



THE INTERPLAY OF MEDIA THEORIES, MEDIA ETHICS AND THE OBJECTIVITY QUESTION IN MEDIA PERFORMANCE IN 2023 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *CAMPAIGN FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS INTO THE PRESIDENCY, GUBERNATORIAL, NATIONAL AND STATE ASSEMBLIES ARE A 4-YEAR RITUAL IN NIGERIA ORGANIZED BY INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION TO ELECT OR RE- ELECT OUR REPRESENTATIVE AT BOTH STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS. ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA HAVE OFTEN BEEN CONDUCTED IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF SUSPICION, FEAR AND BRICK BATTING AND SOMETIMES WITH VIOLENCE UNLEASHED ON POLITICAL ASPIRANTS. BECAUSE OF THE ATTENDANT POMP AND PAGEANTRY AND WINNERS TAKE-IT-ALL SYNDROME COUPLED WITH OVER BLOATED TAKE- HOME PACKAGES, ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA HAVE OFTEN BEEN REGARDED AS A DO OR DIE AFFAIR. THE MEDIA HAS BEEN TOUTED AS THE FOURTH ESTATE OF THE REALM WITH A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, AND HAS BEEN GUARANTEED FREEDOM TO ACCESS AND DISSEMINATE NEWS UNIMPEDED. THERE IS THE UNDERLYING FEELING THAT THE MEDIA HAS BEEN COMPROMISED AND STOMACH INFRASTRUCTURE IS BEGINNING TO PLAY OUT. OPINIONS ARE BEGINNING TO EMERGE ABOUT THE FRACTIONALIZATION OF THE MEDIA ALONG ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND OWNERSHIP DIVIDE, ESPECIALLY AS IT PERTAINS TO 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA. THIS STUDY SEEKS TO FIND OUT THE PERFORMANCE OF THE MEDIA BEARING IN MIND THAT MEDIA PROFESSIONALS HAVE FORE KNOWLEDGE THAT MEDIA THEORIES, MEDIA ETHICS AND THE OBJECTIVITY QUESTION WHICH REQUIRES THAT MEDIA BE IMPARTIAL AND UNBIASED UMPIRES AT ALL TIMES, COME TO THE FRONT BURNER ESPECIALLY IN A SENSITIVE ISSUE AS ELECTIONS. THE STUDY HAS AS ITS SPRINGBOARD THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY AND EMPLOYED DEPTH INTERVIEW OF 10 SEASONED JOURNALISTS/ MEDIA SCHOLARS CONVENIENTLY SELECTED TO FIND OUT THE INTERPLAY OF THEORIES SUCH AS DEVELOPMENT MEDIA THEORY, AGENDA SETTING THEORY AND STATUS CONFERRAL THEORY AND OTHERS ON THE ELECTIONEERING ACTIVITIES OF 4 TELEVISION STATIONS-*



NIGERIAN TELEVISION AUTHORITY BASED IN ABUJA, CHANNELS TELEVISION, ARISE TELEVISION AND TVC NEWS BASED IN LAGOS. THE STUDY DISCOVERED SUBSTANTIAL NONCOMPLIANCE WITH MEDIA ETHICS AND THE OBJECTIVITY QUESTION. HOWEVER, THERE WAS AN INTERPLAY OF A NUMBER OF MEDIA THEORIES IN THE NUMEROUS ACTIVITIES EMBARKED UPON BY THE MEDIA PERSONNEL IN THE MEDIA HOUSES UNDER SCRUTINY AND RECOMMENDED A SYSTEMATIC PROGRAMMED TRAINING AND RETRAINING FOR ALL MEDIA PERSONNEL FOR A BETTER RE- ORIENTATION AND PROACTIVE PERFORMANCE.

Keywords: MEDIA THEORIES, MEDIA ETHICS, OBJECTIVITY QUESTION, MEDIA PERFORMANCE AND ELECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, scholars in the social sciences discipline are of the opinion that the media is a critical arm in any democratic setting. The media plays a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy. The press remains the fourth estate of the realm, the watchdog and the conscience of the nation. It is the organ that informs the public about the activities of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. To Adeyemi (2006), the press has always occupied the forefront of socio-political and economic changes throughout the history of mankind. The Federal Government in recognition of the sacred role of the media enshrined in Section 22 of the 1999 constitution as amended thus: The press, radio, television and other agencies of the media shall at all times be free to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

The mass media is very useful in the electoral process of any nation. The media in its agenda-setting role help the electorate to have an insight into the personalities of the political office seekers and their party manifestoes.

Usually elections are held periodically to enthrone the democratic process. The media is germane to the sustenance of democracy and its functions include disseminating information on citizen education for electoral purposes and human rights that serve as a link between the government and the governed and a link between political parties and the citizens. It also serves as a watchdog to hold elected persons accountable. According to Omoera and Ake (2021), television is a powerful media platform for voter education and information on political parties' candidates for elections and recommended a continuous partnership of the medium with the election umpire (Independent National Electoral Commission-INEC) for citizens' enlightenment, fair publicity for all candidates, more agenda-setting programs by television stations and empowering the television medium with access to enough information in order to improve quality of service to the receiving public.

In the run up to the 2023 elections in Nigeria, the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) had outlined guidelines for election reportage that would ensure the defense of the rights of every citizen and discourage the assumption of fighting for the rights of other people without recourse to the rule of law and constitutional provisions.



The media according to Oluwajuyitan (2015) is politically polarized in terms of axis, ethnic loyalty, ownership and selfish interests. This is against the backdrop that the media is one of the institutions that sustain democracy. It is on this basis that Agba (2007) examines the relationship between the state and the media in Nigeria and observes that it has been that of mutual distrust. One of the main constitutional roles of the media in a democracy is to objectively monitor governance while maintaining an impartial and objective stance in holding those involved in the democratic process accountable to the people. These include those with executive, legislative and judicial functions in the polity together with all institutions of governance and democracy. This study seeks to examine the extent to which the television medium took cognizance of the ethics of the profession including the objectivity question and the role media theories played in the day to day discharge of their duties in the run up to 2023 general elections in Nigeria, during elections and post elections period.

Two research questions were proposed thus:

1. To what extent did media theories- Agenda setting theory, Development media theory, and Status conferral theory play out in the roles played by television journalists in the 2023 general elections?
2. How impartial and truthful were the media personnel in the television media under focus during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

THEORETICAL SPRINGBOARD

This paper is anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory of the mass media and it has the following assumptions according to Ojoobo (2002):

1. That media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to society;
2. That through professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance, these obligations can be met;
3. That media should regulate itself within the framework of law and established institutions to be able to carry out its responsibilities;
4. That the media should reflect its society's plurality, giving access to various points of view and granting all the rights to reply.

The major premise of the social responsibility theory is that freedom carries concomitant obligations and the press which enjoys a privileged position under the government is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication.

The social responsibility theory according to Anaeto et al (2008), postulates five specific functions of the press:

1. To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible;
2. To inform the public to enable it take self-determined action;
3. To protect the rights of individuals by acting as watchdog over the government;
4. To serve the economic system by bringing together buyers and sellers through the medium of advertising;
5. To preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences.

The social responsibility theory rests on a concept of positive freedom and freedom of expression is grounded on the duty of the individual to his thought and conscience and should not be claimed for selfish ends. It has value both for the individual and for the society. Although free expression is a moral right, media operators are obligated to make sure that all significant viewpoints of the citizenry are represented by the press. They should see that all ideas deserving a public hearing are granted.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study thrives on certain concepts which need some explanation because they form the building blocks for the study. They include: Ethics and journalism, media professionals, spheres of media control, the press in a democracy, criticism of media practice, principles of journalistic ethics and codes of media ethics.

There are certain actions which human beings will condemn as morally wrong and Omoregbe (1993) captures it succinctly when he says that ethics is concerned with fundamental principles of morality where wrong actions will include dishonesty, stealing, embezzling, adulterer, murder, and so forth, while moral actions will include hospitality, respect for human life, honesty, truthfulness, humanness and their likes. In the past, media practitioners have thought very little about theories of ethics and known almost next to nothing about the history of moral philosophy and today modern journalists are increasingly pulled between what they consider their rights as journalists and their responsibility to society or to various persons and groups within the society. Journalists play important pivotal roles in the society and collectively have the potential for massive influence on the direction the society takes because they make available to the public information upon which decisions are based. Ethics is fundamental to media practice because such practice is based on a set of essentially ethical concepts such as trust, objectivity, honesty, privacy and freedom to access and transmit information as enshrined in the 1999 constitution as amended in 2011.

Laws may be made to guide media professionals, so also are codes of professional ethics but the onus rests on practitioners to act responsibly and responsively. However, media practitioners differ in the way they respond to situations that confront them. Sometimes, they may have to adapt to the policies of whoever pays their wages and whose motives they are afraid to question.

What constitutes the sphere of media control? They include:

1. Professional standards and ethical practices of publishers, reporters, editors, station and network owners, news directors and film editors;
2. The standards of practice and the code of ethics established by individual media. All mass media be they newspapers, magazines, broadcast stations and so forth, operate under certain guidelines which may be written codes, unwritten assumptions, lore and traditions. Those who work for these media must subscribe to the standards and practices of organizations for which they work or look elsewhere for their employment;
3. Professional or industry-wide standards of conduct as embodied in statements of sound practice affecting radio, television, film, newspapers and books and the code of ethics of groups such as Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON) and Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), and so forth.;
4. The basic press philosophies and the laws of individual governments;
5. The limits that people will tolerate regarding all types of human activity. No individual organization can pass beyond the outer limit of what people will permit without reprisal.

A vibrant press in a democratic dispensation must be able to meet the following requirements which reflects the code of ethics enacted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and which have been incorporated in codes of ethics subsequently established by other media organizations all over the world:

- A truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of daily events in a context that gives meaning;
- A forum for the exchange of comments and criticisms;
- The projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society;
- The presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society;
- Full access to the day's activities.



According to Onabajo (2002), media practices have been criticized based on the following observations among others: a) invading personal privacy; b) smearing reputations; c) practicing deception; d) unduly criticizing government, business leaders and politicians; e) reporting gossips and rumors; f) failure to correct errors promptly and conspicuously or even admitting that mistakes have been made; g) fabricating stories.

Lambeth (1986) advocates five principles of media ethics to include principles of truth telling; principle of justice; principle of freedom, principle of humaneness and principle of stewardship because the media writer as a steward of free expression must manage the resources of communication with due regard to the rights of others, the rights of the public and the moral health of his occupation. There are four key areas of code of ethics that have universal applicability. They are:

1. A clear-cut delineation between advertising and editorial matters should be maintained at all times;
2. Material produced by an editorial staff on news services should be used only in sections controlled by editorial departments;
3. Sections controlled by advertising departments should be distinctly different from news sections in typeface, layout and design;
4. Promoting a story in exchange for advertising is unethical.

Basically, journalism is a profession of collecting, writing, editing and publishing materials in newspapers, magazines or on television and radio. It involves a high degree of public trust. Such trust is the cornerstone of journalism and as such journalists and media writers should strive diligently to ascertain the veracity of an event. In performing his duties, a journalist's role is to act as a watchdog of the public, that is to watch over the interests of the people and cry out if and when these interests are threatened. Mass media practitioners should serve as the antidote of citizens against the tyranny of the majority, the intoxication of power, the grinding oppression of authority and the mindless expectation from the underprivileged. Also the media writer should perform his duties selflessly, faithfully and fearlessly as he creates an avenue which affords the public the opportunity to critically examine all sides of an issue with a view to reaching a decision that will be for their good. Moreover, it has become urgent for every journalist or media writer and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards, as journalism today faces an increasing need for critical reporting, accuracy, fairness and objectivity. Furthermore, the code of ethics of journalism is the companion of the practicing journalist as well as the public in providing ethical guidelines by which practitioners can judge and be judged. It is the rules, principles and norms painstakingly established to regulate the practice of journalism.

THE OBJECTIVITY QUESTION

Objectivity subsumes all mass communication virtues. It covers the individual journalist and the institution that employs him. It is a way of trying to understand reality based on the collection of observable verifiable facts. The reporter, reader, viewer, the conventions, forms and processes of communication institutions, language, the investigative and interpretative functions of the reporter affect the objectivity of mass communication. According to Edeani (1993), the negative or positive performance of the press is judged by its objectivity and responsibility. When media professionals claim they are objective, they mean some or all of the following:

- They gather and present materials without prejudice or partisanship;
- They act as impartial witnesses to events;
- Their work is not affected by their preconceived notions and ideas;
- Their work is not influenced by emotion;
- They keep personal opinions and judgements out of their messages;



- They are neutral and do not pass judgement in the information they present;
- Their messages are the sum of independently verifiable facts.

Striving for objectivity affects the way mass media messages are constructed; from the choice of individual words to the structure of the entire message. Media practitioners practice the following techniques in order to be objective:

- A. They practice the use of specific verifiable factual details rather than general judgements;
- B. They use quotations to distance themselves from the statements of others and clearly indicate that opinions stated are not theirs;
- C. They use experts as their sources of information since they are often not experts on the issues they write about and they depend on others for information. Most media writers depend on people who by virtue of their position or job title are generally accepted as experts.
- D. In an effort to avoid overt bias, media writers try to balance conflicting claims of truth expressed by sources through presenting both sides of the issue;
- E. Media writers structure messages to accepted convention so that arrangement of information will not pose a problem to them anytime they sit to write their stories.

At this juncture, there is the temptation to ask whether objectivity is possible. Media writers are human beings and are the sum of their experiences which differ from one media writer to another. Each media writer or journalist processes the experiences of everyday life through individual filters which are largely determined by age, gender, race or ethnicity, education, socio-economic background, religion, personal philosophy and life experiences.

Media professionals often think they are neutral witnesses of reality, but in actual fact, the act of observing often changes what is being observed. Some people play up to the television correspondents and their cameras which often transform them from mere information sources to actors on display. Others may become far less articulate or even nervous at the sight of cameras. In either case, the audience accepts the image presented as an accurate representation of reality. The process of writing a media message is a process of selection. Faced with choices from what information to highlight to which words to use, individual writers make individual choices. The act of choosing a set of objective facts over another is a subjective one. The selection process begins as the writer sorts through numerous possibilities concerning the overall direction and content of the message. Each time the writer makes a decision or follows a decision made by others, he or she travels down a particular subjective road.

According to Onabajo (2023), what journalists tout as objective is at best subjective-objectivity as objective-objectivity is but a mirage which the journalist strives to achieve but never reaches this utopian stage. This is because the very nature of mass communication makes objectivity impossible for the following reasons:

- The content of mass media messages is almost entirely dependent on information gleaned from sources such as clients, government representatives, industry reports on official documents which may be biased
- Media writers are not in a position to judge the correctness, accuracy or truth of information acquired piecemeal from sources. This is because most media writers are not experts in the field they are writing on and would not be capable of independently assessing the quality of information they receive.;
- There is nothing in the background and training of media writers that prepares them for objectivity. Their teachers in journalism schools simply told them to be objective but not how to be.



THE INTERPLAY OF MEDIA THEORIES

Media theories have goals which media practitioners have to imbibe in the day to day performance of their duties. According to Severin and Tankard (2001), media theories help to explain the effects of mass communication; they explain the uses to which people put mass communication; they explain how people learn from the mass media; and they explain the role of the mass media in shaping people's values and views.

The democratic-participant media theory emerged in response to the elitist nature of the press, its responsiveness to political and economic pressures and the professional hegemony in the media system. It also came up as a result of the dissatisfaction with the libertarian and the social responsibility theories. This was because they failed to achieve the social benefits expected of them. To Folarin (2002), the thrust of the democratic-participant theory lies in its insistence that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down so as to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers. McQuail (2005) sees the theory as reflecting public reaction against the commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media and against the centralism and bureaucratization of public broadcasting institutions established according to the norms of social responsibility. The theory sees public broadcasting as too elitist and too susceptible to the dictates of those in government. With regards to the media, the theory calls for greater attention to the needs, interests and aspirations of the receiver in a political society. It insists that media conglomerates be replaced or at the least juxtaposed with small scale media enterprises. Under this theory, the individual's right to communicate is defended. This right entails access to the media as well as self-determination of needs to be served by the media. Local organizations and communities are encouraged to own and operate their channels of mass communication.

The development media theory has the following assumptions:

- The media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with national established policy;
- Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society;
- The media should give priority in their content to national culture and languages;
- The media should give priority to news and information that link with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically;
- Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks;
- In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in or restrict media operation, and devices and direct control can be justified.

The uses and gratification theory is concerned with what people do with the mass media instead of what the mass media do to the people. The assumption is that the people influence the effects the mass media have on them. The people are not just passive receivers of the messages but actively influences the message effect. This is because they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the media messages on the basis of their needs, beliefs and so forth. This is in consonance with the selectivity theory of Berelson and Steiner (1964). According to the theory, media consumers have a freewill to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them.

The agenda setting theory proposes that the facts which people know about public issues tend to be those which the mass media presents to them. Also, the significance which they ascribe to the same issues tend to be proportionate to the amount of attention given to the same issues in the media. Here, it is assumed that the media sets the agenda for our general discussion. The media may not always determine what we think, but what we think about. Although, we have a right to think what we want to think, but surprisingly, we tend to think most of those things the media highlight as important. The



number of times an issue is reported, using headline and display strategies to play up a report in the media and to relay reports that give room for points and counterpoints could be responsible for agenda setting.

Status conferral theory assumes that the media confers status on individuals by regularly featuring them. This means that the media focus on those that are regarded as important personalities. It assumes that if they are not important, the media will not give them prominence in their coverage. Examples are today's celebrities, including politicians who were relatively unknown before the media made them important.

The gate-keeping theory deals with the processes and factors which influence the decisions of media organizations to select or reject potential newsworthy items for publication. Bittner (2003) defines gatekeeper as any person or formally organized group directly involved in relaying or transferring information from one individual to another through a mass medium. According to Folarin (2002), the concept of gate keeping is that no media organization can transmit all the messages it receives in the course of the day's routine. Some individuals have to decide which information to transmit, which to defer, which to modify, and which to delete entirely. The factors which determine if these gates will be opened or closed are organizational policy; audience needs and preferences; personal disposition of the communication professional; competition; legal restrictions; characteristics of information sources; nature of the media and professional ethics (Adepoju, 1999).

ELECTIONS AND MEDIA PERFORMANCE

According to Oluwajuyitan (2023), the history of elections in Nigeria has provided a golden opportunity of assessment of the divergent roles of the media in the Nigerian political process within the framework of our national political goal. The issue and question of education, information, mobilization and monitoring have become a very crucial factor in the realization of the national objectives in the context of the electoral process. This is as a result of the ugly incidents of various forms of electoral malpractices which have repeatedly threatened the possibility of credible elections and national integration. Though the issue at stake is the responsibility of all stakeholders in the body polity, there is however a rationale in assigning this responsibility as a primary concern of the mass media on the ground of professional competence as the fourth estate of the realm. As a means of disseminating information, media has often been misused as political agenda is inserted into media content. For the media to maintain its relevance, the people must be assisted to premise their political choices on rational parameters and vote wisely during elections. They must have all the information that are needed to elect the right candidates into political offices.

Dukor (1999) is of the opinion that that there has been a democratic flowering of the independent press which has generally accompanied moves toward democracy and respect of human rights, but regrettably, the practice of journalism in Nigeria is bedeviled by some unethical problems. The media is politically polarized in terms of axis, ethnic loyalty, religion and selfish interest. This is against the backdrop that the media is one of the institutions that is expected to sustain democracy. One of the main constitutional roles of the media in a democracy is to objectively monitor governance, while holding the stakeholders in the democratic process accountable to the people. There are a multiplicity of roles that the media can perform in the electoral process. They are but not limited to the following:

- To educate the voters on how to exercise their democratic rights;
- To provide a non-partisan platform for political parties and their candidates to interact with the public;
- To sensitize the electorates to participate in the electoral process;
- To provide the platform for the public to communicate their concerns, views and opinions on the electoral process;



- To cover the electoral process before, during and after elections;
- To scrutinize the electoral process including electoral management in order to evaluate the fairness of the process;
- To provide political education to the citizens because the media remain the platform for the dissemination of political news;

Gordon (2006) notes that television advertisements have become ubiquitous feature in American political campaign at every level of government and it is also one of the most expensive tools of a political campaign. The news media are now the platforms on which party candidates disseminate information to voters and solicit their support to win elections. To Kurfi (2010), citizens cannot fulfil their roles without access to the full range of information supplied by the media and this may hamper democracy. Nevertheless, the aims and objectives of the media are sometimes different from what politicians actually use the media for during elections. Balkin (1999) is in agreement with this assumption by submitting that politicians and the mass media do not necessarily regard the public as an adversary, rather as the politicians are seeking to shape and draw benefits from public opinion, so also is with the mass media which seek to inform, educate and entertain the public thereby securing public attention and influence. Although both the government and the citizens have the constitutional right to establish and run media organizations, the fact remains that media institutions are established to facilitate the socio-economic and political development of the society. This is why public and private media should reject any action whose aims and objectives are inimical to the society.

METHODOLOGY

The approach used for the study is descriptive/qualitative design. According to Onabajo (2011), a qualitative design involves the collection of information and its analysis rather than the application of quantitative methods. As such, it is less concerned with numbers and accurate measurement and more concerned with the depth of data. It will typically involve the collection of data via interviews, focus groups, participant observation, oral history and so forth. The research instrument is the depth interview conducted for 10 scholars/teachers of mass communication that are purposefully selected and were mandated to beam their satellite on political news and discussions on NTA, TVC News, Channels Television and Arise TV. The common denominator in these 4 television stations is that they have local and international presence and spread. Key components of media theories, media ethics and objectivity were converted to 6 questions to assess the performance of the four television stations in question as per their performance before, during and after 2023 general elections.

Questions asked were based on the following:

1. Whether each television station did set its own agenda;
2. Conferring status/giving special attention to some political parties and politicians;
3. Alignment with national policy
4. How much of truth, accuracy and objectivity played out in their political news and programs?
5. Professionalism and accountability to society
6. Observing Nigerian society's pluralism and rights to reply by the aggrieved.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1-Pre-election performance (score is 10 marks)

Questions	Arise	Channels	TVC	NTA
Setting its own agenda	7	7	7	1
Conferring status/ special attention	7	6	6	5
Alignment with national policy	4	5	5	7
Truth, accuracy and objectivity	4	5	5	7



Professionalism and accountability to society	3	5	5	7
Observing pluralism and right to reply	4	6	6	8

Source: Field Work, 2024

Table 2 – Performance during Elections

Questions	Arise	Channels	TVC	NTA
Setting its own agenda	7	7	7	7
Conferring status/special attention	5	5	5	6
Alignment with national policy	6	6	6	6
Truth, accuracy and objectivity	4	5	6	6
Professionalism and accountability to society	4	5	5	5
Observing pluralism and right to reply	4	5	5	6

Source: Field Work, 2024

Table 3 – Post election performance

Questions	Arise	Channels	TVC	NTA
Setting its own agenda	7	7	7	1
Conferring status/special attention	7	7	6	5
Alignment with national policy	5	5	6	7
Truth, accuracy and objectivity	4	5	5	6
Professionalism and accountability to society	3	5	5	7
Observing pluralism and right to reply	3	5	5	7

Source: Field Work, 2024

RESERCH QUESTIONS RESTATED

1. To what extent did media theories- agenda setting theory; development media theory and states conferral theory play out in the roles played by television journalists in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
2. How impartial and truthful were the media personnel of the television stations in the dissemination of political news and programs before, during and after the general elections?

Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 show that Arise TV, Channels TV and TVC News scored 7 marks out of 10 in terms of agenda setting during pre-elections, elections, and post-elections period in terms of disseminating political news and programs, while Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) scored 1 mark out of 10 on the average score of the 10 scholars interviewed. On conferring status and giving special attention to some political parties and their candidates; Arise TV was more guilty scoring 7 marks out of 10 during pre-election, scored 5 marks during elections and 7 marks during post- election. Channels and TVC scored 6 marks each during pre-election, 5 marks each during elections and 7 and 6 marks respectively during post-elections while NTA scored 5 marks during pre-election and post-election and scored 6 marks during elections. On alignment with national policy, NTA scored 7 out of 10 marks during pre-elections and post-elections and scored 6 marks during elections; Arise scored 4, Channels 5 and TVC 5 during pre-elections and scored 6 marks each during elections and 5, 5, 6 marks respectively during post elections.

On professionalism and accountability to society, Arise TV scored 3, 3 and 4 marks during pre-election, elections, and post-elections periods; Channels TVC scored 5 marks each for the three periods; while NTA scored 7, 5 and 7 marks respectively.



On observing pluralism in the Nigerian society and right to reply, Arise TV scored 4, 4, and 5 marks in the three periods under consideration; Channels and TVC- 6, 5, 5 and NTA- 8, 6, and 7 marks respectively.

For the truth, accuracy and objectivity question which is the preoccupation of Research Question 2, Arise TV scored 4 marks out of 10 for political news and programs transmitted before, during and post-election periods; Channels TV scored 5 marks each; TVC scored 5, 6, 5 and NTA scored 7, 6, and 6 marks

In providing answer to Research Question 1, there was an interplay of media theories as conceptualized and perceived by each television station. Ownership to a large extent did play a key role in agenda setting. Arise Television is owned by Nduka Obaigbena who is perceived to be a card-carrying member of the People Democratic Party (PDP) and understandably will be very critical of the activities of other political parties. According to Olawunmi (2023), the public spat between two prominent media owners- Bola Ahmed Tinubu, owner of TVC News and The Nation Newspaper and Uduka Obaigbena, owner of Arise Television and This Day Newspaper with their warriors (journalists) engaged in mud fight on behalf of their principals has unnervingly exposed the ugly underbelly of media practice in Nigeria. According to the author, the notion of free and independent press bandied by the two combatants only exist in their warped imagination. It is a convenient labelling adopted by the media that is not in accord with reality. Channels Television is owned by John Momoh and his leaning at inception was toward the PDP, although it claims to be non-aligned, but often sets agenda through its news resources often invited to its political programs to propagate its views to the public. In the election period, it has tilted toward the Labour Party with the producer and presenter of its flagship program “Politics Today” trying hard at every opportunity to prove, sometimes without success that the 2023 presidential elections was highly flawed. The NTA scored low on agenda setting because the hierarchy of the party did not support Tinubu’s presidency, hence the NTA has become non-aligned because it does not see its interest in any political party.

According to the scholars, Arise TV scored low marks on the issue of aligning its policies to that of the Federal government, professionalism and accountability to the Nigerian society; it also does not recognize the plurality of the society and does not give its pronouncements any right of reply

The fourth item on each of the table was used to answer Research Question 2 which sought to know how truthful and impartial the television stations were in the periods under consideration.

The scores indicated that Arise television was the most partial and biased and did not speak the truth at all times or spoke the truth through jaundiced eyes. Except for NTA, Channels television and TVC were accused by National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), the regulatory body for all forms of broadcasting in Nigeria.. According to Oluwajuyitan (2023), Arise Global Media Limited, owner of Arise television was sanctioned by NBC for what it described as unprofessional broadcasts and was fined two million naira. Also the station was fined 5 million naira for allowing its television station to be used to make wild and incendiary comments by the vice presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Datti Ahmed. TVC was also indicted and fined 2 million naira for giving more prominence to All Progressive Congress (APC) at the expense of other political parties and also for allowing the APC presidential flagbearer, Ahmed Tinubu to breach the NBC code over a period of time during the countdown to 2023 general elections.

CONCLUSION

It is safe to assume that the Nigerian media is yet to be aware of the onerous responsibilities placed on its shoulders. The media personnel want freedom to access and disseminate news but fail to recognize that there can only be freedom with responsibility and that one’s freedom cannot infringe on other people’s freedom. The flagrant display by journalists seem to send a wrong signal that they are above



the law and the NBC is sometimes too slow in applying the hammer. The media of today is made up of rookies who have undergone little or no training and so are involved in setting frivolous agenda and have since jettisoned their gate-keeping functions and their watchdog role. In this study only NTA displayed decorum because of the maturity of its human capital. Other television stations are made up of neophytes that are yet to grapple with the fundamentals of journalism. From the performance of the media personnel of Arise TV, Channels TV and TVC, there is little or no evidence that they know what media theories are, what constitute media ethics; and the objectivity question is still a mirage. A lot still need to be done.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study makes bold to make the following recommendations:

1. Recognition of the existence of the reporter's personal history and experience and their effect on his work with constant effort made to broaden and objectify that experience;
2. More professional education and training in the art of reporting, presenting and producing programs should be carried out;
3. Insistence that media personnel bring to their work a broad educational experience so that they can interrelate the economic, political, social and cultural elements of public affairs and provide the context which will illuminate what they are reporting;
4. The media writer should strive for principled fair minded professional conduct at all times;
5. A reporter should aim for the highest degree of accuracy in the information he selects and presents. By choosing representative details from the vast amount of information he has gathered, he can create a realistic picture;
6. Completeness of information is an important goal for those who write messages to inform and educate. It means gathering and presenting the most comprehensive information possible at any point in time
7. The journalist should recognize the complexity of the issues, ideas, people, institutions or products he is trying to present. He should ask, pursue and answer the questions that will most help his audience gain knowledge, perspective and understanding.



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