

**A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING AND POPULARIZING COMMON
GOOD**

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ABSTRACT

The notion of common good does not just happen. Establishing and maintaining it is the responsibility of everyone. Maintaining the social conditions from which we all benefit requires the cooperative efforts of all citizens. These efforts pay off with the media assuming a frontline responsibility to promote the awareness and shared understanding of common good as well as emphasizing that most social problems grow out of widespread pursuit of individual interest. The study recognizes the fact that we face in the society a choice between where people accept modest sacrifice for common good and a more contentious society where individuals selfishly protect their own benefits. This is where the media come handy as a mechanism to promote and popularize common good. The study reveals that the media being a formidable instrument for social change also serves as the forum in which consideration and promotion of issues of common good take place. Also emerging from the study is the fact the media communicates messages useful in promoting the interdependence of modern society as people now come together to contribute effectively to common good because they have been duly informed and enlightened. The study recommends that the obstacles hampering media operations be removed so that more and more people would use it increasingly for the good of the society, to achieve collective interest and promote the welfare of all persons.

INTRODUCTION

The horizon of media is an operation of human action, being a social context; it seeks the good of persons and communities. The activity of imparting information is a human act. Humans act for an end in various ways to realize the good they seek. In all, the universal injunction which summarizes the natural law precept is to do good and avoid evil. The notion of common good implies that which benefits society as a whole in contrast to private good that benefits only the individual or a section of the society. Common good has pointed towards the possibility that certain goods such as security, freedom of all, human right, democratic ideals, societal happiness can be achieved through collective actions and active participation in the affairs of the state. In effect, the notion of common good is a denial that society is an atomized individuals living in isolation from one another. Common good is a notion that originated over two thousand years ago as seen in the writings of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. More recently, the contemporary ethicists Rawls (2012) defines it as certain general conditions that are equal to everyone's advantage. It is believed to be the sum of those conditions of social life which allow the members of the society thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment and happiness. The media are major source of information about issues bothering on common good. Philips (2013) explains that the media serve as a forum in which consideration and promotion of issues of common good take place and are recognized as powerful mechanism to promote the awareness and shared understanding of common good

Common good is the horizon of task engaged by members of the society for their mutual complementation. It is an avenue of shared meaning realized through responsible communication, action and mutual trust. Common good is one of the three principles of social order, the other two being the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. Information is an interaction between people, and this interaction seeks to share meaning locked in the minds of people. For effective communication to take place there must be the willingness to communicate. Media communicate messages useful in promoting the process of and interdependence of modern society. If news or facts or happenings are communicated publicly and without delay, every individual will have permanent access to sufficient information and thus be enabled to contribute effectively to common good. The progress of the society and the enhancement of common good make manifest the existence of right to information in human society.

Pearce (2014) agrees that common good is the good that is common to the members of society and good arising from association and hence from the nature of man. This comprises a sufficiency of material necessities, comfort and convenience of life, all aimed at a wider, fuller and nobler life. The common good is about how we as society balance the needs of all for the benefit of all. It requires respecting and protecting fundamental right, property, spiritual and temporal prosperity and maintaining peace and security. In his analysis of the common good, Rousseau argues that the dignity of individual is inherently connected to the common good, that is the good of society and that everyone has an obligation to contribute to the good of the whole society. We must respect each person's basic right and fulfill our responsibilities. Lallana (2013) believes that restoring a healthy commitment to common good is one of the most significant task of our time and one which takes the media to task. The media need to create awareness, sensitize and educate the people on issues of common concern by way of highlighting the intrinsic values of common good and their inherent benefits.

Media as social institutions have the moral sensitivity and imagination, to recognize common good, to imagine the various ways to promote and popularize them and communicate appropriately their real values. There is, in the society, co-operation by all including social institutions for the realization of societal existential ends. The help shown by members of the society, whether individually or collectively is referred to as common good. It is the end of the co-operation of all members for the end for which the society exists. The media, it has been observed are very important in shaping public belief and fostering positive attitude toward common good and stimulating interest in the mind of the people to promote and preserve them (Hagglehead, 2013)

The conduct demanded of man by the full actuality of his nature is indicated by the ends in the physical and psychical instincts. The fact of man's nature with its implication imposes on man a certain morality. There is specifically a human way of being in the world- interaction with others given his rational nature. Man possesses the rational insight into the moral conduct that is demanded of him in the society. He has the moral conscience to discern what is good or bad and he can acquire the permanent disposition or habit for aspiring toward the common good or the good life. The pursuit of existential ends must be respectfully and responsibly accorded their place by individuals or groups such as the media and civil societies. With regard to the well being of any given community, common good means "a set of conditions which enables the members of a community to attain for themselves reasonable objectives or to realize reasonably for themselves values for the sake of which they have reason to collaborate with each other positively in the community". The media thus, perform the necessary function that empowers the community to direct their efforts on things that would enhance and promote common good.

The meaning of the statement that humans are predisposed to society is that society finds the reason and order of its being in the nature of human person and other institutions of the state. Society exists for human nature with its needs and capacity for completion in the attainment of full humanity. The order of being of society or human group is found in the conditions prescribed by the person's individual or social nature for the attainment of the purpose for which human beings come together

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Common good requires that everybody must be committed to it hence it is the good beneficial to all. The notion of common good implies that which is equal to everyone's advantage. Unfortunately, achieving or ensuring the realization of common good does not come easy either because of lack of knowledge and shared understanding of common good or because of the usual apathy that surrounds the active participation of people in the affairs of the community. To ensure the realization of common good and the active participation of all persons, the media is needed to sensitize and enlighten the people on the importance of common good and the need to work together to achieve collective result.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- The objective of the paper is to ascertain the role the media play in promoting and popularizing common good and ensuring that people develop positive attitude towards issues of common concern

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Utilitarianism as the name implies is derived from the use of the word “utility” to denote the capacity in action to have positive result. Utilitarianism supposes that the society is better off when its members are on the average happy and satisfied with what obtains in the society (Williams: 2000:165) Common good has most times been seen as a utilitarian ideal, thus representing the greatest possible good for the greatest possible number of individuals. Utilitarianism as propounded by Jeremy Bentham and later expanded by J.S Mill evaluates the performance of any action from the point of view of its social relevance and how it satisfies the greater members of the society. Utilitarianism is deemed the best theory to contextualize this study given the general meaning and purpose of common good. Based on some of the issues arising from review of literature, this study was examined within the context of utilitarian ethical theory. Although this theory lacks the capacity of appreciating or appraising the performance of any given action from how it satisfies the agent or the individual, it nonetheless remains the best for the study hence the emphasis on societal happiness as against that of the agent or the individual.

Utility is happiness or satisfaction while disutility is unhappiness or lack of satisfaction. Actions are right to the extent that they maximize happiness or satisfaction of every member of the society (Dworkin: 1985; 72). Recognizing the merit of this postulation, it follows therefore that the continuous promotion of common good by the media is not only a mere social obligation but one intended to contribute to the overall co-existence and happiness of every one. The choice of this theory is largely predicated on the logic that the pursuit of common good is for the good of all hence the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Restoring a healthy commitment to the common good is one of the most significant social tasks of the media especially in a decaying and shrinking society where individual tendencies reign.

MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND COMMON GOOD

Man has a rational nature, with his reason, he can discern what is good or evil hence he can perceive self evident truth or universal injunction” do good and avoid evil”. This is the basic principle that summarizes the natural law doctrine, that the person has moral consciousness, that is, he has the fundamental experience and universal awareness of good and the desire to seek it. Njoku (2014,) reasons that it is not only incumbent on individuals alone but also on the media to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the universal injunction, which as a matter of principle should be promoted. Such common good as filial piety, human rights and justice should be communicated in a way befitting humans.

Communication from the ethical perspective is the assessment of how moral principles could be combined with communication methods to bring about the best in faithfulness to the demand of moral order, and meanings that enhance persons and their communities, as well as the unity and advancement of men living in society. Finnan (2012) opines that these are the major aim of social communication and of all the means it uses. These means include the press, the cinema, radio, television and the internet. The constant improvement of the media put them at the disposal of more and more people who in their daily lives make increasing use of them. Finnan further argues that more than ever before, the way men live and think is profoundly affected by the means of communication available in that society. The truth of social communication is not independent of the truth of humans, their communication and values. The means of social communication can contribute a great deal to human unity and the realization of common good. Figorere (2013) added a slight twist to Finnan’s assertion, stating that if however, the media are ill disposed or face some constraints in communicating the benefits of common good, there will be less or minimal understanding of their real values. For him lack of communication contradicts or corrupts the fundamental values of human life and may hinder the understanding of the actual gains associated with common good.

The common good consists primarily of having the social systems, institutions and environment on which we all depend work in a manner that benefits all people including a vibrant media system that would ensure their realization (Shanks, 2011). Examples of common good according to the author include an accessible and affordable public health care system, and effective system of public safety and security, peace among the nations of the world, a just, legal and political system and a flourishing economic system. Because such systems, institutions and environments have such a powerful impact on the well being of members of a society, Shanks advocates for a strong, vibrant and resilient media that would go extra mile to promote things that are beneficial to all.

Nwokoye (2010) assesses the ethics of the media based on how they communicate and ensure the realization of common good and contribute to the overall happiness of the people. For the media to take its allotted place in the history of mankind, and give consideration to the morality that governs its use, Nwokoye suggests that there must be a full and proper understanding of man, his nature and desires. The true nature and tools of social communication are not examined in isolation of the truth of man and his society, hence the total output of the media in any given area should be judged by the contribution it makes to the common good of the people.

From the utilitarian perspective, Coleman (2014) examines the relationship between media, society and the common good. He contends that the truth of the information the media communicate must face the truth of the welfare or common good of the community. The art of sharing meaning is not excused from the moral demand “good be pursued and evil be avoided. The society is better off with the pursuit of common good hence the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

The ethics of man and society as expressed in communication will be able to discern as a matter of moral principle how communication and communication methods bring about the best in faithfulness to the demand of the moral order and the meanings that enhance persons and their communities. Michael (2011) contends that the constant improvement of the media puts them at the disposal of more and more people to use it increasingly for the good of the society, to achieve collective interest and promote the welfare of all persons. As agent of social mobilization, the author sees the media as a formidable instrument for social change and one that can bring about societal happiness and social order. The attainment of common good is the fundamental concern of the media. This is evident in the fact that the means of social communication can contribute greatly to harmonious co-existence of all individuals. It is the individuals who decide how the available means of communication is to be used

TRUTH, INFORMATION AND COMMON GOOD

Information is an interaction between people and this interaction seeks to share meaning locked up in the interiority of persons. For effective communication, there must be the willingness to communicate and communicate well. Brann and Jacks (2011) believe that information is very useful in promoting the process and interdependence of modern society, for if news, fact or happening in the society are communicated publicly and without delay, every individual will have permanent access to sufficient information and thus will be enabled to contribute effectively to the common good. The identification of the relevance of information in the pursuit of common good by the authors underlines the fact that the truth of such information being an ethical injunction must be communicated. The truth of the common good lies on what they mean or represent in any given society. Common good is for the good of all. It is for the welfare and happiness of the society. Information about them must be seen to contain the truth of what they genuinely stand for. With this, people will more closely work in harmony to contribute to the progress and prosperity of the society as a whole. In the opinion of Adegoke (2010), the progress of the society and the attainment of the common good make manifest the existence of right to information in human society. The sharing of ideas in the search for meaning demands the right of human person to meaningful communication. The proper exercise of this right according to the author demands that the content of communication be true and within the limit allowed by ethics. What this perhaps refers to is that in the gathering and dissemination of news, the moral law and the legitimate rights and dignity of man should be upheld. The communication of truth or meaning through the media demands a moral responsibility and unhindered freedom of information. This freedom goes with the responsibility on the part of the media to highlight repeatedly the genuine values of common good and their accompanied benefits.

The principle of solidarity is a firm moral and social attitude that preserves a positive determination to commit oneself to the common good. This is sustained on the basis of growing enlightenment and awareness individuals and nations get from the media on the need for collective pursuit of common good (Shinnston: 2013). Media in this context is seen and considered as agents of socialization which have the capacity to orient and direct the minds of people towards things that promote societal happiness. It is clear that a special responsibility rest on the media in today’s world as they have the power to direct mankind along the good path by the information they impart and the pressure they exert in the society.

MEDIA, COMMON GOOD AND AUTHORITY

The meaning and reality of authority is located directly in connection with the concept of corporate entity engaged in common action for the sake of common good. Authority is the voice of practical reason speaking for the community, giving unity to its actions in pursuit of the common good. Such actions are amplified by the media on whose onus it lies to adequately inform the people, criticize the authority and evoke sentiments

where necessary. Fagbemi (2012) sees authority as performing two essential functions in relation to public good. These functions he identifies as choice and intention. He believes that authority is the agent who chooses the means the community employs in its securing and preserving the common good. Again, authority is charged by the community to intend, to will as its end, the common good. The state does not exist to exercise brute force. Its functions or responsibility is rooted in the order for which it has come into being- to secure the good of the members. It is incumbent on the state to always initiate and implement programmes and policies that promote the happiness of its members. The state can do this function if it has an establishment of law as a legal community and a well organized media system needed as a catalyst to speed up the implementation of the policies and programmes of the state. Finnis (1998) observes that the legitimacy of the state to exercise legal authority is rooted in the origin and nature of the state as a community for the realization of the highest excellence of man. The state exists for the common good of all, and by extension must recognize the existence and functions of such other institutions like the media and civil society that contribute to the attainment of common good. The state must provide the enabling environment for the media to operate by enacting the appropriate laws and exterminating such other obstacles that impede the activities or reduce the power of the media. Amplifying the voice of Finnis, Messner (2002) adds that law may have a lot of aberration in its application in the state, yet a well established legal order is an essential instrument for fostering the common good, hence it can be recognized as the primary condition for the fully integrated human existence, so that any degree of true order is of immeasurable value by comparison with the complete lack of the fundamentals of order. The media as essential institutions of the state function to serve the state in various capacities. Being itself an essential good, the media must have a space within the confine of law to operate and promote common good (Henry and Pearce: 2012).

It should be noted however that there is the power instinct, which can lead to political power instead of serving the general good to serve selfish interest. The chief function of ordered power can be a means of combating arbitrary or illegal power. Milton (2011) thinks that the ordered power that is modeled for the integral development of the members of the state becomes authority and this authority is rooted in the common good, not on sheer force. It is the chief function of the state to maintain legal order and ensure state power is used essentially for the realization of common good. The state which exists for the common good of all needs order or authority to realize it. Against this background, authority therefore becomes a constituent of the common good of the state. Common good is media driven. It is incumbent on the media to promote and popularize them, to effectively communicate their values, to compel action on the part of government to remove all barriers impeding their attainment including the freedom and rights of the individuals. For Ekezie (2010), the media like civil society, is also for the good of the people. It produces common good out of the individual pursuit of private good. This according to him is a natural end within all private ends, and when the society is harmoniously functioning, it is a good within all the goods, a weal within weals. The extent to which media produce this good is however dependent on the nature of freedom of information the state provides. The end of society is the common good and the end of state is the government of society that is the care of the common good. Affasot (2010) sees the media as the institution for the defense and promotion of common good and any law which impoverish the media is a huge impediment on the promotion and attainment of common good. It is the duty of the media to do that which ensures the survival of the society including that which brings about a state of happiness and promotes harmonious co-existence of all.

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES HINDERING THE ATTAINMENT OF COMMON GOOD

It might seem that since all citizens benefit from common good, people would all willingly respond to urging that they cooperate to establish and maintain the common good. But observers have identified a number of obstacles that hinder people as a society from successfully doing so. Philosophers like John Dewey, Kierkegaard and Cicero all subscribe to the fact that the very idea of common good is inconsistent with a pluralistic society like ours. Different people have different ideas about what is worthwhile or what constitutes the good life for human beings. Differences that have increased during the last few decades such as the voices of more and more previously silenced groups like women and minorities are now attracting attention and sympathy. Given this new development, scholars urge it would be impossible for people to agree on what particular kind of social system, institutions and environment they would support. While people may all agree for example that an affordable health system, a healthy educational system and a clean environment are all parts of the common good, some will say that more should be invested in health than in education while others will favor directing resources to the environment over both health and education. Such disagreements are bound to undercut the ability to evoke a sustained and widespread commitment to

the common good. In the face of such pluralism Voxxy (2013) suggests the media should through its agenda setting function help the society to prioritize its needs and pay attention to issues of common interest.

Nwala (2011) observes that even if people agree upon what they all value, they would certainly disagree about the relative values things have for us. For him, efforts to bring about the common good can only lead to adopting or promoting the views of some while excluding others, thereby violating the principle of treating people equally. Such efforts it is argued would force everyone to support some specific notion of common goods, violating the freedom of those who do not share in that goal. Simpson (2014) believes that there must be dissenting views in everything that concerns man and obtaining consensus opinion could be difficult. Any cause supported by the greater number of people should be seen as the overriding cause no matter the political and economic influence of those who are opposed to such cause. Ibeme (2014) believes the media should be more concerned with campaigns to promote what benefits the larger members of the community hence the difficulty in having everybody support a common cause. People should be well sensitized and enlightened about the inherent values things have for us or the values derivable from a cause of action..

Another problem encountered by proponents of common good is what is sometimes called “free-rider problem”. The benefits that common good provides are available to everyone including those who choose not to do their part to maintain the common good. Althuser and Blumber (2013) observe that individuals can become “free riders” by taking the benefits that common good provides while refusing to do their part to support the common good. An adequate supply of water for instance is a common good from which all people benefit, but to maintain adequate supply of water during drought, people must conserve water, which entails sacrifice. Some individuals may be reluctant to do their share, however, since they know that so long as enough other people conserve water, they can enjoy the benefits without reducing their own consumption. If people become free riders this way, the common good which depends on the support of all would be destroyed.

Doyen (2012) sees the free-rider syndrome as an attitude problem which can be corrected by aggressive media campaigns. It requires a consistent and comprehensive approach on the part of the media to create the needed awareness strong enough to change human behavior, the mindset and perception of people positively toward issues of common concern. People must surrender their collective will to a common understanding that individual sacrifices have to be made in preference to common good.

Another problem encountered by attempts to promote the common good is that of individualism. Our historical traditions place a high value on individual freedom, on personal right, and on allowing each person to do her own thing. Our culture views society as comprised of separate independent individuals who are free to pursue their own individual goals and interests without interference from others. In this individualistic culture, the role of the media should center more on designing messages to convince people that they should sacrifice some of their freedom, some of their personal goals and some of their self-interest for the sake of the “common good”. Agbalajobi (2014) observes that the media have made positive impact in the attempt to de-emphasize the fact that our cultural traditions do in fact reinforce the individual who thinks that he should not have to contribute to community’s common good but should be left to pursue his own personal ends.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Common good is the horizon of tasks engaged by members of a society for their mutual complementation. It is not a national cake around which stakeholders secretly contemplate on what to do with their forks and knives. The common good is the end of the co-operation of all members for the end for which society exists. It is the good of all people and of the whole person. The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself, that is apart from the fact that he exists with others and for others. The goal of life in society is in fact the historically attainable common good.

It is evident as seen in this paper that the media are considered a formidable force for social change, committed to promoting common good and contributing to the improvement of the conditions of human life for all. Like any other function of the media, part of the reason for the existence of the media is to promote and defend the common good. The common good is always oriented towards the progress of society. The media have created circumstances that allow people to thrive and enjoy the conditions of social life brought about by the quest for common good. As the major source of information concerning common good, the media have always served as the forum in which consideration and promotion of issues of common interest take place. More so, the media are powerful mechanism for promoting the awareness and shared understanding of common good. They communicate messages useful in promoting the real values of common good. News and happenings are now communicated publicly and without delay. The result is that people now have permanent access to sufficient information which enables them to contribute effectively to

common good. The media is important in shaping public belief and fostering positive attitude and stimulating interest in the minds of people to promote and preserve common good. The media perform the necessary function that empowers the community to direct its effort to things that enhance and promote common good. This is so because the attainment of common good is the fundamental concern of the media as they have the power to direct mankind along the good path by the information they impart and the pressure they exert in the society.

It is the recommendation of the paper that the use of the media be continuously embraced so that more and more people would use it increasingly for the good of the society, to achieve collective interest and promote the welfare of all persons.

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