the media extends to the issue of crime. Some people also feel that the media promote crime instead of fighting crime. Recently, Nigerians have cried that reality TV shows promote prostitution, love for money and laziness. In a recent study by Ngonso, et.al (2023) on reality TV show, Big Brother Naija shows that many Nigerians (majority of respondents) found the show morally offensive. Through action films and other related films, many young people have been exposed to dangerous lifestyles which they also exhibit in everyday life. The second most controversial media form that has been regularly accused of contributing to crime in the society is the social media. Social media allows anyone to freely express himself or herself. Social media breaks the boundary and connects people virtually allowing conversation in real time. Bassey (2020,p.143) “social media are essential components of the contemporary society and have exerted pervasive influence on human communication especially among younger generations who are internet savvy and explorative”

These platforms have enabled interaction in business among members of the society across local and international boundaries. This opportunity has paved the way for internal fraud and other criminal activities. The question is, should the media not air what the society brought to them particularly now that the media depend on commercialization for their continued existence?

2.6. Diseases

Media of communication particularly the electronic media have been accused of contributing to moral panic. One of the areas the mass media, particularly electronic media, have been accused of moral panic is in the dissemination of disease, war and disaster-related messages. During the COVID-19, some media audiences in Nigeria blame the media for blowing out of proportion the COVID-19 pandemic. The First World War, the Second World War, the Iran-Iraq war and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war are amongst other societal problems that the media audience accused the media of promoting on taking sides. The media critic also felt the media create panic or take sides through framing of issues and possibly set agenda the media way.

Ngonso and Uchenunu(2021) concluded that the role of the media in shaping and reshaping public opinion has been established through the agenda setting role of the media(p.32). Nwabueze et.al(2011) assert that, “the media play agenda setting role in the society, determining which issues move from press agenda to public agenda. Framing is a process that sees journalists interpreting and ascribing meanings to news items. This process of news framing could be influenced by political commitments, interests of media stakeholders, and wider relations of power in the society in which the media exist” (p.32). Nwabueze et.al (2011) went further to state that, “media framing of issues has dominated media discourse over the years due to media influence in setting agenda for public consumption. Media framing is a skewed report of situations perpetuated by media organisations to propagate an ideology of the owner of the media or country or environment where the media establishment operates with certain socio-economic, racial or segregational ideology” (p.33). See how Bassey (2016,p.219) puts it, “but media more often than not seem to project the views and opinions of the political office holders, cronies of politicians, their relations, high profile businessmen and women, professionals, religious and traditional leaders to the detriment of the common people”.

Meanwhile, the same media accused of moral panic and contributing to fear provide the news information that keeps the people abreast of the happenings concerning disease outbreak and war. Ngonso and Chukwu(2021) in their study of message consumption during the pandemic assert “COVID-19 pandemic has recalibrated the hitherto world order and subjected everybody to learning new methods of survival. Information dissemination and communication-related activities are not left out in the new arrangement. Hence, the need to ascertain and distinguish how the rural dwellers accessed and interpreted the COVID-19 pandemic’s broadcast messages” Ngonso(2021) in his study of NGO sponsorship of COVID-19 safety protocol as radio jingle found that people still listen to radio for news information on disease outbreak, one of the respondents in the descriptive study conducted by Ngonso asserts, “in fact, I listen to the radio at any time particularly, Vibes FM, Benin City, KU FM, Benin City, ITV/Radio Benin City, and Rhythm FM, Benin City”(p.123). In a similar study conducted by Ugwonno and Ngonso (2013) found that the media audience was still sourced for information in the media about infectious diseases. Should journalists and entire media practitioners ignore covering these disasters? If the media had ignored reporting COVID-19 that posed a great an unprecedented challenge to industrial, economic, and societal activities all over the world with attendant impact to human health, health delivery systems the ecosystems, and other aspects of human endeavors (Ukhurebor et.al,2022; Ibanga & Ataire,2022), a section of the public would have queried the media corporate social responsibility which entails truthful dissemination of news information to the society (Ngonso &Nworisa,2022). But Akpan and Bassey (2018) felt that it is the responsibility of the media to sensitise the public. Bassey (2018,p.78) categorically placed this responsibility on the media and asserts that, “as agents of development, the media in discharging their surveillance function owe the society a duty to report on the implementation, failure and success of development agenda of governments”.

2.7. Ethics and Values

The media controversy extends to the issue of ethics and values. Media operations are governed by ethical principles. In as much as this is true, certain segments of the audience still do not believe that media operators live up to their billing. They often see media practitioners as corrupt, biased, and sometimes concealing important information from the members of the public. Ethical principles of the media are anchored on truth, factual reportage of events, timely reportage, and unbiased dissemination of information, honesty and accountability. As some scholars will expect the media to always lead the way in all that concern the society. Ozekhome and Ngonso (2021) opine, “no doubt, the media have a crucial role to play in the reform agenda by totting social balance to a more sustained growth”. Adedara and Bewaji (2017,p.179) see ethics as a moral philosophy that concerns itself with the “norms of behaviour; right and wrong, good and evil, approbation and reprobation”. Wimmer and Dominic (2003) cited in Ngonso(2022a) state that ethical behaviour is the “proper thing to do”. Due to the perceived powerful influence of the mass media which include essentially to inform the populace of the goings-on within their environment constantly, some critics have placed much expectations on the media activities including how they operate within the ethical principles to enthrone moral values and save the society from decade(Ngonso, 2022a; Ngonso,2022b). The critics have also accused the media particularly electronic media and the social media of promoting gossips, rumours, nude pictures, sexual assault, sexually explicit materials, sexual violence, indecent dressings, and alien culture. The church has also shared this sentiment against the media (Ngonso & Egielewa, 2019; Ngonso & Egielewa, 2023).

3. Conclusions

In spite of the important role of the media to the society, many audience members have blacklisted the media and their practitioners. They have raised several complaints about the media. These include but not limited to lack of trust Egielewa (2020), spreading gossips, rumours, nude pictures, sexual assault, sexually explicit materials, sexual violence, indecent dressings, promoting alien culture. No minding the fact that interpersonal communication has a role to play in what we do or think about the society (Ngonso & Egielewa, 2023). Other accusations levelled against the media include but not limited to, promoting sectional interest in politics, misinformation, and misrepresentations of images, product and services, crime, debasement of culture and values, and unbiased reportage. Though these allegations have been levelled against the mass media, human society finds it very difficult to do without the media. Everyone depends on the media either for news information, education, relaxation, persuasion. Humans interact with the media daily particularly with social media and other learning technology (Ngonso et.al, 2018). Human environment has become an issue of concern to man particularly with the recent outbreak of COVID-19. Human health, business, wellbeing and legal rights

has been more exposed by the availability of information now on social media. In fact, media technology has redefined everything about man and his environment, Aidonojie(2023). But man with his rational thinking ability does not want to see the media's positive contributions in isolation to what he feels are the short-coming of the media, this is where the controversy lies.

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