

**RE-BRANDING THE NIGERIAN MASS MEDIA FOR POLITICAL
DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

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ABSTRACT

Mass Media globally are established on the premise of getting the society informed, educated, and entertained. These tripartite roles are guided by the ethics of professionalism, accuracy, credibility, balance objectivity, sensitivity, reliability, national interest and social responsibility as the core values of the Nigeria mass media as brands. Doing thus, they media practitioners have are expected to implore employ sanctity, objectivity, and reliability these enshrined values in the discharge of their professional duties .order to be accorded credence in the job they do. The Nigerian Mass media have not always abided by the media code of ethics lived up to this ideology as case abound where media organizations have blatantly breached the they have gone contrary to Nigerian Broadcasting Code Section 5:8 that emphasizes that” a media organization shall exercise good judgment in their choice of news stories and headlines. Furthermore, Section 4:3 of the same Code assert that ‘a media organization shall reject any material intended for publication or airing by political parties, candidates and other interest that contains hateful or inciting messages. Invariably, electioneering in the Nigerian media came out of the election that is characterized by campaigns of calumny and hates. This state of affairs has severely bruised, scandalized and put the Nigerian media into disrepute thereby constituting as an impediment to Nigerian a robust democratic system. Conclusively, to consolidate on the democratic ideology in Nigeria, the media ought to uphold the values as enshrined in the Broadcasting Code as the soul and spirit of their brands to realize the value of integrity, credibility, objectivity and reliability to information to be disseminated to the public information dissemination.

Key Words: Re-branding, Integrity, Reliability and Political Development

Background to the Study

Political parties are generally acknowledged as the soul of every democracy. Without them, there can be no true democracy. Invariably, political parties play critical roles towards the survival; and growth of their respective democracies in the world.

Specifically, political parties in Nigeria are known to bring people together to achieve control of the government, provides platforms for the development of policies germane to the collective interests of groups that support, organize and persuade voters to elect candidates of their choices to offices. This means that the fundamental purpose of political

parties is to nominate candidates for public office and get as many of them elected as possible.

Clearly, political parties serve four basic functions using Nigeria as a case study:

- i. Selection of candidates for elections. Political parties narrow the field from the multitude of aspirants to a manageable few credible candidates. This brings some orders to an otherwise chaotic electoral scenario and also simplifies the voter role.
- ii. Mobilization of voters. Political parties maintain organized network and structures at States, Local Government and Ward levels that provide platforms for voters mobilization. They send out brochures, run media campaigns, knock on doors, call voters on phone, send messages to voters on phone. Political parties also provide suitable platforms for fund raising to finance their candidates campaigns.
- iii. Facilitate the process of governance. Party members in the legislature for example, build alliances that help in the passage of legislations. Party alliances also close the gap between the legislature and the executive. Even though the two arms of government are separated by law under democracy, party affiliations narrow the gap and enable co-operation and synergy a lot easier.
- iv. Checkmating the opposing party in power. Political parties as observed in Nigeria context serve the function of a watch-dog for the public. The adversarial relationship between major political parties makes it expedient for the party out of powers to closely monitor the activities of its opponent in power and blow the whistle in event of any misdemeanors or policy misstep. The above clearly indicate that political parties and their activities are key to the deepening of every democracy interestingly, as Aristotle stated, politics is a never ceasing process of civic education and incremental consciousness. This makes the mass media a crucial partner and lubricant of the political process and indeed its development.

Mass Media and Nigeria Politics

Obviously the mass media has immense power in a democratic dispensation as many voters get their news update as fast they can rather than from public or other sources. The mass media also shape how the voters perceive and evaluate issues, government policies and candidates dispositions. This means that the mass media is a recipe to democratic transitions to the extent that citizens get properly informed in order to understand the ideals of voting and to be voted for.

Is this point that Iredia (2007:12) former Director-General of Nigerian Television Authority, emphasized when he observed that “The people must be assisted to premise their choices of rationality and vote wisely during elections. They must have all information that is needed to elect the right candidates who can ensure good governance. Where such public awareness is lacking, those of us in the media must accept a share of the blame of failed elections in Nigeria”

It is also instructive that the United Nations Declaration of people and Human Rights as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights adopted in 1986 and ratified in 1990 which Nigeria is a signatory) places the burden of inalienable right to know and

impart information on the mass media (Aghamelu, 2010:156) Specifically the Charter States that, “ every individual has the right to receive information ... Should have the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the laws”.

Understandably, therefore , the media is regarded as a critical parties and key drives of the democracy process. The media therefore has a duty to stimulate citizen deliberations and build public understanding of issues and report on key public problems in a manners that would advance public knowledge of possible solutions and the values served by alternative courses of action. Towards this end many observers agree that the Nigerian Mass Media has a remarkable pedigree of heroic performance particularly during the country independence and post- independence era of military dictatorship. The roles of the indigenous pioneer journalists/nationalists as Dr. Nnamdi Azikewe, Anthony Enahoro et.c in these fights remain a source of pride to the profession and an inspiration to any succeeding generations. However a critical appraisal of the performance Nigerian mass media in the political development of the democracy in the country shows some serious fault zones that have adversely affected their credibility, integrity, sanctity and overall reputation.

Professionalism and the Nigerian Media

Nigerian media are known with derogatory names such as Stomach Journalism, Cash and carry Journalists, journalism for highest bidder, press boys, PDP or APC mega phones and brown envelope collectors ascribed to the profession and its practitioners.

Corruption also called “Brown Envelopes” and nepotism have become the signature of the profession. Charlatans and Interlopes also litter the media land shape.

It is also common knowledge via different media platforms that the most relevant issues and problems confronting the Nigerian electorates were not given the desired treatment. These includes, Insecurity, provision of uninterrupted power, unemployment, poor infrastructure, falling standard of education, and decayed health care facilities

The Nigerian media failed to sufficiently engage the political parties and their candidates on these key issues rather the dominant discourse centered on sensational political rivalry and scandals among the parties. News headlines and narratives across media platforms particularly the print dealt with spectacle instead of substance. The broadcast media, particularly in the build up to 2015 elections was also awash with hate jungles and documentaries, use of indecent languages and hate speeches.

This scenario prompted a former Military President of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida to openly complain that the hate documentaries targeted at former military leaders at the time the Military institution was tackling insurgency in the North east was unhealthy and counterproductive.

Another charge against the Nigerian mass media role in politics is that it lacks the principles of objective and imperial reporting. Many media organizations including government owned Nigerian television Authority, Independent African Television (owned by PDP Chieftain) Nations newspaper (Owned by APC Chieftain) etc either took side with one political spectrum and at best provided biased coverage or at worst acted like virtual propaganda machines for particular political parties.

The ruling PDP particularly bombarded the media with advertisements, documentaries and special reports aimed at swaying public opinion in favour of their candidates while also discrediting the opposition candidates. The government owned NTA and AIT were

inundated with media hype of transformation strides of Presidents Goodluck Jonathan in virtually all the sectors of the economy while demonizing the main challenger, General Mohammed Buhari of APC.

In spite of these, PDP and most of its candidates including president Jonathan, and National Assembly members lost to the opposition .

The failure of PDP, the largest political party Africa despite the generous media hype/exposure should provoke some critical soul searching not just by the managers of PDP campaign organizations but most importantly the media operators and scholars the form of post mortem analysis. Accordingly, the critical questions to answer include

- i. Did the Nigeria electorate watch or listen or read the messages?
- ii. Did the electorates understand the messages?
- iii. Did they believe the messages/messenger (media channels)?
- iv. Did the result of the election show that the voters were affected by the messages.

Invariably, whatever answer these efforts will produce it is obvious that most Nigerian electorates (educated) were exposed to the messages and also understood their content. However, they did not buy into the campaigns either because they perceived the messages claims and promise as falsehood or did not have faith in the messengers NTA, AIT etc or both.

Unfortunately, during political campaign periods the mass media act with impunity and also demonstrate partisanship while the so called regulators look the other way.

Nigerian Media and Broadcasting Code

Consequently most media organizations Nigeria including the mainstream media establishments acted in breach of the code thus eroding their sanctity integrity and credibility. It is therefore important and to close examine the Nigerian mass media as a brand with a view to repositioning it as effective tool of deeping democracy .

The use of the mass media as a platform for hate campaigns including conveying death wishes of the APC Presidential candidate (General Mohammed Buhari) by Governor Ayo Fayose contravened fundamental provision of the mass media code. Specifically, section 5:8 of the code states that “a media organization shall exercise good judgment in the choice of news stories and headlines: Furthermore section 4:3 of the code notes that “a media organization shall reject any material intended for publication or airing by parties, candidates and other interest that contains hateful or inciting words and messages.

Invariably, the media code emphasizes professionalism, accuracy, credibility, balance objectivity, sensitivity, reliability, national interest and social responsibility as the core values of the Nigeria mass media as brands. In order to drive these values and deepen the mass media as a distractive brand, specific institutions and structures were established by the Nigerian government. These include.

1. National broadcasting commission (NBC)
2. Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON)

These agencies of government have the mandate to act as regulators and gate-keepers was a common discourse in gatherings concerning the unprofessional disgraceful and self-serving roles particularly the broadcast media. While some Nigerians found some of PDP political broadcast enlightening particularly the documentary on “Emperor” Ahmed

Tinubu, Former Governor of Lagos and a National Leader of APC. Others saw them as pedestrian, despicable outright blackmail and unsubstantiated claims.

Invariably, the Nigerian media came out of the election severely bruised, brutalized, scandalized and highly disrepute. The integrity, credibility and sanctity of particularly government owned NTA was shrouded in controversy while the fate of the organization and its key operators was left precariously hanging.

Similarly the private owned AIT was not spared from the backlash of its unprofessional conduct during the 2015 elections. The winner of the presidential elections, General Mohammed Buhari, barred the media organization from covering his activities. However, the APC on whose platform General Buhari, won the election intervened but the face off indicated warning signals of a possible unhealthy relationship between President Buhari and AIT. The above reasons underscore the imperative of rebranding the Nigerian media.

Conclusion

A brand, According to Smith & Zooks (2011) is far more than just a name, term, design or signal that identifies and distinguished a product service from that of other competitors. Invariably a brand involves the image, associations and inherent value customers put on products and services. This means that brands encompass intangible attributes, values, vision and personality.

In other words, a brand is a logistic experience that stretched beyond the physical into the psychological. It is important to note that for brands to be effective they must uphold their core values. This point is particularly important for the mass media as brands which depend on the values credibility and integrity to achieve their objectives.

Consequently the Nigerian as mass media ought to make these values the soul and spirit of their brands. These values ought to constitute their brand essence which is completely internalized by the employees and also drives every business decision.

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