

PUBLIC SPHERE AND CIVIC JOURNALISM AS FULCRUM FOR EFFECTIVE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

By

Okoro, Nnanyelugo

Senior Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria,
Nsukka, Nigeria, nnanyelugo05@yahoo.com, 08039312707

and

Diri, Christian Tuotamuno

Lecturer and Ag. Head, Department of Mass Communication and Media
Technology, Oduduwa University, Ipetumodu, Ile-Ife, Osun State,
chris_diri@yahoo.com, 08035511278

Abstract

Alongside education, information plays a vital role in helping the public to form an opinion on societal issues. For citizens to reach an agreement among themselves, it is always imperative that they have both accessibility and freedom to receive and impart information. The most significant sort of information in reference to the concept of the public sphere is the information about state activities. Such information should provide a subject matter to be discussed, scrutinised and criticised as well as a main drive for building up a rational public opinion. Political communication between the state and its citizens is therefore considered a fundamental principle in developing the public sphere. Habermas was concerned with the obstacles of political communication that led the constriction and limitation of public political discourse. But Schultz (1998) argues that the public watchdog role of the media empowers them on behalf of the public, to hold the powerful accountable for their actions in the exercise of the powers and authority conferred on them by the people. Therefore, for the public service broadcasters to play this role in Nigerian electioneering and democratisation, they must operate freely and independently from the state. Also, there is the need for public and private broadcasting stations to evolve into public service broadcasting to properly service the needs of the people who are daily increasingly becoming politically conscious.

Introduction

The public sphere, as had been advocated by many scholars, is a constitutionally empowered kind of public court, aside from state and economic spheres, where individuals gather to assess and judge their state unhindered. Thus, the media, to Habermas, represent places where people can freely express their

views. The media, in Habermas' vision, differed from those of today, a factor made possible by technological advancement, privatisation and management. The new trend in media management, Schudson (1996) argues, sees news as a commodity to be bought and sold and not for empowering and mobilising the public.

Carver (1995) argues that the public space provided by the media today has faded in importance and that the audience whose opinions count are so far only individuals. He further reasons that the current trends of commercialisation in the media, especially the broadcast media, have made the contribution of the public service broadcasters to the public sphere problematic. This, Carey (1993) posits, implies that the public space has been disappearing as commercial goals and not public interests now dominate the establishment of broadcasting stations. This statement implies that commercial influences have affected the media's contributions to the public sphere, as Habermas rightly predicted.

Despite these shortcomings which Schudson (1996) and Carey, (1993) traced to the unwillingness of the media to interrogate controversial issues, the media remains essentially a protector of public interest and forum for people to be educated, informed and entertained.

Habermas (1989) views the concept of the 'free market place of ideas' which aided the development of the capitalist economy, among other things, to lead to an uneven distribution of wealth and rise in the cost of entry into the public sphere. Curran (1991) on his part says that, with commercialisation, today's media have ceased to be an agent of empowerment and rationality and become a further means by which the public is sidelined. Bennett *et al.*, (2004) post that it is the accessibility, independence, responsiveness, openness and recognition given to the types of issues that the media handle, that in turn affects the quality of opinions subsequently expressed, and determine their contribution to the public sphere.

Reith (1924) views the role of radio, used here to represent media, as facilitating a new and better relationship among people. McQuail (1983) says that radio can cross frontiers more easily than other media and is even increasingly available for short distance communications. It is also the cheapest means of communication globally (Reith, 1924). These statements emphasise the importance of radio as the most available means of informing, educating and entertaining people in all parts of the world.

Fourie (2003) reasons that in any society, radio, because of its wider reach, can contribute significantly to creating public awareness and mobilising participation and nation-building, especially in times of political transformation. A public broadcaster like *Radio Rivers*, at the time that it was established, is expected to perform these roles. To perform these roles, Fourie (2003) argues, the PBS, through its various programme schedules, should provide a forum for interactions between the different sections of society. Given this, if radio is to be a critical voice in the society, then "it should provide a public sphere where the public can express ideas

freely and in which information, opinions and criticisms can be circulated independently from commercial pressures or political influence” (Fourie, 2003:166).

The idea of a PBS as a public sphere is merely an idealised concept that has never been realised anywhere in the world (Verstraeten, 2000; Tomaselli, 1989). This means that free access to radio as a medium of mass communication can only be achieved in a deregulated broadcast landscape, where editorial and programme independence, as well as institutional autonomy and accountability are sacrosanct. In this way, the radio studio will perform a 'mediational' role as the people's parliament, bringing people together to debate issues without interference from extraneous influences. Thus, radio, playing the role of mediating in the conversation between people, brings everybody together to debate and decide on core issues of their welfare, in a framework of democratic participation.

In addition to its informative, educational, and entertainment roles, broadcasting broadly speaking is called to fulfil a further function: that of “an emancipatory force that empowers the people” (Curran, 1991:43). That broadcasting is able to achieve these societal functions is because it was seen as a public good. This public good ethos calls for editorial independence which ensures balanced news and current affairs programming at all times. However, the failure of broadcast media to play such roles, Reith (1924) views, portends danger for democracy.

Therefore, for private citizens in contemporary society as Nigeria to come together to share information for the advancement of society would be almost impossible without the media of the public sphere. The media thus help citizens to reach informed decisions about what courses of action to take also offer the citizenry the enabling environment to engage in discussions on how state power is utilised by those in authority (Dahlgren, 1991). This implies that it is through the media that people are able to participate freely in discussions relevant to the public good (Curran, 2000). By so doing, the media assist in resolving social conflicts and defining collectively agreed-upon objectives.

By helping to resolve social conflicts, the media become a common space that link together divergent groups, thus becoming a stabilising element in the society and polity which strengthens its place in any modern society (Curran, 1991).

Arguably, for public service broadcasters and other media to play an essential role in the new public sphere they must be independent, because the media do not only transmit messages but also shape the form and, to a certain extent, the context and content of a message (Carey, 1993). Therefore, radio programming, whether of a PBS or commercial nature, can only contribute to the public sphere in mediated messages and in a representational sense. This means that the listeners' interest and informational needs should be represented in all aspects of radio programming to justify the radio station's existence.

Thus, there are three features which facilitate media contribution to the public sphere: free access for all in the public, freedom of expression, and a lack of emphasis on status in debates (McQuail, 2000). The PBS is central to this process, as they distribute the information necessary for citizens to form informed opinions. Curran (1991) argues that, whether it is to inform, educate, or entertain, the media's contribution to the public sphere is that it is a place in which private individuals and interest groups seek to influence and regulate social relations.

From this role of the media can be extrapolated the media watchdog, agent of public representation and diversity, informed citizenry, and public entertainment ideals, which shall be discussed shortly.

Public Sphere Conceptualised

German sociologist Jurgen Habermas developed the concept of the public sphere in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1989). The book was first released in Germany in 1962, and almost thirty years later, Thomas Burger translated Habermas's work into English, which immediately received much attention especially by British and Americans intellectuals. The work soon became a significant topic for discussions and researches in the fields of cultural theories, philosophy, sociology, history and media and communication studies. Habermas defined the public sphere as:

An arena, independent of government (even if in receipt of state funds) and also enjoying autonomy from partisan economic forces, which is dedicated to rational debate (i.e. to debate and discussion which is not 'interests', 'disguised' or 'manipulated') and which is both accessible to entry and open to inspection by the citizenry. It is here, in this public sphere, that the public opinion is formed' (quoted in Thussu 2000)

According to Habermas, a main prerequisite for a public sphere to be formed is to have a public arena in which private citizens gather and discuss topics without any constraints or domination by the government; these discussions are supposed to determine matters of public concern or common interests. In his work, Habermas focused on the bourgeois political life of the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries in England, France and Germany in order to identify what conditions led to the growth of the public sphere, the decline of the public discourse, and what can be done to renew this public arena in our societies today (See Calhoun 1993, Weisser 2002).

From a historical point of view, the participants of the public sphere were actually European educated male citizens who used to gather in literary clubs, salons and associations, and who disregarded their social status as being the precondition

for participation, nevertheless; the quality of debate and validity of argument were much important than social positions (See McKeon, 2004; Garnham, 1993; Weisser, 2002).

Before capitalism, the private individuals who succeeded in constituting the public sphere were actually able to influence the governmental, legislative and judicial decisions, and that was mainly due to the transformation of discussed topics (influenced by the expansion of market economy) from literature, plays, opera and music into state-related issues that Habermas defined as 'public matters'. The similarity between what we call today 'civil society' and the concept of the 'public sphere' is that both consider a separation from the state, regardless the degree of this segregation, and that the bourgeois public sphere has worked in articulating the needs of the society in relation to the state.

Habermas indicates that both merchants and aristocrats in the bourgeois model of the public sphere had equal rights to speak and be heard, and that the public sphere must be, at least in principle, accessible to all participants. In simple words, Habermas considered public discourse that he calls also 'communicative action' as a possibility for the coordination of human life (Calhoun, 1993).

According to Habermas, which we agree with to a great extent, there were particular circumstances that led to the disappearance of the bourgeois model of the public sphere. According to Habermas's observation:

...the expansion of the public sphere to include more and more participants brought degeneration in the quality of discourse, which actually transformed the quality of discussion and made it impossible to escape addressing class divisions (Calhoun 1993, p.3, 21).

It is reasoned that this expanded element of inclusivity that is more or less supported today by democratic concepts and notions, works on the other side as an obstacle towards constituting an aware, effective, and functioning public opinion in many developing and developed countries. Calhoun (1993) has commented on this notion by saying that: '...the occupation of the political public sphere by the masses led to the interlocking of state and society which, (contrary to Marx's expectations), removed from the new public sphere its former basis without supplying a new one' (Calhoun 1993, p.22).

The second fact Habermas used to justify the decline of the content of the public debate is also related to the unlimited entrance of the public into the public arena, this actually resulted in a major shift in the basic function of public discussions that turned to address negotiations and compromises among interests instead of keeping its assignment as a critical power to state practices. The third factor in this transformational process is related to the function of media that had its sole goal and

focus to gain commercial profits to the extent that the press witnessed a transition from addressing ideological sides to achieving success in business. By understanding the role media play today over people's ideologies and views, one can easily comprehend the significant position media took in degrading the public discourse at that time: 'As newspapers and other fora of public debate became more and more occupied with their own commercial success and less with political and social change, the bourgeois public sphere disappeared' (Weisser 2002, p.73).

Summarily, Habermas argued that as a result of the increasing amount of state intervention in private activities of civil life, the capacity or power of the public sphere largely decreased. Although Habermas stressed that 'the nature of the public sphere and the conditions of its possible existence must be understood historically' (Postone 1993, p.165), there were lots of criticism as well as new perspectives regarding this controversial concept. It is, therefore, important to critically present some of these influential ideas as they offer an extensive review and discussion about some of the main aspects of the public sphere.

Many critics have considered the term "public" as being a controversial concept, Nancy Fraser (1993) has raised this issue while criticising the bourgeois public sphere, and she made the notion that: 21 tribution to the public sphere.

Weisser (2002) also indicates that the first recorded uses of the word 'public' in English identifies the public with the common good of the majority of individuals in a community, and that the term was initially used to mean "in the best interests of the masses" unlike the term 'private' that was initially used to mean 'privileged' at a higher governmental or bureaucratic status. Thus, we agree with Fraser that the term should have been specified and contextualised more. However; by tracing back the historical origins of this word, it is viewed that to grasp the notion of the public sphere correctly, the term 'public' should be observed as being distinct from the state, market and personal affairs.

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and the Proletarian Public Sphere* was also published in German and translated into English in 1993. Their book has contributed a lot to the ongoing discussion around the public sphere; as they attempted to make a clear distinction between the image Habermas portrayed regarding the bourgeois public sphere, and the reality of this concept. Negt and Kluge suggest that the bourgeois public sphere had other goals than discussing topics of public concern such as increasing capitalism, generating profits, facilitating commodity productions, building up a network of relations among participants and gaining power and influence. This criticism was clarified further by Weisser as he writes that:

Negt and Kluge suggest that the public sphere was used as a tool by the bourgeois, a method for increasing their ability to create markets for their goods, facilitate trade, and generate profit for themselves and their peers. They used the ideal of consensus, equality, openness, and the like to create favourable situations (Weisser 2002, p.76).

By idealising the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas received criticism in two other important aspects; exclusivity and negligence of other existing possible spheres. Fraser (1993) suggested that the point of accessibility did not exist in the bourgeois public sphere as Habermas claimed; she argued that protocols of style and decorum served to intensify the status of inequality, as both women and members of plebian classes were prevented from equal participation. Furthermore, she stated that some interests were excluded from public debate being considered as domestic or private matters. Fraser wrote that 'women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation on the basis of gender status' (Fraser 1993, p.118).

The failure to examine other non-liberal, no bourgeois competing public spheres was another criticism against Habermas by Fraser (1993). The competing public spheres are those related to nationalists' publics, elite women's publics, working class publics and popular peasant publics.

Though there are several public spheres in each society, there are three remarks that are important to point out in this context. First, according to Weisser (2002), the bourgeois private sphere 'inhabited by women and children was not a hidden space, but it was discussed in public as a necessary component of the 'whole' man's life' (Weisser 2002, p.67), and in such way its value was confirmed in public.

There are many recent and interesting studies conducted about the privacy and publicity of the public sphere. In his attempt to analyse the ideological transformation of the public sphere in Turkey, Caha (2005) suggested that the globalisation process have contributed greatly to the decline of the ideological public sphere around the globe, and he affirmed that the private sphere does not exist anymore in modern society. His idea was obviously supported by Karlstrom (2004) who posited a popularised model of the public sphere in which both spheres 'public and private' encroach upon each other so that one can speak of a private sphere within the public.

It is interesting to realise that the concept of the public sphere has created a cycle of discussions about so many different public spheres over the recent decades;

The concept of the public sphere provides actually some new conditions and rules that govern democratic processes. It also raises so many questions about today's democratic standards and values, and it further indicates a distinction between a democracy that is governed by valid arguments, and a democracy that is controlled by masses.

Political Communication: Representation and Integration

Therefore, political communication between the state and its citizens is considered a very fundamental principle in developing the public sphere. Habermas was concerned with the obstacles of political communication that led the constriction and limitation of public political discourse. For instance, some of these obstacles were represented by the state's attempt to politicise everyday life through different means so that social and civil movements respond politically to this direction (Crossley and Roberts, 2004). Tracing back the studies that dealt with political communication, Lang (2003) explained the history of political communication research by referring to (Cohen, 1998). Lang writes:

Historically, one can distinguish three stages of local political communication research...first, the research of the 1950s and 1960s, which focused optimistically on local political communication processes as a harbinger of democracy and small town community (i.e., Janowitz, 1952; Vidich and Bensman, 1958) Second, the research in 1970 and 1980s, which conceptualised local political communication as a part of mass media communication studies (See Cox and Morgan, 1973; Murphy 1976)...The third research phase, in the late 1980s, reconnected local political communication via electronic media to broader questions of local democracy and participation' (Lang 2003, p.172).

There is also a number of recent articles that dealt with the future of the political communication field; (Graber, 2005) commented on the distraction of efforts regarding political communication research, and called for creating a collective road map for more systematic outcomes in this field, while (Mut, 2001) suggested that this science should not focus anymore on media content and messages but on citizens as active gatherers and processors of information in a globalised world.

Both variant characteristics of communication and central actors are extremely worthy elements in constituting a progressive political communication between the state and its citizens; for instance, communication is supposed to be an ongoing process that affects participants through dynamic and not fixed processes. Another important attribution is its systematic nature; meaning that it usually occurs in context. Other features of communication indicate that it has a self reflection nature and consequence, which signifies that when you receive a message, something happens to you (See Samovar & Porter, 2004). On the other hand, there are many essential actors in the process of political communication as far as the public sphere is considered; those actors may include individual citizens, government, non-governmental organisations, media, interest groups, and business (Lang, 2003).

In the context of political communication, representation refers to how civilians get empowered in the government through vigorous public debate of issues concerning the citizenry. Citizens usually get represented in the government by giving them the right of voting, and by representing them in the parliament through candidates, they even can, in representative democracy, provide for recalling their representatives whom they are not satisfied with. By representation we do not refer to descriptive or passive representation in which candidates are elected to represent ethnic, gender or minority groups, however; we attempt to exceed this symbolic feature by extending the rights of citizens to participate in governance. The issue of employing representation to create a balance between the state political agenda and the central actors in a society has been addressed well by Garnham (1993) who commented: 'The overwhelming focus of concern has been the problem of representation in the meditative sense of that word, that is, the question posed has been how well or badly do the various media reflect the existing balance of political forces and the existing political agenda' (Garnham 1993, p.361).

Considering the fact that strong media are usually controlled and owned by the state in developing countries including Nigeria, one must never ignore the great influence and significance of governments in the process of representation and civilians' political participation. It has been correctly argued that 'it is representation that provides a basis for mediating between political leadership and public participation' (Clark 2000, p. 45). One of the main reasons why we defend the necessity of representation is that it represents a mode of social integration. By integrating citizens' arguments and social characteristics, you bring them against each other, you organise their attitudes, and you create a sort of unity inside the state. That explains why Neget and Kluge described the public sphere as a 'genuine articulation of a fundamental social need' (Weisser 2002, p.75).

Essentially, social integration must only be based on critical public discourse. It is again important to remind us that the process of integration should also be seen as a part of the local political communication process, and though the government may or may not participate in the critical discourse, it is extremely momentous that the process of political communication is not based on a top-down approach. The public sphere should seek to reach participative governance in which the problems of exclusion as well as lack of interaction and participation are addressed; such a process has been described by (Newsman, 2005) as means of engaging the public in responsibility for their own care and welfare.

Relevance of Information Media in the Public Sphere

Alongside education, information plays a serious role in helping the public to have a considerable public opinion rather than merely a state of consensus. In order for citizens to reach an agreement among each other, it is imperative that they have

•

both accessibility and freedom to receive and impart information. Perhaps the most significant sort of information in reference to the concept of the public sphere is the information about state activities; such information provides a subject matter to be discussed, scrutinised and criticised as well as a main drive for building up a rational public opinion. Habermas has explained that press in the bourgeois public sphere made the circulation of news available, and that these news became 'raw materials for discussions', on the other hand; individuals used to read these news in privacy and discuss the matters of common concern in the public sphere. Consequently, the freedom of press was a challenge for the actors in the bourgeois public sphere, mainly because newsletters and journals constituted a ground for their arguments.

The role of media and information, being a central institution in the public sphere, has been a topic of debate among many theorists, for example; in the theory of communication action, the relationship between the individual and the state has become increasingly 'one of client or customer of services rather than citizens' (Crossley and Roberts 2004, p.5). When individuals become increasingly dependent on the state, they lose their independence, and that affects their citizenships while at the same time makes political argument lose its political edge by focusing on distribution of resources and domestic issues (Crossley and Roberts, 2004). This idea has been addressed by theorists who argued that the growth of capital and governmental power has led the establishment of communication empires that worked on manipulating public opinions, and that a certain mechanism for insuring more selection and democratic access is required to respond to the growth of giant media organisations, and concentration of media ownerships (See Calhoun, 1993 and Penslar, 2000).

The mechanism of news culture in constructing politics has been discussed by (Goode, 2005 and Spenser, 2005) who demonstrated that the ways news address politics today are far to correspond with Habermas's ideal model of the public sphere; Spenser noted that news works on depoliticising politics by focusing on the entertainment of conflict, which indicates that the narrative nature of reporting political news usually dramatises and trivialises issues of social or public significance. Not to mention that by merely identifying citizens with officials' acts and, media will be moving towards the version of representative democracy, which is able to create a public sphere in appearance only. A modern study about political communication on Arab world Television, (Ayish, 2002) displayed that television services in the Arab world, though they were enhanced technically in the last two decades, they remain obsessed with politics as the most important news selection criteria, and they keep empathising their efforts on the Palestinian question. Such a study illustrates a good example about media focus on the entertainment of conflict, particularly if one considers the enormous political, democratic, economic, and social problems taking place in the Arab societies. On the other hand, other theorists

have undermined the role of media as major obstacles in developing the public sphere; their argument has been based on the fact that channels of interpersonal political communication, including citizens, leaders, activists and professional communicators, are more significant than the role of media (Maarek and Wolfsfeld, 2003). Negt and Kluge suggested that media and government have reciprocal relations giving an example of TV political debates, and they explain that by broadcasting such kinds of debates both media and politicians benefit; the former wins legitimacy and respectability while the latter sell their ideology (Weisser, 2002).

Authorising Broadcast Media as Public Watchdogs

The public watchdog role of the media involves revealing abuses in the exercise of state authority, and facilitating general debate about the functioning of government (Curran, 2000). In a democratic society, the media constitute the institutional framework for carrying out this function of regular monitoring and reflecting on public opinion. This role implies that the media should facilitate a general debate about the functioning of the state and, in that way, protect and promote the interests of society (Curran, 1991).

The public watchdog, Schultz (1998) posits, empowers the media, on behalf of the public, to hold the powerful accountable for their actions in the exercise of the powers and authority placed upon them. For the public service broadcasters to play this role, they must operate freely and independently from the state. This is because, once they become subject to state control, the fear is that they will lose their ability to be a watchdog and may even be transformed into an accessory of the state (Curran, 1991). Such public service broadcasters are useless in serving the public good and public opinion.

The public watchdog role, therefore, confers on the media the right to speak with one voice for itself and for the public (Schultz, 1998). Curran (2000) further argues that PBS enjoys some 'publicly' based independence that enables them to perform the watchdog role more meaningfully than private broadcasters, because of their strong internal systems of checks and balances and fear of public disapproval.

Originally conceptualised for the print media, the watchdog role in its application has seen the media standing up against abuses by the rich and powerful in society (Curran, 1991). However, there have always been doubts about the effective application of the watchdog role to the broadcast media as the state regulates the use of the broadcast spectrum. Thus, Curran (1991) argues, while it is easy for the press to play this role, the same cannot be said of the broadcast media because of the scarcity of frequencies on the electromagnetic spectrum. But the current deregulation wave sweeping across the African continent is gradually re-conceptualising this thinking.

However, reasons for this fear, have been dispelled by technological advancement, leading to better management of the electromagnetic spectrum, - a situation that led to the deregulation of broadcasting in many countries (Seaton, 2000).

Since deregulation means commercial broadcasters becoming dependent on advertisement revenue from corporate entities, Curran (1991) says that this may sometimes restrain them from criticising or investigating the activities of corporate establishments, especially their major advertising clients. Therefore, Curran (1991) argues that the free-market compromises rather than guarantees the editorial integrity of the media and impairs their watchdog role.

This assumption further calls into question the very foundation of the traditional free-market thesis that commercialisation leads to the independence of the media for democratic purposes.

However, since the free-market thesis provides for freedom of expression, public service radio programmers could still use radio for empowerment by opening their studios for *talkshows*, panel discussions and interviews by those who hold divergent views from the dominant positions being circulated by the elites to express their views unhindered outside the context of news which is often presented in a stereotypical fashion.

From the foregoing, the establishment of public service broadcasting as a public watchdog, which encourages neutrality and higher stakes programming, seems to enjoy overwhelming support.

The Mass Media a Veritable Backbone of Democracy

The media supply the political information that voters base their decisions on. They identify problems in our society and serve as a medium for deliberation. They are also the watchdogs that we rely on for uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those who have power. It is, therefore, reasonable to require that the media adhere to certain standards with respect to these functions, and our democratic society rests on the assumption that they do (Venturelli, 1998; Kellner, 2004; McQuail, 1993; Skogerbo, 1996).

The most important democratic functions that we can expect the media to serve are listed in an often-cited article by Gurevitch and Blumler (1990). These functions include surveillance of socio-political developments, identifying the most relevant issues, providing a platform for debate across a diverse range of views, holding officials to account for the way they exercise power, provide incentives for citizens to learn, choose, and become involved in the political process, and resist efforts of forces outside the media to subvert their independence.

However, there is a growing concern that the mass media are not fulfilling these functions properly. Media critics claim that commercial mass media controlled by a few multinational conglomerates have become an antidemocratic force

supporting the *status quo* (Kellner 2004; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Herman and McChesney 1997; Alger, 1998; McChesney, 1999; Keane, 1991). The news is more entertaining than informing, supplying mostly gossip, scandals, sex, and violence. Political news is more about personalities than about their ideologies. In the absence of serious debate, voters are left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans making them disinterested and cynical about politics (Bagdikian, 1983; Fallows, 1996; Capella and Jamieson, 1997; Bennett and Entman 2001; Barnett, 2002). It is also claimed that the watchdogs are barking at the wrong things.

The media hunt for scandals in the private lives of politicians and their families, but ignore much more serious consequences of their policies. They go after wounded politicians like sharks in a feeding frenzy (Sabato, 1991). All too often, the media make us afraid of the wrong things. Minor dangers are hysterically blown out of proportion, while much more serious dangers in our society go largely unnoticed (Glassner, 1999). The exaggerated fears often lead to unnecessary measures and legislation and "gonzo justice" (Altheide, 1995, 2002; Altheide and Michalowski, 1999).

Critics also complain that the media fail to report wrongdoings in the industry. For example, many media have suppressed information about the health hazards of smoking due to pressure from advertisers (Cirino, 1973). Even more alarming is the claim that certain mass media (especially women's magazines) promote worthless alternative health products, thereby effectively conspiring with the industry to defraud consumers of billions of dollars every year (Barrett and Jarvis, 1993; Jarvis, 1992). The broadcast media are also guilty of the above allegations levelled against the print media though in a different guise. Therefore, to realise workable people-oriented public sphere for Nigeria's electioneering and democratisation the following recommendation would be plausible.

Recommendations

1. There is the need for public and private broadcasting stations to evolve into public service broadcasting to properly service the needs of the people who are daily increasingly becoming politically conscious.
2. Public service broadcasters need to be allowed to develop and be protected in law especially the aspect that has to do with press freedom.
3. Public service broadcasting should be geared towards ensuring universal access to information and fulfilling the developmental functions to fight poverty, promote justice and equality, foster transparency in governance and ensure political education.
4. It is necessary to ensure sustained funding of a public broadcasting service in every in Nigeria and other African country, thereby distancing public broadcasters from government controls.

5. Public service broadcasters must be assisted with obtaining access to frequencies, licenses and permits. This would be in pursuance to the tenets of the deregulation of broadcasting sweeping across the continent of Africa.
6. These public broadcasters must be assisted in developing content through personnel training and the provision of collaborative tools-ICT-driven, with other media. Training needs to be increased to address the dearth of quality, and to promote ethical journalism.
7. State interference in media activity must come to an end in order for the media to play their full democratic and developmental roles appropriately and effectively.
8. Finally, community-based radio stations with Internet connectivity could play an important role in democratic sensitisation, consolidation and development. Television and radio outputs must respect the needs of the viewer in order to fulfil their potential of incorporating the viewer and listener in their programme contents and schedules.

References

- Alger, D. (1998) *Megamedia: How Giant Corporations Dominate Mass media, Distort*.
- Ayish, Muhammad I. (2002) "Political Communication on Arab World Television: Evolving Patterns" *Political Communication* 2002:19, pp. 137154.
- Bagdikian, B.H. (1983) *The Media Monopoly*. Beacon Press, Boston.
- Barnett, S. (2002) *Will a Crisis in Journalism Provoke a Crisis in Democracy? The Political*.
- Barrett, S, Jarvis W. T (Eds) (1993) *The Health Robbers: A Close Look at Quackery in*
- Baynes, Kenneth (1994) "Communicative Ethics, the Public Sphere and Communication Media" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1994: 11 pp. 315 - 326
- Blumler, J. G. (2001). "The New Media and our Political Communication Scientists: Democratising Cyber Space" *Information, Communication & Society* 2001: 4, No.1 pp. 1-13.
- Caha, Omer (2005). "The Ideological Transformation of the Public Sphere: he Case of Turkey" *Turkish Journal of International Relations* 2005: 4, No.1&2 pp. 30.
- Calhoun, Craig (ed.) (1993) *Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere* Cambridge: MIT Press Cambridge University Press.
- Cirino, R. (1973). Bias through Selection and Omission. In Cohen S, Young J (eds) *The*
- Clark, Wayne (2000). *Activism in the Public Sphere: Exploring the discourse of political participation*: Williston: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Crossley, Nick & Roberts, J. M. (ed.) (2004). *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Pubic Sphere* Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Dahlberg, Lincoln (2005). "The Habermasian Public Sphere: Taking difference seriously?" *Theory and Society* 2005: 34, pp.111-136.
- Dehsen, E. (Ed.) (2000). *The Concise Encyclopedia of Democracy*. C.Q. Press, Washington DC.
- Democracy. Cambridge University Press
- Fallows, J. (1996). *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*.
- Fraser, Nancy (1993). "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in Calhoun, Craig (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Glassner, B. (1999). *The Culture of Fear*. Basic Books, New York.
- Goode, Luke (2005). *Jürgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere* London: Pluto Gruyter, New York
- Hartley, John & McKee, Alan (2000). "The Indigenous Public Sphere: The Reporting and Reception of Aboriginal Issues in the Australian Media" Oxford: *Oxford University Press*.
- Jarvis, W. T. (1992). Quackery: A National Scandal. *Clinical Chemistry* 38: 1574-1586.
- Karlstrom, Marit (2004) "Public Sphere: The Art of Becoming and Remaining Popular" Uppsala: *Uppsala University* 2004: 49, No.1.
- Kassis, Mudar (2001) "Civil Society Organisations and Transition to Democracy in Palestine" *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations* 2001: 12, No.1 pp.35- 47.
- Keane, J. (1991) *The Media and Democracy*. Polity Press, Cambridge
- Kellner, D. (2004). *The Media and Social Problems*. In: Ritzer G (Ed) *Handbook of Social*
- Lindolf, Thomas and Bryan C. Taylor (2002). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* London: Sage London
- Maarek, Philippe and Wolfsfeld, Gadi (ed.) (2003) *Political Communication in a New Era: A cross-national perspective* London: Routledge
- Manufacture of News. Sage, Beverly Hills

- Martin, M. McIntyre L. C (Eds.) (1994). *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. MIT
- McChesney R. W. (1999) *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious*
- McIntyre, L.C. (1996) *Laws and Explanation in the Social Sciences: Defending a Science of*
- Mckeon, Michael (2004). "Parsing Habermas's Bourgeois Public Sphere" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2004: 46, No.2, pp. 272-277
- McPhail, Thomas L. (2006). *Global Communication: Theories, Stakeholders and Trends* Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- McQuail, D. (1993). *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*. Sage,
- McQuail, D. (2003). *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication*. Oxford University
- Media Politics 1980-1993. Dissertation. University of Oslo
- Miller, Gale and Dingwall, Robert (ed.) (1997). *Context & Method in Qualitative Research* London: Sage
- Murmann, J. P. (2003). *Knowledge and Competitive Advantage: The Coevolution of Firms*,
- Mut, Diana C. (2001). "The Future of Political Communication Research: Reflections on the Occasion of Steve Chaffee's Retirement from Stanford University" *Political Communication* 2001: 18, pp. 231-236.
- New York
- Newman, Janet (ed.) (2005). *Remaking Governance: peoples, Politics and the Public Sphere* Bristol: The Policy Press
- Norris, P. (2000). *A Virtuous Circle: Political communications in Post industrial Societies*. Pantheon, New York
- Penslar, Derek (2000). "Introduction: The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere" *Jewish History* 2000: 14, pp. 3-8
- Philo, Creg et al (2004). *Bad News from Israel* London & Michigan: Pluto Press Politics. The Free Press, New York
- Porter, Richard E. & Samovar Larry A. (2004). *Communication between Cultures* Wadsworth: Holly J. Allen
- Postone, Maishe (1993). "Political Theory and Historical Analysis" in Calhoun, Craig (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* Cambridge: MIT Press
- Sabato, L. J. (1991). *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism has Transformed American*.
- SageSpenser, Graham (2005). *The Media and Peace: From Vietnam to the "War on Terror"* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sarman, Naz (2002). *Public Space, Mediated Environment, Public Participation: An Inquiry into the Transformation of public space and its effect on public opinion* [WWW]
- Saviotti, P. P. (2003). *Applied Evolutionary Economics: New Empirical Methods and Simulation*
- Schudson, Michael (1993). "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So, When? Reflections on the American Case" in Calhoun, Craig (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* Cambridge: MIT Press
- Shikaki, Khalil (1996). "The Peace Process, National Reconstruction & the Transition to Democracy in Palestine" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1996: xxv, pp.5-20
- Silverman, David (ed.) (2004). *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice* London: Techniques. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK
- Technology, and National Institutions. Cambridge University Press
- Thussu, Daya (2000). *International Communication: Continuity and Change* New York: American University Press
- Times. University of Illinois Press

- Tom, Sally (2001). *More than Directing Money: Theories in Use for Helping Distressed Communities As Practiced by Private Foundations* [Pdf]
- Tsagarousianou, Roza (2004) Rethinking the concept of diaspora: mobility, connectivity and University Press.
- UNRWA (2006). *Who is a Palestinian Refugee?* [WWW] <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/whois.html> (May 8, 2006).
- Verba, Sidney; Nie, Norman; Kim, J. (1978). *Participation & Political Equality: A Seven Nation Comparison* Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press.
- Walliman, Nicholas (2005). *Your Research Project* London: Sage
- Weisser, Christian R. (2002). *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies & the PublicSphere* USA: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Wengraf, Tom (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing* London: Sage
- Wilson, H.T. (1984). *Political Management: Redefining the Public Sphere* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter