

TELEVISION BROADCASTING AND THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN NIGERIA: THE SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL STORY

JUDE TERNA KUR and ENDWELL ONYINYE NYEKWERE

Abstract

This paper assesses the performances and challenges of television broadcasting in the democratisation process in Nigeria. The historical discourse identifies both successes and challenges of both the military and civilian governments in the management of television broadcasting for the facilitation of democratisation process. The successes achieved by the military governments centre on expansion of the industry while those recorded by the civilian governments had to do with consolidation of the expansion. The challenging aspect of television broadcasting under the military largely had to do with restricted access and operation along sectional lines. The civilian governments on the other hand politicized and introduced negative commercialization of television broadcasting. Also, under the civilian governments, television broadcasting is heavily involved in unethical practices. To use television broadcasting to contribute meaningfully to the democratisation process in Nigeria, the paper recommends the strengthening of regulatory framework, making television broadcasting wholly an affair of the private sector, introducing the community television broadcasting project, and encouraging the civil societies and professional associations to advocate for best practices in the industry.

Keywords: Civilian rule, democratisation, military rule, negative story, positive story, television broadcasting.

Introduction

The role of television, as a mass medium, in the democratisation process is understood within the context of public sphere, defined by Habermas (1989, p. 49) as “organs of information and political debates such as newspapers, journals as well as institutions of political

discussion such as parliament, political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs, coffee houses, meeting halls and other public space where socio-political discussion took place.” Television, just like other media of mass communication, is intended in a democratic setting to provide a space that mediates between civil society and the realm of power. Television thus creates a forum for open discussion of all issues of public concern during which discursive argumentation is employed to ensure public good (Isola, 2010). This presupposes that television in a democracy should operate along the principle of freedom of speech and expression. This enables the people the right to freely participate in political debate and discussion making, which is central to democracy. This argument that freedom of speech and of the press is necessary for political participation in a democracy is the position of several research findings in political communication (Becker, McCombs & McLeod, 1975; Entman, 1989; Van Belle 1997).

Among the three factors that sustain democracy, as identified by Diamond (1999), is civil society, which include the mass media, of which television is a part. The other two are political culture and political institutions. Among the mass media, television with its unique advantages of impact (audible like radio and visible like print), selectivity and flexibility, exerts tremendous influence on the democratisation process for good or for bad. Former President De-Gaulle of France once asked former President John Kennedy of the United States of America: “How can you control your country if you don’t control television” (cited in Agbanu & Nwammuo, 2009). In a similar vein, television is arguably one of the most frequently used means of communication in a democracy. While success or failure of democracy cannot be reduced to issues of television, Rajagopal (2001) maintains that concern for democracy necessitates a concern about television. Hence, to advance the process of democratisation, television is expected to discharge certain roles, which include the following, as given by Isola (2010): (1) surveillance of contemporary events that are likely to affect citizens positively, (2) identification of key socio-political issues, (3) provision of platforms for advocacy for causes and interests, (4) transmission of diverse contents across the various dimensions and factions of political discourse, (5) scrutiny of government officials, their institutions and other agencies, (6) giving incentives and information to allow citizens to become actively informed participants rather than spectators, (7) provision of principled resistance to external forces attempting to subvert media autonomy, and (8) respectful consideration of the audience as potentially concerned, sense-making efficacious citizens.

These functions suggest that television in a democracy is expected to be a vigilant watchdog of public interest and under no circumstance should it demean itself into acting as lapdogs for

establishment. It should not only be a mirror that reflects the face of the democracy, the beauty spots and the warts (Dukor, 1998), it should also be a voice of advocacy for the collective good of the society. In this regard, television in an emerging democracy like Nigeria should, as noted by Pate (2011), be answerable to the various constituencies that depend on it for information, education and direction on the functioning of the democratic system, it should strengthen its mediating role through increased interactions among the various parties and stakeholders in the democratisation process; it should ensure that the conduct of each of the stakeholders is in conformity with public interest, and it has a responsibility to stamp some element of legitimacy on the democratic credentials of the stakeholders by publicly justifying their actions or inactions that are good or bad to the democratisation process.

Television broadcasting in Nigeria emerged as a product of democratic effort, and was meant to foster the democratisation process in Nigeria. This paper examines the role of television broadcasting in Nigeria's attempt at democratisation. The examination explores the performances of television broadcasting under military and civilian governments, pointing out the areas of success and challenge, as well as suggesting a way forward in an attempt to have television broadcasting contribute meaningfully to the democratisation process in Nigeria. The rationale is to contribute to the ongoing brainstorming exercise of stocktaking on the role of television in the political development of Nigeria over 50 years after its establishment. The brainstorming exercise, it is hoped, would lead to some solution to the political problems of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. The exercise, it is also hoped, would offer useful insight into the operations of television broadcasting for the advancement of democratic governance and culture.

Emergence of Television Broadcasting in Nigeria: The Political Link

The emergence of television broadcasting in Nigeria was as a result of political rivalry and a reaction against suppression of the freedom of expression. Historical accounts by Ume-Nwagbo (1979) and Aliede (2003) has it that in 1953, the Action Group (AG) political party, which controlled the Western Nigerian Region and was headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, through one of its representatives in the legislative house, Chief Anthony Enahoro, moved a motion for Nigeria's independence in 1956. The party also declared that the Macpherson Constitution was unworkable. The debate generated a lot of heat that the members of the AG had to walk out of the legislative house. The same day, the Governor-General, Sir John Macpherson, went to the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), a radio station established by the Central Government in 1951, and made a nation-wide broadcast accusing AG (which was an opposition political party) and its leader, Chief Awolowo, of "perfidy" explained as an attempt to destabilize his government. In a

reaction, Chief Awolowo requested from the Director General of NBS air time to respond to the accusation against him and his party by the Governor-General. The Director General referred the request to the Secretary of the Central Government who eventually turned it down (Akinfeleye, 2003). With this refusal of the right to reply, the AG commenced a move to come up with a legislation to empower regional governments to establish and own broadcast stations. This move materialized, and on October 31, 1959, the Western Regional Government established the first television station in Nigeria and black Africa as a whole. The station, called Western Nigeria Television (WNTV), was established at Ibadan, but the signals covered the huge commercial city of Lagos.

The heated political climate at the time presented a situation of political rivalry among the three major regions in the country - Western Region, Eastern Region and Northern Region. Also, NBS, which became Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) on October 1956, did not receive the favour of the three regional governments, a factor that also contributed to its change of name and status from NBS to NBC so as to address concerns of regional governments too. A comment by the Minister of Information and Welfare in the Eastern Region, B.C. Okwu, is incisive. Okwu remarked: "NBC does what it likes... and although it exists here to serve the Eastern Region, its position is rather innocuous..." (cited in Ume-Nwagbo, 1979, p. 820). Thus, on October 1 1960, the day Nigeria gained independence, the Eastern Region established its own broadcast station at Enugu called Eastern Nigeria Broadcast Service, the station had radio and television arms; the same thing was done by the Western Region. The Northern Region came out with its own Radio-Television Kaduna (RTVK) in March 1962. Then, in April 1962, the Federal Government began the Nigerian Television Service (NTS) Channel 10 in Lagos.

Issues emerging from the foregoing are that abuse of the principle of equal opportunity and the political oppression by the Central Government necessitated the emergence of television broadcasting. Political rivalry among the three regional governments contributed significantly to the expansion of television broadcasting. This was clear with the establishment of more television stations immediately after the civil war in 1970. Each of the existing 12 states at that time established a television station. In principle, the main objective of each of the television stations was the facilitation of educational development. In practical terms, however, this was not the case. The stations became political tools for propaganda, as aptly noted by Aliede (2003, p. 33): "this goal (of facilitating education) was however not strictly pursued as politicians later diverted the medium for political and specifically propagandistic purpose. No wonder critics at the time saw investment in television as wasteful and ostentatious." It was also a thing of pride and

prestige for each of the 12 state governments to own a television station, which many of the states saw as a mark of political independence (Ukonu, 2006).

The Democratization Process in Nigeria

The process of democratisation in Nigeria began even before the country's attainment of self rule in 1960. As early as 1944 a political party was formed. That was the NCNC (National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroun). Later in 1951, the AG (Action Group) and NPC (Northern People's Congress) were formed (Anifowose, 1982; Uzuegbunam, 1998; Akoja, Shamija & Ocheibi, 2007). These political parties were formed with the main aim of taking part in democratic elections. On attainment of political independence in 1960, the democratisation process continued both with civil and military rules.

The democratisation process in Nigeria, just like in many other Africa countries, is an admixture of various democratic theories which include: *classical theory of democracy*, *modern theory of democracy*, *liberal (bourgeois) theory of democracy*, and *Marxist theory of democracy*. A comprehensive explanation of these theories as offered by Obasi (2001) shows that democracy is a controversial and nebulous concept. It has no settled meaning; it connotes image as well as reality of politics for different political systems, rulers, citizens, actors and scholars. It is within this backdrop that Aina (1999) refers to the democracy in Nigeria as uniquely Nigeria, because it is predicated along the "Nigerian factor," which is an easy approach to achieving individual and group objectives. The Nigerian factor is actually a lawless, immoral, unjust, ungodly, bad, and sometimes a criminal approach to doing things. Hence, the democratisation process in Nigeria is predominantly tele-guided by wealthy elites; it does not accommodate the demands of the majority of the Nigerian poor, but remains sufficiently flexible to accommodate the interests of the main privileged groups. This kind of approach to democratisation has a serious consequence on a democratic attempt as splendidly observed by Obasi (2001, p. 30):

Owing to the exploitative dependent, capitalist nature of most African states, the attempt at democracy has been a dismal failure. The exploitation by the indigenous bourgeois class and the misuse of state power by leaders for capital accumulation jointly create politically marginalized, weak and helpless African masses. This implies that the majority of the African people are not exercising any form of popular sovereignty.

Odey (2002) thinks along the same line with the foregoing assumption, and is more apt in describing the democratisation process in Nigeria. Odey maintains that democracy in Nigeria is not of the people, not by the people, and not for the people. It is a homemade democracy,

which is an organized consortium where the organizers convert leadership into a democracy that breeds unemployment, insecurity, hunger and hopelessness. “It is a government of political robbers, by political robbers and for political rubbers... it is a government of the looters by the looters and for the looters” (p. 17). Odey’s description of the democratisation process in Nigeria is made from the backdrop of a call by a small group of wealthy Nigerians on former President Olusegun Obasanjo to contest the 2003 presidential election for a second term. This call came at a time when the overwhelming view of President Obasanjo’s first term presidency was that of abysmal failure. *The News* magazine edition of November 25, 2002 captures this popular view with a lead story entitled: *Hard times: Hunger, poverty and despair spread in Nigeria as the economic woes deepen*. In the story, the writer, Nkeneke Efo, pointed out the concerns of Nigerians over the hard times they were passing through. According to the writer, all economic indices were worrying pointers of an economic system that was hurtling menacingly into a possible collapse. Not minding this failure of President Obasanjo, a small group of political desperadoes had the audacity to invite the President to contest for a second term. Their aim, as captured by Odey (2001,p.17), was “to come together, praise whoever is in power, share the spoils of their mission and disperse to wait for another round of the booty.”

From the foregoing, the democratisation process in Nigeria is characterized by class domination by a wealthy minority at the expense of the poor and weak majority. Other characteristics of the democratisation process include: violation of human rights, electoral malpractices, abuse of state power, massive corruption in public places, insensitive and desperate conduct of politicians, bad governance, absence of accountability, executive fiat, incessant communal conflicts, disregard for rule of law, increased deprivations, debilitating poverty, rising public frustration, tyrannical attitudes, and structural weakness of democratic and other political and socioeconomic institutions (Kukah 2007; Akinwale, 2011; Adebayo, 2011; Bayo, 2011; Egbuta, 2011; Pate 2011).

Television and Democracy: Review of Empirical Studies

A number of studies have been conducted on the impact of television broadcasting on the democratic process. Why some of the findings reveal a positive impact, others show a negative impact. On the positive impact, findings on the influence of television on political knowledge acquisition are imperative. One such finding is that from a study by Shaw (1999) to answer the question: Does television coverage of campaigns contribute to voter preference of presidential candidate? Using data from both the 1992 and 1996 U.S. presidential campaign on opinion polls, campaign event and news media coverage, Shaw found

that favourable television coverage of presidential campaign event did influence voter preferences, and the nature of that event also influenced voter perceptions. The researcher concluded that television coverage of electoral campaign has an effect on the outcome of the elections.

In another study, Boyle (2001) examined the influence of television campaign messages on agendas in other media forms. This idea is called intermediate agenda-setting, which is a concept used to describe how message in one type of media influence the agendas in other types of media (Traudt, 2005). Boyle based his study on the 1996 presidential campaign between Clinton and Dole, and used the content analysis to examine messages in television campaign advertising, major network broadcasts, and three major daily newspapers. The coding frame comprised 24 issue categories including topics such as taxes, leadership, political processes, drugs, and the economy. The findings gave some support to the argument that major party television advertising influences network news agenda, especially for the political challenges whose message, by nature, is more aggressive.

Parmelee (2002) studied the characteristics of communication strategies in short videotaped features of presidential candidates, by examining the producers of “meet the candidates videos” for the 2000 U.S. primaries where Bauer, Bradley, Bush, Forbes, Gore, and McCain were candidates. The videos, between 10-20 minutes long, were meant to create first impression of presidential candidates. The researcher used frame analysis (defined as the study of a central issue or idea that determines how a series of events are interpreted) in the study. The producers of the video were interviewed to determine the frames used. Findings showed that the various candidates used a number of frames in this order: for Democrats Bradley and Gore, the videos promoted leadership and values respectively; for Republicans, videos promoted the ideals of former President Reagan for Bauer; promoted change, for Bush; and promoted values, for both Forbes and McCain. The frame “I’m qualified to be president because the media say I am” was common in all six videos. The conclusion drawn was that the use of video cassettes in early primary race is important in establishing initial, positive impressions of individual presidential candidates.

Television contributes to political socialization. This was a finding by Okigbo (1988) in a study of television in the lives of Nigerian youth. Okigbo, in that survey of 300 randomly selected youth in Nigeria’s major cities of Benin, Enugu, and Lagos, found that youths, aged 15-25 years, had regular access to television and preferred television news more than other television programmes. Television news in Africa, as observed by Domatob(1988), is full of political issues, many of which concern democracy. In a similar study of television news and youth in Benue State, Nigeria, Melladu (2009) evaluated the frequency at which youths are exposed to television news, the type of

television news that interest them most, and the gratification they derive from watching television news. The study was a survey of 300 youths in the area. The findings revealed that the youths studied had regular access to television news, and were highly exposed to political news. The gratification the youths derived from this exposure was largely cognitive orientation, socialization and affective orientation in that order. Kur's (2008) study on the influence of television on political socialization of children was aimed at investigating the relationship between exposure to television and the development of political values in children. The children studied, numbering 150, were drawn from junior secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Findings indicated that the frequency of exposure to television was associated with development of political values in the children. Children who were exposed to informative content on television like news, current affairs, debates and discussions were more knowledgeable on political issues than those who were not. The findings also indicated that the influence of exposure to television on the development of political values was reinforced by the children's social ties with parents and peers.

The foregoing review of empirical studies suggests that television is influential in the formation of political attitudes and orientations. These are necessary in the democratisation process of nations. It is in this regard that Huntington (1991) observes that the more TV set that are in a country, the more likely democracy is to emerge and survive there.

On the other hand, there is also quite an avalanche of empirical studies which show that television has a negative impact on the process of democratisation. One such study was undertaken by Larson (1999) to ascertain how national evening television news covered public opinion about the 1996 U.S. presidential election in terms of reporting the polls and "people on the street interviews." The study was a content analysis of news programmes on ABC, CBS and NBC. Findings indicated that public opinion about issues was practically absent from poll reporting. This finding has been the concern of Sipe (2006) that television does not provide enough information to assist people in making well informed decisions in a democracy. According to Graber (2001), cited in Sipe (2006), television news provides tidbits about everything rather than focusing on few important stories of the day. This way, television does not provide the people with important aspect of the democratic experience they do not know.

Apart from lack of depth in television political news, the issue of news bias is an issue of concern to researchers. D'Alessio and Allen (2000) made a meta-analysis of 59 studies on news bias and the coverage of U.S. presidential elections since 1948. The 59 studies examined whether political candidates or parties were given unfair coverage in terms of quantity and quality of coverage. The result of the

analysis revealed that television network news coverage of presidential campaigns was consistently biased, even though to a small extent, in favour of the Democratic Party.

Other research endeavours in this direction have focused on over-representation in the coverage of political actors. One such endeavour is the study by Benoit and Currie (2001), which investigated whether television actually reflected the nature of U.S. presidential debates in 1996 and 2000 elections. The study, a content analysis, found that news coverage for both 1996 and 2000 debates emphasizes verbal attacks between candidates significantly more than they actually occurred during televised debates. The study concluded that televised news coverage of presidential media debates “has the potential to foster the inaccurate impression that the debates are mostly negative (when in fact debates are mostly positive)” (p. 37). Commentators like Graber, cited in Sipe (2006), have agreed with this finding, saying that deception in television, just as in other audiovisual communication, is both unintended and deliberate.

The negative impact of television on the democratic process is also seen in political advertising. Studies have shown that political advertising on television is less than factual, negative, promotes images over substance, and mislead voters. A study by Balloti and Kard (2000), which examined 1,267 television advertisements between 1952 and 1996, concluded that realism and activity themes are most prominent in presidential television advertisements, with less realism and more certainty themes.

It is clear from the foregoing review of empirical studies that television is necessary, in the process of democratisation in the sense that it is a veritable tool of information dissemination (vital in the democratic process). In addition, television is a voice of advocacy and agenda-setter. Besides, it promotes the activities of pressure groups, which tend to put pressure on the political institutions for best performance in the democratisation process. But television could be used intentionally or unintentionally against the proper functioning of the democratic process. This is where the issue of ethics and moral obligation to society comes in. It is imperative that those who own, control and operate the medium in a democratic setting should be ethically and morally committed to serve public interest defined by the majority and not by a minority few wealthy elites.

Theoretical Framework

From the theoretical perspective, what ought to be the role of television in a democracy is explained by the *democratic participant media theory*. The theory emerged as a result of public disillusionment with both the *libertarian* and *social responsibility* theories because of their failure to deliver the expected social benefits. *Democratic*

participant media theory is a product of reaction against “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” (McQuail, 1983, p. 98). The theory frowns at the elitist and rigid nature of public mass media organizations that are slavish to professional ideals and susceptible to the whims and caprices of those in government (Folarin, 1998). The *democratic participant media theory*, therefore, advocates for multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, de-institutionalisation, interchange of sender-receiver roles, horizontality of communication links at all levels of society, interaction, and commitment system of mass media (Folarin, 1998). The central issue in these principles of the theory is that individual citizens and groups, be they minority or majority but especially minority, have rights of access to media and rights to be served by media according to their own determination of needs. Another pertinent issue in the principle of the theory is that the media exist for public interest and not for the interest of the government, media organizations, professionals and media clients alone.

These issues are of concern to the discourse in this paper because, for television to play a meaningful role in the democratisation process, it has to embrace the public interest approach to communication and be maximally concerned with the needs, interests and aspirations of the audience in a democratic environment. This presupposes that television stands for the democratisation of communication, and is in line with horizontal, interactive and participatory kind of communication. Unethical and manipulative practices that tend to misrepresent facts and mislead the audience in decision making should not be the case with television, according to the *democratic participant media theory*. How has television broadcasting in the emerging democratic Nigeria society operated along the principles of the *democratic participant media theory*? Discourse in the next sections of this paper provides answer to this question.

Television under Military Rule: Performances and Challenges

Six years after Nigeria’s independence, exactly on 5th January, 1966, the military took over the administration of Nigeria through a coup d’état. Major General Johnson Thomas Ummakwe Aguiyi Ironsi became the first military Head of State. A counter-coup took place just about six months later, precisely on 29th July, 1966, and major General Aguiyi Ironsi was not only overthrown but killed. LT. Col. Yakubu Gowon became the second military Head of State. Gowon ruled for nine years and was overthrown by Brigadier General Murtala Mohammed on July 29, 1975. Barely six months after, on 13th February, 1976, Brigadier General Mohammed was assassinated in an unsuccessful bloody

counter-coup led by Lt. Col. Buka Suka Dimka. General Olusegun Obasanjo took over as the military Head of State to continue the government of Brigadier General Mohammed. General Obasanjo handed over power to a democratically elected civilian president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, on 1st October, 1979. Shagari's civilian government lasted for only four years when the military, through a palace (bloodless) coup of 31st December, 1983, took over power again with Major General Mohammadu Buhari as the fifth military Head of State. Major General Buhari ruled for about two years and was overthrown on 27th August, 1995 in another coup d'état that brought in Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida as the sixth military Head of State. General Babangida ruled for eight years and was about to hand over power to a civilian government, when crisis over the June 12, 1993 presidential election made him to abandon the hand over idea. As the crisis continued, General Babangida who was seen as part of the crisis decided to "step aside" and hand over power to an unelected civilian, Chief Ernest Shonekan, in an arrangement called Interim National Government (ING). That was on 26th August, 1993. Three months later, Chief Shonekan, in what appeared like a palace coup, handed over power to General Sani Abacha on 17th November, 1993. General Abacha died in office on 8th June, 1998 while in the process of transforming himself into a civilian president. Lieutenant General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over and organized a transition to civil rule programme that handed over power to the civilian government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on 29th May, 1999.

Out of the 54 years of Nigeria's independence (1960-2014) the military ruled for 29 years or 53.7 percent. Policy actions and inactions of the various military governments made some impact (positive and negative) on the development and use of television for democratic governance. We take the negative impact first. In this regard, mention is made of the abuse of television broadcasting for selfish individual and group political interests. General Yakubu Gowon's military administration divided Nigeria into 12 states in 1967 and later 19 in 1975. These state creation exercises introduced "statism," a new kind of sectional consciousness similar to regionalism consciousness which existed before the first military take over. Statism created fierce political rivalry among the 12 and later 19 states. This rivalry witnessed each state establishing its own television station for selfish political interest (Umeh, 1989). One factor that favoured the establishment of television stations by the various state governments was the oil boom, as explained by Umeh (1983, p. 58): 'the oil wealth which the nation enjoyed at the time eliminated the fear of financial constraints for most of these hastily conjectured and planned development ventures.' Apart for television, other ventures states went into establishing on a competitive basis were universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, teaching hospitals,

radio stations and newspaper houses (Adegbokun, 1983). What obtained was quantity and not quality, as the stations, in the words of Akinfeleye (2003, p. 50), were “instruments of oppression, disunity, political vendetta, tools for coups promotions, frame ups, frame down etc and baseless propaganda particularly during the Babangida and Abacha regimes.” To buttress Akinfeleye’s assertion, the saga of Abacha campaign on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to succeed himself in office readily comes to mind. General Sani Abacha wanted to transform himself from a military Head of State to a civilian President. He used NTA to promote this idea. NTA ran four promotional advertisements in this regard frequently and consistently free of charge. The promotions were; (1) He who the Cap Fits (meaning Abacha was the only one whom the cap to rule Nigeria as a president fitted), (2) The Two Million Man March (a march in support of Abacha’s presidency), (3) The Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha, and (4) The Magic Key (that Abacha was the magic key to open doors for Nigeria’s development).

Television broadcasting under the military administration of General Babangida contributed to threaten the unity of Nigeria, following the June 12, 1993 political impasse. The country was polarized along North-South divide; with many of those from Northern Nigeria supporting the cancellation of the presidential election and those from Southern Nigeria did not. NTA was partly responsible for this polarity. Femi Kusa, a former Director of Publications of Guardian Newspapers Limited, Nigeria, buttresses this point. Kusa said he stopped watching NTA during that period, and told the story of his nine-year-old boy who asked his mother whether there was going to be war. Asked where he got this horrible impression from, the boy replied that he had been watching NTA a lot and the images that came through indicated a war situation (Orhewere & Kur, 2003).

Another challenge of television broadcasting under the military was that certain actions of the military government concerning the organisation of the television industry inhibited media pluralism. This was the case with the establishment of NTA. The military government of General Obasanjo, through Decree No. 24 of 1977, established the NTA, giving it retrospective effect to April 1976. The Decree gave NTA the exclusive right for television broadcasting in Nigeria. NTA took over 10 television stations and established more. The argument goes that having the entire television stations in the country under the management of NTA, owned and controlled by the federal government is against the principles of media pluralism, understood beyond mere availability of numerous media establishments. Media pluralism in earnest should be understood as the free expression of diverse views from diverse class, ethnic, geographical, religious, occupational, and other socio-economic groups. This is made possible with horizontal ownership and operation of media channels of communication (Kur, 2007). By having the entire

television broadcasting in the country controlled and managed by one agency (NTA), some voices were shut as it became clear with the civilian administration that inherited the arrangement (discussed below). One of the reasons given by the federal government for the takeover of television stations in the country by NTA bordered on the need to safeguard national unity (Umeh, 1989). However, this policy ended up threatening national unity, as noted by Akinfeleye (2003, p. 50) that “takeover of all television stations in Nigeria by the military government under the pretence of national unity... almost led to national disunity.”

One of the most disturbing issues in the Nigeria mass media industry is the commercialization of news. This is a practice whereby media organizations raise revenue to sustain their operations by charging fees for news reports they should normally carry free. This unethical practice is the case in virtually all television and radio stations in Nigeria. It is a serious threat to freedom of expression. The military government of General Ibrahim Babangida officially started the practice, when in 1992 it promulgated Decree No. 38, which established National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to regulate the broadcast industry (Adaja, 2011). This Decree ushered in the deregulation of the broadcast industry. The deregulation was within the policy direction of the government, which embraced and supported World Bank/ IMF-driven privatization of public enterprises on debtor nations. Onoja (2009) reminds us that it was the Technical Committee on Privatization and Commercialization (TCPC) of some federal government agencies that, in 1988, listed NTA and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) among the federal government enterprises that were to be partially commercialized. The two broadcast stations became partially commercialized in July 1992, after the federal government through the TCPC signed performance bonds with the two stations. From this moment, the concept “Let Them Pay” (LTP) became very alive in broadcast stations. The concept of commercial news also became popular. Though this practice is against provisions of the NBC Code, it has gained momentum, with the regulatory agencies unable to stop it. Section 4.3.11 of the 2006 revised NBC Code maintains that selling of news so as to raise money and improve the financial standing of broadcast stations encourages partisanship and does not give equal access to people to express their views freely. It compromises standards and marginalizes a majority of those who cannot afford to pay. It does not provide a level playing ground, it is against the principle of social justice, and it short-changes the electorate. All these are a threat to the democratisation process. Similarly, contrary to Section 5.1.3 of the same Code, television stations in the country now give so much preference to advertisements to the point that they sometimes distort the essence of the programme. A good number of the stations are in the unethical practices

of using commercial backdrops and accepting sponsorships for news and commentaries.

One effect of commercialization of news in the broadcast stations is that news content, which is very important in a democracy, is shrinking and entertainment content which is relatively less important is increasing. Findings of an empirical study which examined the contents of federal and state-owned broadcast stations between 1991 and 1994 revealed that entertainment rose from 28.8 percent to 57percent. News and current affairs declined from 70 percent to 27 percent (cited in Oso, 2011).

On the positive side, credit has to be given to the military for some policy decisions taken which enabled television broadcasting contribute meaningfully to the democratisation process. The same deregulation policy, which introduced the unethical practice of news commercialization, also was responsible for the expansion of the television industry and introduced private broadcasting in the country. Decree No. 38 of August 24, 1992, which introduced deregulation of the broadcast industry, put to an end the almost 40 years of uninterrupted government monopoly of the broadcast industry. This monopoly was as crude as stressed by Akinjogbin and Atofojomo (2011, pp. 113-114):

The right to operate radio and television stations was vested only in the Federal Government of Nigeria and the state government. Even then, state government owned television stations were only allowed to operate on ultra high frequency (UHF) while only the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), a Federal Government parastatal, was allowed to use the more powerful (sic) very high frequency (VHF).

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), established by Decree No. 38 of 1992, processes and recommends for the granting of broadcasting licenses to private investors. This has facilitated the establishment of many private television stations in the country. As at 2011, there were 182 television stations in the country, broken down as follows: NTA federal stations, 47; other NTA stations, 50; state-owned stations, 32; privately-owned stations, 14; direct home TV, 2; direct satellite stations 2; and cable stations, 35 (Akinjogbin & Atofojomo, 2011).

In a way, the military also made some efforts at effective regulation of the television industry. Decree No. 38 of 1992 also empowered NBC to monitor broadcast stations in the country to ensure that stations do not abuse the airwaves or carry out operations that are against national interest. NBC thereby came up with ten guidelines for all broadcast stations in the country to abide by as follows: (1) Emphasis

on national cohesion and unity. (2) Emphasis on respect for human dignity. (3) Sustenance of family values. (4) Portrayal of religious and communal sensibilities. (5) Prohibition of meting broadcast and portrayal of violence or obscenity or materials in bad taste or x-rated programmes when children are likely to be watching or listening. (6) Encouragement of right to reply. (7) Allowance of appropriate presentations for the various religions in the community, but with religious programmes not exceeding 10 percent of weekly airtime. (8) Provision of political parties equal opportunity and airtime. (9) Balance of programmes devoted to discussing controversial public affairs. (10) Decency, legality and truthfulness of advertisements which should not exceed 15 percent of total programme time. Whether these guidelines have been observed or not is a different thing entirely, but the intention was to ensure that the broadcast media operate in a manner that facilitate the democratisation process and contribute to the overall development of the Nigeria society.

Similarly, by the establishment of NTA in 1977 and bringing the entire television broadcasting in the country under its umbrella, the military government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo intended to regulate television broadcasting for best practice. This point is eruditely stressed by Adegbokun (1983, p.3):

The decree (establishing NTA) gave the authority the exclusive right for television broadcasting in Nigeria. It stated further that it shall be the duty of the authority to provide, as a public service in the interest of Nigeria, independent and impartial television broadcasting for general reception within Nigeria. The authority shall ensure that the service which it provides, when considered as a whole, reflects the unity of Nigeria as a Federation and at the same time, gave adequate expression to the culture, characteristics and affairs of each zone or other parts of the Federation.

The need for best practice also was a factor that informed the setting up of the Christopher Kolade Commission of enquiry into the problems of broadcasting by the Mohammadu Buhari Military government in 1984. The huge expenditure in maintaining many broadcast stations without corresponding tangible benefits was a reason that necessitated the setting up of the Commission. Mytton (1991, p. 59) elaborates this view: "At its peak in 1981, television and radio equipment buying reached a level of millions of dollars per week. Soon the new government announced that there would be cuts." Even before the Commission could submit its report, the military government of General Mohammadu Buhari, in a characteristic military approach, went on in January 1985 to close down

all FRCN stations except the five national stations at Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and Abuja. The total number of FRCN stations closed down was 19. The report of the Kolade Commission recommended the closure of redundant television stations and 40 percent cut in NTA staff. This measure, in a way, was to correct the massive abuse of television broadcasting by the predecessor civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. That administration (1979-1983), as discussed below, turned television stations into political propaganda devices (Umeh, 1989; Mytton, 1991; Aliede, 2003; Ukonu, 2006).

Television under Civilian Rule: Performance and Challenges

In discussing the performance and challenges of television broadcasting under civilian rule, it is expedient to trace the historical development of the rule. As early as 1944, a political party was formed in Nigeria, even though the country was still under colonial rule. Elections into central and regional legislatures were conducted and the business of the two arms of the legislature went on before independence in 1960. The country had a constitution, which was revised several times before independence. The first federal Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was appointed in August 1957. The same year, regional self-government was granted to Western and Eastern regions. That of the Northern region was delayed to 1959 at the region's request (Uwechue, 1971). These civil administrative structures, which were put in place and functioned with Nigerians before 1960, show that civil rule in Nigeria actually started before independence and went on side-by-side with colonial rule.

On attainment of independence in 1960, Nigerians assumed full self civil rule, with Sir Balewa continuing as the Prime Minister and the Queen as the titular Head of State. However, on 1st October, 1963, when Nigeria became a republic, the Queen gave way and Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe became the first civilian Head of State. Prolonged political crises and other factors combined led to the first coup d'état in the country. This bloody coup, led by a few young military officers, brought to an end the civilian rule of that first republic on 15th January, 1966. The military ruled for 13 years and handed back power to civilians on 1st October, 1979, with Alhaji Shehu Shagari democratically elected and installed as the President. Shagari was in power until 31st December, 1983, when the military through another coup d'état took over power again. The 1979 Constitution was suspended and this marked the end of the second republic. The military ruled for 10 years and in the process of conducting elections to hand over power to civilians, it found itself in a serious political crisis that stalemated the handover. Nevertheless, the military handed over to an unelected civilian in an arrangement tagged: Interim National Government (ING) on 26th August, 1993. The ING lasted for only three months, when on 17th November, 1993, the military

took over again. This marked the end of the third republic. The military remained in power until 29th May, 1999 when the elected President Olusegun Obasanjo was inaugurated as the fourth civilian leader of Nigeria. This marked the beginning of the ongoing fourth republic which is yet to be interrupted by a military take over.

Just like under the military, television broadcasting under civilian rule made negative and positive impact on the democratisation process. To begin with the negative impact, television broadcasting has been politicized under civil rule. Just as its emergence (under civil rule) was an issue of politicisation, it has continued to be politicised by the different civilian governments that have emerged. The civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari amended Decree No. 24 of 1977 that established NTA (and renamed it NTA Act) in line with the 1979 Constitution that was in operation. The amendment gave the Nigerian president the power to grant licenses to states, organizations and individuals to operate television stations. The President was very “liberal” in the exercise of this power. Thus, many state governments established television stations to run side-by-side with the then 22 existing NTA stations. By 1983, out of the 19 states in existence, nine established their own television stations. The states were Anambra, Bendel, Imo, Kano, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo and Plateau. The case of Plateau State is interesting as recounted by Mytton (1991). The ruling party at the centre was The Nation Party of Nigeria (NPN), but Plateau State was ruled by an opposition party, Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP). The NPN led federal government established an NTA station in Plateau State. This station was a very weak one, operating on an outside broadcast van with a small transmitter. Programming was poor; it relayed only few programmes from national NTA station in Lagos using a satellite dish. There were no local programmes. The then Plateau State governor, Solomon Lar, wanted the NTA station in his state to cover activities and programmes of his government. On several occasions, he pleaded with the NTA station to cover the activities of his government, but the reply was that the station could not do more than it was doing. The governor now suspected the NPN-controlled federal government of using the station to deny his government, which was in opposition, adequate coverage. The governor then went on to establish a state television for his state to give more adequate coverage for his activities and programmes.

This situation in Plateau State was almost similar to all the other states ruled by opposition political parties like Kano, Imo, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo and Bendel states. With this kind of politicisation, the numerous television stations in the country, instead of working for national unity, contributed to the cut-throat rivalry among the political and socio-cultural groups in the country. This was the reason the military government of General Mohammadu Buhari, on takeover of power in

1984, capitalized on to stream down the number of television stations in the country. While inaugurating the Christopher Kolade Commission discussed above, the then Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Brigadier Tunde Idiagbon, expressed sadness over the abuse of television and radio broadcasting by the politicians. *New Nigeria* newspaper reported the Brigadier's remarks (cited in Umeh, 1989) this way:

This exercise was aimed at streamlining television broadcasting in the country, saving cost and making services more efficient. He condemned the role played by the various radio and television stations during the civilian regime. He said the stations without exception became megaphones of political parties in power, suppressing or grossly distorting information to serve the whims and caprices of politicians. By so doing, Brigadier Idiagbon added, 'they fanned the embers of disunity, disaffection and discord.' They also succeeded in poisoning the political atmosphere to such an extent that law and order virtually broke down in many states of the federation.

The situation was not different with the civilian government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007). Not only were television stations partisan; they were glaringly unethical especially in the coverage of the electoral process. That government was characterized by electoral irregularities (Odey, 2002; Jibo, 2003; *The News*, 2003; Umechukwu, 2004; Kur, 2005; National Democratic Institute, 2007; *The News* editorial, 2007; Adegbamigbe, 2009), and television and other mass media forms were used as part of the machinery that perpetrated the irregularities. Sheriff's (2002, p.32) remarks stress how the PDP-led federal government under President Obasanjo planned to use NTA to rig the 2003 general elections:

If history is anything to learn from, the nation should remember how the same NTA was raped and discredited in 1983 through its infamous 'Verdict 83' programme. With national elections around the corner and the desperation of President Obasanjo for second term, what happened in 1983 might end up as a child's play. This is more so if you recall that both the Director-General of NTA and FRCN were announced as members of the 2003 Obasanjo Campaign Organization under the hands of the presidential fixers.

To stress further this manipulative tendency, Kur (2005) observes that the federal government began the expansion project of NTA and FRCN at a period very close to the elections. As soon as the elections were over, the expansion project slowed down drastically. The federal government promised to establish one NTA station and one FRCN station in each of the 109 senatorial districts in the country. Jibo (2003) notes that the project was not in the good interest of giving the people access to communication, since at the same period, NBC made the conditions for the acquisition of broadcast license by private bodies extremely difficult. Jibo (2003) cites the then NBC Director-General, Mallam Danladi Bako, to have said that the era of broadcasters getting broadcast license in Nigeria and not knowing what to do with it is over. According to Bako, some of the problems which have plagued the industry mainly arise from the fact that broadcasters got their licenses too cheaply before thinking of what to do with them. The remarks by the then NBC boss are far from the truth. Obtaining broadcast license in Nigeria is not cheap. As at the time the then NBC boss (2003) made the remarks, 400 applications that met all NBC's conditions were awaiting the Commission's consideration. It appeared NBC had a hidden agenda to assist President Obasanjo use the broadcast media to manipulate the elections.

Because of its partisanship, NBC became extremely weak in its regulatory function. Television and radio stations that violated NBC's Code went away unpunished. A case in point was when the Ekiti State Broadcasting Services (comprising radio and television arms) was accused of deliberately suppressing a paid advertisement intended to announce the convention of the National Conscience Party (an opposition party in the state) slated for 7th January, 2003. The gubernatorial candidate of the party in the state, Femi Falana, reported the matter to NBC, but the Commission did not even investigate the matter not to talk of sanctioning the defaulting station (Kur, 2005). A similar situation was the case in Ondo State where radio and television stations were passionately bias in favour of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) party in the 2003 governorship election. The stations, in the words of Jibo (2003, p.24), "shut out all other aspirants; they would not even accept paid advertisements." This unethical behaviour of the broadcast stations was across the length and breadth of the country, as noted by Mushikilu Mojeed (cited in Jibo, 2003, p. 24): "Most governors were believed to be hand-in-glove with Chief Executives of their media house to strangle plurality of ideas on the state's air waves. From Jigawa to Kano, Enugu to Rivers, Ondo to Akwa Ibom, Sokoto to Cross River, the situation appears the same." The widespread violation of the NBC broadcast code on balanced coverage of political party campaign did not attract any sanction either from NBC or any other broadcast regulatory

body like BON, Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE).

The problem of news commercialisation discussed above under the military rule is also the case and even worse with civilian governments. Decrying the situation as it was during the short-lived third republic, Nwokoh (1996) stresses that it was a shame for the broadcast media to recklessly champion partisanship through their expensive charges for news. Nwokoh cites an example to buttress his point:

A politician pays for 30 minutes of political coverage and uses the opportunity to make false claims about his rivals. It is unlikely that the broadcast station would be in a position to discomfort a politician who has paid thousands of naira to air his message by challenging the news or facts he presents So, because the rival politician or party is not financially healthy enough to dispense money for a rebuttal, such falsehood would be allowed to gain a bridgehead (p.27).

Not minding the widespread and general outcry against the practice of news commercialisation, it has continued unabated. Section 7.9.2 of the revised 2006 NBC Code clearly states: "In the interest of fairness and balance, and to prevent the monetization of political broadcast, any form of commercialisation of political news or coverage is forbidden." On why NBC, as a result of its undue political marriage with the ruling party, is unable to enforce compliance is worrisome.

The inability of NBC to discard the impression that only the federal government should undertake network television broadcasting is a serious challenge of television broadcasting under civil rule. Breaking the monopoly of federal government on network broadcasting is a way of creating more access to information for a healthy democratisation process. The efforts of Daar Communications Limited, private owners of Ray Power F.M. Radio and African Independent Television (AIT), to embark on network broadcasting have been stopped by NBC (Jibo, 2003). This stresses the point of emphasis in this paper that the federal government uses NBC to manipulate television broadcasting in its favour at the expense of rapid, objective, credible and accessible information dissemination to the political system for meaningful and well-informed political decisions.

Not everything about the management of television broadcasting under civil rule is negative to the democratisation process. There is a positive story too. This positive story is largely that of the contribution of the civilian administration in strengthening active private participation in the television broadcast industry. The military laid the foundation to private broadcasting not to the required standard but to a level of some

appreciation. The civilian government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo amended Decree No. 38 of 1992, which established the NBC, and changed its name to National Broadcasting Commission Act of 1999. The amendments made were in the areas of strengthening the Commission's role of speedy processing of license applications and effective regulation of licensed stations, public and private. In this regard, the NBC Code of 1993 has undergone reviews in 1996, 2002 and 2006. Even if only on paper, the reviews which are good, present a ray of hope that the future of television broadcasting in contributing meaningfully to the democratisation process is bright.

Another remarkable achievement of the television industry under civil rule is the proliferation of television stations. From three stations in 1962, the number has grown to 182 in 2011, with most of the stations springing up during civilian regimes. In terms of plurality of voices, this proliferation is nil or hugely inadequate, but in terms of ownership of television sets, this proliferation is influential. Writing in this regard, Umeh (1989, p. 62) observed over 20 years ago that:

One advantage to the television industry and to the nation as a whole, of the two bouts of speedy proliferation of television stations was the rapid increase in the use of the television medium by Nigerians. Many individuals, establishments and homes procured television sets as a result of oil wealth of the last two decades... about 87 percent of the people surveyed viewed more than two hours of television programmes a day in all states... the number of channels which became available to some Nigerian viewers increased from one or two during the early 1960s to five or more channels in some locations in the country by the 1960s...television had spread to all areas of the country. Growth had been phenomenal. Viewers between Western states and Lagos could select from some twelve channels.

Over twenty years after, the situation described above by Umeh has improved more drastically. As at 2003, almost every home in urban Nigeria possessed a television set (Alawode, 2003). Today, with a proliferation of satellite broadcast stations, many Nigerians don't watch only local television but foreign one as well. Therefore, even if local television fails in appropriate programming for the facilitation of the democratisation process, foreign television might not fail. Indeed, sometimes, foreign television covers the democratisation process in Nigeria more objectively and creditably than does local television.

The management of the broadcast media deregulation policy under the civilian rules of the third and fourth republics has brought about the expected competition, which is contributing to improve standard in practice and equipment at NTA headquarters, Abuja. The need to transmit quality signals far and wide so as to outdo its major rival, African Independent Television (AIT), was a major factor in equipment upgrading at NTA between 2007 and 2011. In terms of personnel too, television stations now go for the best hands to employ. The stations have also taken seriously the issue of staff training (Enemaku, 2003). Many of the stations send their staff for refresher courses in Europe, America and Asia, continents that lead in television broadcasting.

One aspect of television broadcasting spearheaded and consolidated by civilian governments in Nigeria is educational television broadcasting. Directly or indirectly, this form of television broadcasting has contributed significantly to the democratisation process in Nigeria. Educational television broadcasting was a primary objective of the first three television stations established in Nigeria (Ume-Nwagbo, 1979). It continued to be a major programming objective of virtually all subsequently established television stations in the country, be they government or private stations. Even though the educational television project has suffered a setback beginning from 1983 due to a number of factors, it has made appreciable contribution to formal and informal education in Nigeria. The project still goes on in spite of the challenges which include politicization of television broadcasting and lack of adequate planning (Umeh, 1989).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Television broadcasting, as a form of mass communication, has a responsibility to discharge in the democratisation process of societies. This responsibility has to do with the use of the medium (television) in a democratic manner to facilitate the democratic organisation of the society. This is the argument of Hamelink (1995, p. 18) that mass media, including television, have a role to play in the realisation of “the democratic ideal,” defined as “a political decision-making procedure that enables all those concerned to participate on the basis of equality.” The onerous task of this paper has been an assessment of how television broadcasting in Nigeria has contributed to the realisation of the democratic ideal. The discussion which took a historical perspective revealed that television broadcasting played positive and negative roles under both military and civil rules. The positive role largely centred on the enabling environment which informed the proliferation of both government and private television stations. The negative role was predicated largely on the negative manipulation of the medium for the

selfish interest of politicians and government officials within both the military and civilian governments.

The inescapable conclusion, therefore, is that television broadcasting has a high potential in facilitating the process of democratisation, and because of its power in this regard, it is open to abuse by overzealous politicians. When abused, it turns out to be a clog in the wheel of democratic progress. This is the case in Nigeria. Even though television broadcasting made some meaningful contribution to the democratisation process, its unhealthy impact was significantly more. To manage television broadcasting to facilitate the democratisation process in particular and the overall development of Nigerian in general, the following recommendations are imperative:

1. Government at every level should hands off ownership and control of television broadcast stations. Operating television broadcasting should be the affair and concern of the private sector. This should be done through legislation and amendment of the relevant sections of the 1999 Constitution which gives government a hand in the running of radio and television broadcasting.
2. Where it is impossible or difficult for government to completely hands off ownership and control of television broadcasting, government-owned television stations should be removed from direct government control and funding to safeguard the station's independence and integrity. In this regard, television broadcasting should not be under the exclusive control of the executive arm of government. Government-owned television stations should be run by boards of trustees, with members appointed and answerable to the two arms of the national assembly – the Senate and the House of Representatives. Nominees into the boards should be subjected to thorough public hearings to ensure their suitability in terms of, among other things, being non-partisan and representing a broad spectrum of the Nigerian society. This arrangement should be the case with both the federal and state government-owned television stations.
3. The National Broadcasting Commission should be made by law to be an independent body, free from executive control. Just as obtains in the United Kingdom with the British Broadcasting Bill of 1989, there should be separate regulators for private broadcasting and public broadcasting. As noted by Akinjogbin and Atofojomo (2011), this arrangement allows for the protection of the functions, social responsibility, community interest and profit-making interests of the private and public sectors.
4. Nigeria is overdue for community broadcasting. As at July 2014, the country was still awaiting presidential approval for the take off of community broadcasting in the true sense of the word. Community television broadcasting would, to some extent, break the barrier of

vertical or elitist kind of communication and introduce a more democratic and horizontal kind of communication which is not only needed but a necessity in the process of creating a democratic social order.

5. Commercialization of television broadcasting should be done with caution so as to distinguish between public interest television broadcasting and commercial television broadcasting. Under no circumstance should public service television broadcasting like news and commentary be paid for or sponsored so as to make monetary profit for a station. This is an issue of professionalism, which all stakeholders in the television industry should work towards protecting.
6. Civil society is weak in Nigeria. It needs to be more active in advocating for desirable changes including those in the television industry suggested here and elsewhere. Organized civil societies should act as checks against the excesses of government and politicians, human rights violation, abuse of rule of law, and monitoring of the application of the law in issues relating to television broadcasting.
7. Professional associations with links to television broadcasting such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) and Radio Television and Theatre Arts Workers Union (RATTAWU) should be active in their functions of zealously guiding against abuse of professional standards and agitation for a conducive working environment. Active discharge of these functions will go a long way in improving television broadcasting, and this will in turn make a positive mark on the democratisation process in Nigeria.

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