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# FROM IWE IROHIN TO SAHARAREPORTERS.COM: HARDCODING CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
School of Literature, Language and Media Studies
PhD (Media Studies)

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This thesis is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies

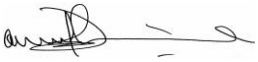
Supervisor: Professor Ufuoma Akpojivi

JOHANNESBUIRG: NOVEMBER 2021

## DECLARATION

I, Akintola Olaniyan (1724603), hereby declare that this thesis submitted as requirement for the completion of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies Department at the University of the Witwatersrand in the academic year 2021. I declare as follows:

- That I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is an offence
- That this thesis submitted for assessment is the outcome of an original research in both its design and execution
- That the standard academic guidelines for referencing the thoughts and ideas of others have been duly followed
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**ABSTRACT**

Nigeria's fourth republic was supposed to deliver much more than the previous attempts at democratic rule. After decades of military rule, during which the media had been a rallying point for pro-democracy activism, the return to elective civilian rule in 1999 was supposed to launch Nigeria into a new order of democracy and development. The media, active in its normative role as watchdogs during the campaign against military rule, was supposed to be pivotal in the new order. Particularly since the 1999 Constitution and new laws like the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) (2011) appear to remove some of the obstacles to their operations. However, performance of the media post-1999 has drawn criticism as Nigeria moved from one electoral cycle to another without evidence of impact on people's lives. This criticism has largely centred on the media's failure to hold politicians to account. New media platforms in the meantime are disrupting the media industry in Nigeria and appear to be taking the lead in performing the normative watchdog role by holding politicians to account; as an increasing number of people adopt these new channels for political communication and citizen journalism. While they appear to allow many more people into the communicative discourse, the significance and impact of new media platforms on democratic processes are still unclear.

This study is a critical assessment of the media's performance post-1999 using political economy and the public sphere as the theoretical lenses. The study interrogates the emergence of new, digital-born news platforms into the Nigerian media post-1999. The study critically examines the contestations around the operations of news platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable. This includes studying their claim to popularity and their perception as alternatives to the traditional newspapers like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune. Some of those contestations centre around the claims that the new media platforms are counter-hegemonic because they accommodate more ordinary viewpoints. This is in contrast to the traditional newspapers which are considered hegemonic because they are less accommodating of ordinary viewpoints. The study draws on three data sets: first, twelve purposive qualitative interviews with Nigerian editors and publishers at The Guardian, The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable; second, an online survey of Nigerian media users conducted between February and July 2020; and third, content analysis of 41 selected newspaper stories. The study finds that new media may have democratised the communicative environment by allowing many ordinary Nigerians access to media that was impossible with traditional newspapers. However, there is still an elite domination of overall communication online. The study also finds that, while the likes of Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable stand in contrast to The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune, most of the differences relate to perception rather than any real difference in the quality of access given to media users. The study finds that the ecosystem of new media allows for more ordinary participation in the communicative process. Furthermore, that some features can be copied by the more traditional newspapers to improve the overall performance of the media and its impact on the democratic process.

KEYWORDS: Alternative and Activist Media, New Media, Citizen Journalism, Digital Disruption, Traditional Media, Alternative Media, Nigerian Media,

**DEDICATION**

To my ever-supportive wife, Folake; and the children, Oluwatosin, Oluwadamilare and Ikeoluwapo Olaniyan

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would have been impossible but for the encouragement of the people close to me. Their support over the last three years made all the difference, providing the encouragement and motivation to continue, especially in 2020 when Covid-19 grounded activities on campus as well as across the world. I am indebted to Professor Ufuoma Akpojivi, whose supervision from the beginning to the end proved decisive in the final outcome. His feedback through every stage of the research and thesis writing processes provided much-needed fillip to continue when situations were most unfavourable. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my wife, Folake, and our children – Ikeoluwapo, Oluwadamilare, Oluwatosin - who endured another long period of absence away from home as I worked on this. I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues, Fiona Chawana, Sylvester Ukut and Samuel Olaniran, for their support and encouragement. I am also grateful for the support from the entire academic staff of the Media Studies Department and for the privilege to gain valuable research and teaching experience over the last three years. Lastly, I would like to thank all the senior journalists who sacrificed their time to share useful insights into the digital disruption of the media industry, and what it means for communication and politics.

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ABC | - | Audit Bureau of Circulation |
| ACB | - | African Continental Bank |
| ACLU | - | American Civil Liberties Union |
| ADVAN | - | Advertisers Association of Nigeria |
| AG | - | Action Group |
| AIT | - | Africa Independent Television |
| APC | - | All Progressive Congress |
| BBC | - | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| CAQDAS | - | Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis |
| CATA | - | Computer Aided Text Analysis |
| CBN | - | Central Bank of Nigeria |
| CEO | - | Chief Executive Officer |
| CNN | - | Cable News Network |
| ENTV | - | Eastern Nigerian Television |
| FOI | - | Freedom of Information |
| FRCN | - | Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria |
| GATT | - | General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs |
| GBPN | - | Guild of Professional Bloggers of Nigeria |
| GDP | - | Gross Domestic Product |
| GOCOP | - | Guild of Corporate Online Publishers |
| HCI | - | Human Capital Index |
| HDI | - | Human Development index |
| ICFJ | - | International Consortium of Investigative Journalism |
| INEC | - | Independent National Electoral Commission |
| MURIC | - | Muslim Rights Concern |
| NAN | - | News Agency of Nigeria |
| NBC | - | Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation |
| NBS | - | Nigerian Broadcasting Service |
| NCC | - | Nigerian Communications Commission |
| NCNC | - | National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons |
| NNTV | - | Northern Nigeria Television |
| NPAN | - | Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria |
| NPC | - | Northern People's Congress |
| NPN | - | National Party of Nigeria |
| NTA | - | Nigerian Television Authority |
| NUP | - | National Unity Party |
| NYM | - | Nigerian Youth Movement |
| ONSA | - | Office of the National Security Adviser |
| OPAN | - | Online Publishers Association of Nigeria |
| OSIIWA | - | Open Society Initiative for West Africa |
| PDP | - | Peoples Democratic Party |
| RDS | - | Radio Distribution System |
| SCP | - | Structure Conduct Performance |
| SOE | - | State owned enterprises |
| TNT | - | Today's News Today |
| TVC | - | TV Continental |
| UGC | - | User Generated Content |
| UNDP | - | United Nations Development Programme |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| UNESCO | - | United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| WAN | - | World Association of Newspapers |
| WNTV | - | Western Nigeria Television |

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# CHAPTER ONE
# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

An increasing number of Nigerians, angered by unfulfilled promises of the decades since independence, appear to be embracing new media[1] and its affordances as alternative channels for political communication (Olaniyan, 2014; Lee et al., 2016; Akoh & Jagun, 2012). Independence from British colonial rule in 1960 was supposed to free Nigeria from external domination and allow the country to use its vast natural resources to improve the standard of living for its people. However, while the country has been ruled by Nigerians since October 1, 1960, many continue to feel that they are still in bondage. A story by Punch, one of the national newspapers, published on October 1, 2016 (Independence Day), captures the mood of citizens who witnessed the transfer of power from the British to the earliest nationalists. "They told us independence would set us free but now we feel disappointed –Senior citizens who witnessed October 1, 1960," the headline of that story screamed. It narrates how the transfer of power had failed to translate to a better Nigeria (Balogun et al., 2016). The story quoted one retiree, who was a young schoolboy at independence, as saying, "we were also told that the attainment of independence would give Nigerians the opportunity to have their own government and rule themselves …we looked forward to a great future as young as we were then,".

The fact that Nigeria's democracy remains fragile suggests that independence had failed to deliver on that promise. This is after nine military coups and coup attempts; a civil war believed to have led to between 500,000 and 1 million civilian deaths; and ongoing regional agitations for self-rule. A faulty federal arrangement, or what Adamolekun (2005, p.384) describes as a 'bastardised federal system' which concentrates power at the centre, means revenue collection and allocation is seen as a political instrument and, therefore, a constant source of political contestation. As power resides at the centre, this means the predominantly[2] Christian South (McKinnon, 2021) has come short in the distribution of resources and opportunities. This is

[1] For this study, new media refers to the technology-mediated communication that is digital, interactive, networked, virtual, and hypertextual that is now made possible in the convergence era. So, this will include online news sites, chat rooms, online communities like those on social networking platforms, listservs, and email.

[2] Like the actual population of Nigeria, religious identification has been largely weaponised for political and economic reasons. Official census figures, which does not track religious identification, are unreliable leaving any figure (either of total population or religious dentification open to contestation). However, Andrew McKinnon's (2021) study, which presents data from eleven nationally representative surveys of adults between 1990 and 2018 agree with the notion that the Northern part of Nigeria has more Muslims while the Southern part has more Christians.

because the first military intervention in 1966 destroyed the ideal federal Nigeria, where power and control of resources devolved to the regions (Oyovbaire, 1998).

Among other things fuelling frustration, Nigeria remains divided along ethnic and religious lines with tensions boiling over fairly regularly into full-blown civil unrest that cost thousands in human lives (New York Times, 2018). Despite 20 years of unbroken democratic rule, a widening gap between the poor and the rich is fuelling a growing sense that elections are meaningless rituals where people's votes do not count. A survey by the Pew Centre (Tamir, 2019) provides some interesting findings on what people make of Nigeria's democracy. The survey, conducted in 2018, found, for instance, that 60% of Nigerian's are dissatisfied with the way democracy is working in Nigeria. Further, that the majority (59%) think elected officials do not care about what ordinary people think; and that 57% believe that regardless of who wins an election, things do not change.

So, there is a strong sense that independence and control of Nigeria's vast resources by Nigerians have failed to deliver any direct benefit to ordinary people. This has increasingly agitated many who, as a result, are looking for communicative outlets to voice their views on the state of affairs. The increasing failure of the Nigerian state is widely acknowledged by many observers who remain baffled by the glaring gulf between potential and performance (Scacco, 2013; Bourne, 2015; Hill, 2012; Cunliffe-Jones, 2010).

Historically, Nigerian newspapers have always provided vibrant political coverage and aided social movements (Dare, 2000; Kayode et al., 2015). Beginning with the Iwe Irohin in 1859, the newspaper industry became known for critical and adversarial views (Olaniyan, 2014; Omu, 1996). The media's activism during those early days and during the military era appeared to have strengthened its reputation as aggressive, independent but one which still suffers from institutional flaws (Uko, 2004). The shortcomings, like those identified by scholars like Uko (2004) appears, however, to have persisted in the fourth republic with the media still unable to perform its normative role.

Amongst other reasons adduced for the media's perceived failure, economic pressure, ownership and government regulation appear to be the most serious hinderances to a free media (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2020; Olukotun, 2018a). The media's perceived failure is central to the overall understanding of the democratic developments of the last twenty-two years. As

McChesney (2004) suggests, the quality of democracy hinges on the quality of the media. Disappointed with a political process that appears to be leaving many behind (Scacco, 2013; Hill, 2012) as well as disappointment in the media's contribution to the dire situation in the country, many Nigerians are embracing new media platforms. These are considered more participatory spaces to air their frustration on vexing national issues in the hope that they can get their voices in on the national political discourse (Lee et al., 2016; Akoh & Jagun, 2012; Kperogi, 2016).

While there is some evidence of increasing use of news websites, chat rooms, online communities like those on social networking platforms, listservs, emails, as well as other Internet-enabled channels for political communication (Lee et al., 2016; Akoh & Jagun, 2012), as these are relatively new phenomena, their potential to impact politics is yet to be fully understood. However, given the growing body of work suggesting that these new channels of political communication are already enabling citizen participation in political processes in new ways (Lee et al., 2016; Olaniyan, 2014), a critical study of how and why they have become so important as well as what it means for Nigerian politics, is not only timely but useful.

This study will, therefore, focus on Nigeria's fourth republic, which began in 1999. The intention being to interrogate how and why new media is becoming increasingly popular as the channel of choice for political communication in the way that Lee et al., (2016), Akoh and Jagun (2012), as well as Kperogi (2016) describe. Furthermore, the study will examine what is responsible for the noticeable shift away from traditional media; the nature and significance of this shift, as well as the ways in which this shift is impacting political processes. In order to do this, this study will use six media organisations samples. Three newspapers, Punch, Guardian and Tribune, were selected to represent traditional media, while Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable were selected to represent online news media. These news organisations were chosen to critically interrogate the difference between the models of traditional and new media organisations and to examine what in their respective ecosystems might be responsible for the noticeable shift. The study will also interrogate how this is affecting their ability to satisfactorily serve people looking for platforms for political communication.

As noted earlier, before the rise of new media across the country, political communication was predominantly conducted through traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television (Kperogi, 2016; Obijiofor, 2015). However, as already mentioned, new media is becoming

increasingly influential in terms of shaping national discourse in much the same ways as newspapers had done prior to the fourth republic. Traditional media have always been accused of being the mouthpiece of the elite because it limits access and participation for ordinary people (Obijiofor, 2015). As a result, many Nigerians appear to have been left out of communicative processes due to the exclusionary policies of the newspapers as well as a combination of government policies which limit the ability of private-owned, commercial broadcasters. Other factors that have limited the access of ordinary people into the media are an increasingly harsh economic environment that hampers the newspaper business; and what McChesney (2002) describes as the attitude of corporate media or their editorial policies that place business interests above those of readers.

It appears the space for ordinary Nigerians to be actively involved in political communication is shrinking at a time of increasing frustration about governance, forcing many of them to seek out and adopt other channels outside of the traditional media. As such, there is a sense in which new media platforms can be considered, in the way that Lievrouw (2011) does, as alternative and activist media. As she says, new media operators are finding the affordances of media convergence "fruitful arenas for action and expression" (Lievrouw, 2011, p.215). The affordances, the author says, include the propagation of "opposition and alternative viewpoints and agenda" (p.225). These factors will be examined in more detail in the next chapters, which explore the historical development of the Nigerian media as channels of political communication; and the digital disruption that is powering participatory journalism of the type that Lievrouw (2011) has described as alternative and activist media.

There is reason to believe a communicative shift, whereby new media is on the ascendancy in terms of its growing adoption as a channel of political communication and overall influence on national discourse since the return to democratic rule in 1999 (Kperogi, 2016; Dare 2011). As such, some understanding of the socio-political environment that is making that shift possible in essential. In interrogating the nature and significance of this shift, it would be useful first to show where Nigeria stands today in terms of its abysmal economic and human capital development, and then map its unbelievable but harrowing journey into that descent. As this is a study of what is motivating an increasing number of people to find their voice via alternative channels, and how this is impacting the political process, it will be useful to begin with a look at what living in Nigeria means for its people.

Perhaps no other single study shows the level of dissatisfaction with life in Nigeria than that conducted by the U.S-based Pew Research Centre. In a study published in March 2019, the centre reported that nearly half of all Nigerians (45%) are considering leaving the country, the highest of the twelve countries surveyed (Connor & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2019). Other countries surveyed included Tunisia, with 24% saying they intend to emigrate and Kenya with 19%. The study, title the 'Spring 2018 Global Attitude Report,' also found that those who express a desire to leave Nigeria plan to do so within the next five years and that 55% of these have taken an initial step in the process by gathering information about moving to another country. The report also shows that 34% or a third have saved or borrowed money; 30% or nearly a third have already applied for necessary documents; and 14% have taken all three preparatory steps for emigration. Only Tunisia, where 70% of respondents who express the willingness to emigrate have gathered information; 54% have saved or borrowed money; 52% have applied for necessary documents; and 28% have taken all three preparatory steps, have more people who have actually taken the steps to begin the process of emigrating.

The Spring 2018 Global Attitude Report notes that those who intend to emigrate cite better jobs, education, reuniting with families and insecurity as reasons. Taking this study on its own might be insufficient to understand the underlying issues that are driving the wave of emigration out of Nigeria. However, when considered along with another study by Pew Research Centre (2018), which referenced the desperation of many to emigrate and the grinding everyday life of millions of Nigerians, the desperation to emigrate begins to make more sense.

Pew Centre's study of asylum applications to Canada provides some context to the desire of almost half of all Nigerians to leave the country. That report, which underscores the desperation to leave Nigeria at all costs, shows that the number of Nigerians applying for asylum in Canada was only second to that of Haiti (Pew Research Center, 2018), many of them having taken the unconventional route of simply walking across the United States border to Canada in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's election (Ross, 2018). There is general agreement that migration is largely driven by factors that make life unbearable for people in their home countries, and that would fit the Nigerian narrative given the worsening quality of life that has impoverished millions (Bourne, 2015; Hill, 2012; Scacco, 2013).

The Nigerian narrative may make for unpalatable reading, especially for those who know about and have always believed in its potential (Scacco, 2013; Hill, 2012; Collier, 2008), but is

consistent with data which reinforces the country's challenges. For example, data released mid-2018 showed that Nigeria had officially become the poverty capital of the world after it surpassed India as the country with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty (Adebayo, 2018). This not only confirmed a trend but underlines the country's failures of the last 59 years. The data, based on computation by the World Poverty Clock and the Brookings Institute, showed that an estimated 87 million Nigerians, or almost half of the country's estimated 190 million population, was living on less than $1.90 per day. This figure is in line with official figures from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, which showed that poverty has been on the increase since 2004 (Bourne, 2015). By May 2019, the number of those living in extreme poverty in Nigeria, according to the Poverty Clock, had risen to 91.7 million compared with 46 million in India.

Regardless of what measurements are used to determine quality of life, whether it those of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP, 2018), Human Development Index (HDI), or the World Bank's (2018a, b) Human Capital Index (HCI), they all show sliding standards of living in Nigeria over the years.

As this study is an attempt to critically examine the nature and impact of new media on political communication and political processes in Nigeria, a contextual review of the geo-political foundation of the country is useful for what it reveals of the fissures that have defined power relations in the country since 1914.

Nigeria's fortuitous emergence as a country is well-covered in literature (Bourne, 2015; Osaghae, 1998; Scacco, 2013; Cunliffe-Jones, 2010; Hill, 2012; Ekundare, 1973; Joseph 1987) and the intention here is not to attempt a historical revision. The objective is to highlight how the cobbling together of three dominant cultural and religious blocs (Bourne, 2015; Osaghae, 1998) and over 200 smaller ones (Scacco, 2013) have shaped economic development, politics and power relations in modern-day Nigeria. The economy appears to be designed to fail with the discovery of oil in 1956 all but ending the development of other revenue sources**.** Falola and Heaton (2008), Oshaghae (1998), Bourne (2015), Ekundare (1973) and Olukoshi (1993) detail the colonial economic model, which was designed to promote Britain at the expense of the colony. They note the policy of promoting the development of cash crops and mineral production, thereby, creating the import-dependent economic framework that has crippled the country and from which it is still trying to escape.

More than a hundred years after it began the forced journey into nationhood, and almost three decades after regaining freedom from colonial rule, there is glaring evidence of how the country its people like to describe as the 'giant of Africa' has failed to turn potential into results (Lewis, 2006; Bourne, 2015; Osaghae, 1998; Scacco, 2013; Cunliffe-Jones, 2010; Hill, 2012). Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, there are grim reminders of the failure of the last century. These can be seen in the crumbling socio-economic infrastructure, growing poverty, and deep-seated divisions among the federating regions (Cunliffe-Jones, 2010; Hill, 2012). Perhaps nowhere is the leadership failure more evident than in the economy, which lags behind its peers and underscores the missed opportunities of the last 59 years.

Without doubt, the Nigerian economy today is performing worse than it did in the years immediately after independence, despite striking oil in the mid-50's. To understand the gradual decline of the last 59 years, a review of some economic history is necessary. While it had been self-sufficient in food production up until and throughout colonial rule, the 1956 oil discovery by Shell D'arcy remade Nigeria permanently, but for all the wrong reasons (Hill, 2012; Scacco; 2013; Collier, 2008; Salai-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2008).

By all accounts, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates was fraught with problems from the beginning (Osaghae, 1998; Ekeh, 1975; Bourne, 2015; Cunliffe Jones, 2010; Hill, 2012). However, this section is not a review of the motives and choices of Lord Lugard and other colonial rulers whose actions shaped policies in those early days. The section will instead focus on how those choices have shaped Nigerian politics in at least two major ways, and how these have provided the enabling environment for more engaging communicative practices today.

First, as previously stated, the colonial administration's economic policies were designed to favour Britain. While the official case for amalgamation was that it made the colonies self-sufficient, the "situation in Nigeria prior to amalgamation, defied this aim" because at the time, the North depended on the colonial office, the South was already self-sustaining with tax revenues from its "more prosperous, export-oriented economy" (Bourne, 2015, p.12).

Second, the amalgamation and the attendant politicking brought a new dimension into the politics of convenience that apparently was not anticipated by those responsible for planning

the economy. However, this new dimension of exploitation of national resources by privileged groups nonetheless continues to fuel inter-tribal struggles and pits the Nigerian elite against the poor, but, ironically, might be one of the only reasons why the country is still holding together (Bourne, 2015; Hill, 2012). As a result of the politics of convenience, or what some scholars like Joseph (1987), Suberu (2013), Amuwo (2013), Aiyede (2013), and Owen (2013) describe as prebendalism, the last 59 years have seen national revenue becoming a political tool used to secure support and beat opposition into line. Given the penchant of Nigerian politicians for rent-seeking, Joseph's (2013) apt description of the politics of the second republic (1979-1983) as having been based on "clientelism and prebendalism" could, as he puts it, "apply to any political order, military or civilian, which might be imposed or attempted in Nigeria… after it" (Joseph, 2013, p.1).

On the basis of available evidence, Joseph's (1987) theory is apt in trying to make sense of the performance of every government that ruled Nigeria from independence to the second republic, and which have always been characterised by what he calls the "intensive and persistent struggle to control and exploit the offices of the state" (p.1). His assertion that "democratic politics and prebendal politics are two sides of the same coin in Nigeria: each can be turned over to reveal the other" (Joseph, 1987, p.10), helps explain the centrality of revenue sharing to present day Nigerian politics.

This is because from the first republic, the struggle for the centre, where the control of the government revenue resides, has always been a bitter one. One which, arguably, led to the first and subsequent military coups[3]; and for which many aspirants are willing to invest heavily (Forrest, 1995, Bourne, 2015; Scacco, 2013). The centralised revenue collection and control is not just making the centre more attractive but is seen by some as one of the reasons why corruption is so difficult to fight in Nigeria (Hill, 2012; Joseph, 1987). Oil revenue, controlled from the centre, fuels prebendalism, otherwise called clientelism, patronage, and patron-client politics, which, in turn, continues to fuel the bitter political contest for control at the centre (Scacco, 2013; Hill, 2012).

[3] The first military coup in Nigeria was led by a Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, Southern Christian and while it might be more convenient to use the emotive argument that Major General Aguiyi Ironsi who took over after that failed coup and Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon who became Head of State after Aguiyi Ironsi were both Christians, the facts suggest an uneven access to Nigeria's Presidency. Ascension to Nigeria's highest political office since 1966 has favoured the North and Muslims. Nigeria has been ruled for a combined 36 years by presidents who practices Islam and 28 years and 9 months by Christians, while the North had ruled for a combined 45 years and the South for 19 years and 9 months.

As noted, this politics of convenience that drains the treasury but keeps Nigeria going rests on the distribution of federally collected revenue by a committee that meets every month. The monthly allocation by the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) of revenue, the bulk of which comes from oil, customs duties and Value Added Tax (VAT), is counter-productive to the extent that it leaves the states weakened and unable to develop other revenue streams (Scacco, 2013; Oshagae, 1998; Oyovbaire, 1978).

This unending struggle for advantages was identified early as one major constraint to sustainable economic development. Larry Diamond puts it succinctly in his foreword to the book 'Democracy and Predendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations' when he says, "the oldest and most enduring story of human political life is this: the strong exploit and abuse the weak" (Diamond, 2013, p.5). Others, like Ekeh (1995), Joseph (1987) and Lewis (1996), all make the same point, that the well-positioned use their advantage to enrich themselves at the expense of the public. Corruption has indeed exacted a heavy cost on Nigeria, principally because it denies the country much-needed investible funds but also because of the damage to the collective psyche of the people (Bourne, 2005).

Making sense of the delicate power relations that keeps Nigeria from disintegrating is both a complex and often disputed exercise. Not just because of the heterogenous nature of the country but also because of the many layers of the composition of those relationships (Joseph, 1987; Ekeh, 1975; Hill, 2017). However, this exercise is crucial to the overall understanding of why Nigeria is not working but cannot as yet be described as a completely failed state. It also aids in understanding why it manages every time, except for the civil war of 1967-1970, to pull itself back from the brink of total collapse (Bourne, 2015; Hill, 2012). Osaghae (1998), Bourne (2015) and Scacco (2013) describe the structural complexity which emerged at independence, when the country's three autonomous federating units, the Northern, Eastern and Western regions, wielded more power. This was until the federal government began to leverage certain provisions of the 1963 constitution to gain greater control. Osaghae (1998, p.25) says "power relations and competition for power constitute the core of politics" and political developments in Nigeria since the 1914 amalgamation lends credence to this. I intend to look at the power relations at two levels. First, the contest between regions and tribes, and second, between the elites and the poor.

Osaghae (1998) and Ekeh (1975) both agree that the struggle for power in Nigeria is dominated by the elites. While Osaghae (1998) argues "the elite in Nigeria is factionalized mainly along ethnic, regional, religious and institutional lines, being the product of uneven development and rivalry" (p.25), there is ground to believe that when it comes to the appropriation of national wealth, they work in close cooperation. Osaghae (1998), for instance, agrees that the elite, while taking their support "from communal, ethnic, religious and regional groups depending on the contestation" (p.25) exploit differences to further their interests, but fail to highlight hegemonic tendencies.

On the other hand, Ekeh's (1975) model of the two publics, the primordial and the civic public,[4] goes further to highlight the class struggles involved in the power relations. His thesis that African bourgeois ideologies were formed to "serve as weapons to be used … for replacing the colonial rulers …." and "… to serve as mechanisms for legitimating their hold on their own people" (p.100) makes my proposition that, while the elite might disagree in the struggle for the sharing of territories, they often come to agreement in the exploitation of the masses.

This call for a re-design of the federalism that leaves the country precariously balanced on the edge, one crisis away from total disintegration, is not just the outcome of years of perceived imbalance but the very foundation of inequality that is partly responsible for Nigeria's failure. As Hill (2012) notes, federalism is contributing to Nigeria's failure in many ways. These, he argues, are: (i) by "fuelling the ethnic tensions and religious hatreds that are undermining the quality of life of tens of thousands of Nigerians" (p.60); (ii) disempowering many Nigerians "who have moved from one part of the country to another, either to find work or to flee violence" but "are denied access to certain services and opportunities" (p.60); (iii) limiting political rights and freedom of choice through the rotation system, as only "individuals from the right ethnic group are allowed to assume certain posts" (p.60-61); and (iv) increasing "the cost of government and created many new opportunities for corruption and graft" (p.61).

Many scholars, like Lewis (2006), Cunliffe-Jones (2010), Hill (2012) and Scacco (2013), note the fact that Nigeria is already showing the signs of a failed state. Scacco (2013), for instance,

[4] The primordial public, according to Ekeh, is the public realm in which primordial groupings, ties, and sentiments shape the individual's public behaviour. Closely tied to the private realm, this public, he says, is moral. On the other hand, he says the civic public is based on civil structures: the military, the civil service, the police, etc., has no moral linkages with the private realm and is amoral.

argues that the Nigerian government is failing two critical tests of going states, namely: security for all its people and equal opportunity for all to flourish. Referencing Human Rights Watch, Scacco (2013) notes that since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999, as many as 10,000 people have been killed in hundreds of different clashes across the country. For his part, Hill (2012) notes that failed states "are distinguished not by what they are, but by what they are not" (p.26). Failed states, he also argues, will be unable to guarantee a conducive environment for their people to thrive; are usually plagued by internal upheaval and, therefore, unable to perform; and fail in their ability to fulfil their social contract with the people.

Citing the Fund for Peace's Failed State Index rankings, Hill (2012) also noted that since 2005, Nigeria has been gradually slipping into failure. Ranked the fifty-fourth most failed state in 2005, the author notes that by 2011, the country was "identified as the fourteenth most failed state in the world" (p.19). This meant that that in six years, "the country has climbed 40 places in the Fund's index and is now grouped with such acknowledged basket cases as Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan" (Hill, 2012, p.19).

How then does all this affect the communicative environment? Suberu (2013) notes how federal character, which requires all government appointments and disbursements to reflect ethno-regional diversity, appears to have made prebendalism an official policy. What he does not mention is how frustrating this policy has become for millions of qualified Nigerians. For example, those from the South cannot gain admission into federal schools or get a job in ministries and parastatals because they have to meet a higher entry requirement than their counterparts from the North. Yet, federal character is not the only practice that is keeping many young Nigerians from advancing themselves.

The elite domination of power and politics also means there is little hope for young Nigerians to have a say in the general direction of their country. Joseph's (1987) graphic description of the way prebendal politics works is as real today as it was when his theory was first propounded. As he notes, individuals still need to seek the "support and protection of an 'oga' or a 'godfather' while trying to acquire the basic social and material goods – loans, scholarships, licence, plots of urban land, employment, promotion" (p.56). It probably helps to explain why some Nigerian political leaders remain in power in various capacities more than

three decades later; or why it is difficult, if not near impossible, for projects like Take it Back[5], which sought to put more young people into political office, to make an impact. As mentioned earlier, since the media works almost along the same lines as the political and religious divisions, with journalists and their media houses taking sides, there is little or no recourse for Nigerians to express their frustrations. The result of discourse in traditional media being dominated by elite voices, as Obijiofor (2015) notes, is that new media is becoming the preferred channel of communication. One cannot but agree with his assessment that, whereas traditional media is discriminatory, new media is more participatory.

One other possible explanation for the continued influence of prebendal politics is that, like Amuwo (2013, p.133) argues, the absence of strong "institutions and inchoate structures of politics to curtail and contain negative derivatives of class — as well as individual and group— perversions of the political sphere and the economic commonwealth". As the media are considered a pillar of democracy as the fourth estate, it is my proposition that the increasing inability of traditional media to fulfil its social contract with people, as Obijiofor (2015) suggests, is one of the main reasons why alternative and activist media are gaining ascendancy in Nigeria. The following sections explain how this has happened.

Some of the major indications of the media's commitment to the social contract with the public is in holding leaders accountable through investigative stories and in allowing ordinary Nigerians access into the media space to express their disappointment. However, the media has been failing in these aspects of their normative roles. First, by neglecting investigative reporting (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2020) and, second, by privileging elite sources over ordinary voices (Obijiofor, 2015). The increasing incidences of corruption amidst falling standards of living among ordinary Nigerians may have been frustrating but the exclusionary editorial practices of the Nigerian media are probably more so. The failure by traditional media in Nigeria exposes the problem with mediated communication and highlights why new media is attractive as a channel for alternative viewpoints. New media use has grown on the back of technological infrastructure developments that enable more Nigerians to have more active participation in communicative processes.

[5] The Take It Back movement, initiated in the run-up to the 2019 Presidential Election, seeks a Nigeria where every Nigerian is free to aspire to office and is considered only on merit. This is made possible by mobilizing people to seize the initiative from the political establishment and replacing it with a people oriented and progressive government at all levels.

This digital disruption to the media ecosystem, which has empowered ordinary people, is making it relatively easier for ordinary Nigerians to get their voices into political discourse that might otherwise have been impossible. Where the balance of power had been with the press, the digital disruption and the participatory environment that this makes possible means government and traditional media are coming under pressure as Internet-mediated communication, especially through alternative and activist new media, is challenging the norm. In the process, and as some studies are showing, traditional media are beginning to lose their dominance over the national discourse and are, therefore, being challenged to carry out more critical reporting of the government and its officials (Lee, Jideofor & Petty, 2016). The emerging pattern is significantly different from the norm but more understandable in the context of the media environment described by Obijiofor (2015), to the extent that the voiceless can now join political discourse at both local and national levels using new media platforms.

The critical scrutiny of government and its activities through new media platforms such as online newspapers, social networking sites, WhatsApp groups, and other Internet-mediated communication, has, on occasion, exposed corrupt practices and called the government and its officials to account (Lee et al., 2016; Akoh & Jagun, 2012). This is especially challenging for the government because this segment of the media operates mostly outside of existing media laws in the country[6] (Cybecrime Law, 2015) and is not without its own drawbacks.

Lee et al. (2016) note that some news reports, which are first published by citizen journalists on new media platforms, eventually make it into traditional media. However, the growing incidence of disinformation and fake news[7] has led to debates about the impact of new media, and its affordances on the national discourse and political processes (Agbese & Opoola, 2018). Those debates centre on how to tackle the problem of communication in the convergence era

[6] The Cybercrime Law of 2015 has been used in some instances to arraign bloggers who criticised politicians and businessmen online and through social media. As the name suggests, this law was enacted to fight cybercrime but a provision for cyberstalking under Section 24 of the law provides for a fine of up to 7 million naira (USD$22,000) and a maximum three-year jail term for anyone convicted of knowingly sending an online message that "he knows to be false, for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred, ill will or needless anxiety to another."

[7] The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in its Handbook for Journalism Education and Training describes ‘news’ as verifiable information in the public interest, and information that does not meet these standards does not deserve the label of news and fake news as an oxymoron which lends itself to undermining the credibility of information which does indeed meet the threshold of verifiability and public interest – i.e., real news. Studies have categorised bogus click-bait, conspiracy theories, reckless reporting, political propaganda, hoaxes, misleading news and even satire as fake news.

that affords ordinary people greater power but also appears to encourage disinformation through the production and distribution of fake news.

Such is the growing influence of new media on the national discourse and political processes that the country's upper legislative arm, the Senate, once considered a seven-year jail term under a new law that would have made it an offence to incite the public against the government or its officials on social media (Godwin, 2013). The proposed law, known as the Frivolous Petitions (Provisions, etc.) Bill 2015, sponsored by Senator Bala Ibn Na'allah, sought to criminalise false allegations on a host of social networking platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, SMS and WhatsApp (Umoru & Erunke, 2015). Though it was suspended following a national outcry, the country's lawmakers have insisted they are pressing ahead with efforts to regulate new media platforms (Tarpael, 2018).

Regardless of the inherent weaknesses and the official moves to regulate communication on new media, there is every reason to believe that many people feel left behind by traditional media and that new media allows them to join conversations about events in the country. The increasing influence of online newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable, both in terms of the significance and political relevance of the stories they break and publish, confirms there is a shift in the way the people consume media. Furthermore, that their viability as channels of political communication must be subjected to critical scrutiny.

**Scope of the Study**

As mentioned, this study is designed to interrogate the growing influence of new media on political communication; how and why new media have acquired that influence; and the nature as well as impact of all this on the political processes in Nigeria. While the study will focus on Nigeria's fourth republic, samples will be drawn from eight years (2011 to 2019) covering three election cycles during which new media became a significant channel for political communication, electoral campaigns and citizen advocacy aimed at ensuring good governance. The study has focused on the fourth republic because the country's return to democratic rule in 1999 was seen as a significant moment in the history of Nigeria, representing perhaps the last chance to salvage a nation that has courted disaster for its lifetime.

The fourth republic took off on the back of a political crisis that had taken Nigeria to the brink

and during a time of heightened agitation for restructuring the federation. While that crisis and the political compromise that established Olusegun Obasanjo as president might have saved the country from another civil war, it did nothing to diminish the political awareness of many who embraced alternative and activist media as channels of political communication. The participatory media environment enabled by new media technologies was visible in 2010, with citizen journalists and activists actively involved in the campaign to transfer power to the then vice president Goodluck Jonathan following the death in office of President Umaru Yar'Adua. The Jonathan presidency was significant in many respects. First, he came into office as Nigeria's ruler on the back of a campaign driven by civil society and activist new media, hence the choice of samples beginning from 2011, just a year after he assumed office. Second, he was the first Nigerian presidential aspirant to utilise new media as channels of political communication when he launched a Facebook page to reach out directly to Nigerians. Third, in 2012 (Hamilton & Daramola, 2011), he was confronted by massive protests against his decision to increase the pump price of petroleum products. Those protests, popularly known as OccupyNigeria, were arguably a defining moment in the recognition of activist new media as influential channels of political communication (Olaniyan, 2014).

The idea is to use three newspapers (Punch, Guardian and Tribune) and three online publications (Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable) as samples for the critical interrogation of whether new media is really has deepened the communicative space by providing more choices to ordinary people. This is especially because of the inherent political, economic and cultural form that shapes the media and the impact of these online publications on Nigeria. More detail of the reason why these media organisations have been selected is provided in the methodology section. Using the selected media organisations allows for a comparative study of their business models, ownership, editorial policies, digital strategies and how all of these affect their ability to serve as effective platforms for political communication and impact political processes. Ultimately, the aim is to see how the useful features of new media can be hardcoded[8] into the Nigerian media system for the overall good.

**Research Problem**

Convergent media has been referred to as technologies of freedom (Diamond, 2012) and has

[8] The computer word used to describe the practice of fixing (data or parameters) in a program in such a way that they cannot be altered without modifying the program is used deliberately to convey the sense of inevitability in the digital disruptions that has shaken the Nigerian media to its very foundations.

altered the old model of the media by allowing news consumers to perform what can be considered acts of journalism such as gathering and distribution of news (Alejandro, 2010; Tufekci, 2017). So, while new media and its affordances may be empowering many Nigerians by allowing them to participate in the communicative processes in the way that Alejandro (2010) and Tufekci (2017) describe, there is need to critically study how and why they impact political processes. This is important because, while it might appear that new media and its affordances are helping to transform political communication in Nigeria in positive ways, there are fears that this new order is a threat to the culture of trust that is at the very heart of journalism (White, 2017).

White (2017) notes that journalism as a public good thrives on the principles of accuracy, professionalism and reliability institutionalised through the processes of clarification and correction. In contrast to this strict code of operation that makes the media an essential element of democratic processes, the new media ecosystem lacks such built-in controls, making it vulnerable to manipulation.

The manipulation of new media for political communication involves complex operations exploiting loopholes in state laws and technology (Fuchs, 2017; DOJ, 2018), which, even in the most developed media markets are still evolving, are completely non-existent in Nigeria. These issues are the focus of this research, designed to interrogate the noticeable trend and attempt a critical analysis of what the likely effect is on the Nigerian media industry and the country's emerging democracy[9]. While there might be grounds to believe that alternative and activist media are on the ascendancy in terms of influence on national discourse, there is a need not just to critically investigate the claim and how this has occurred. In addition, it is important to examine the nature of this impact on political processes. This is because of the loopholes in the ecosystem of new media, as mentioned earlier, leaves them open to abuse.

**Research Aims and Objectives**

Historically, Nigerian newspapers have always provided vibrant political coverage and aided social movements (Dare, 2000; Kayode, Aremu & Thanny, 2015). As noted previously, the Iwe

[9] While there are different approaches to understanding democracy, from the normative, Western ideal to the variants seen in places like Africa, this study takes its definition from studies that found that Nigerians believe that the political process determines a democratic society. So, while such things as the right to vote; the right to be elected; free and fair elections; freedom of association; freedom of expression; and alternative sources of information matter, Nigeria is described here as emerging because the political process is still immature.

Irohin initiated a tradition of robust and sometimes radical reporting that has remained a hallmark of the country's press (Olaniyan, 2014; Omu, 1996). That tradition media appears, however, to be suffering as digital disruption, and political and economic changes impair traditional media and their ability to serve the people. The digital disruption has seen new media and what I choose to describe as alternative and activist media grow in influence in recent years, to the degree that they now play significant roles as channels of political communication. Their growing influence and the likely impact on political processes, however, are not yet fully understood, which is why this study is important.

The aim of the research was:

I. To explore how and why citizen journalism or alternative and activist media are gaining ascendancy in their influence on political discourse in Nigeria.
II. To interrogate the nature and impact of the growing ascendancy of these new media on Nigerian political processes.

The study by Lee et al. (2016), which focused on people-powered media in Nigeria and other West African countries, shows that "citizens are participating in democracy in ways that were previously impossible. This has led to a dramatic reshaping of the national media landscapes which, in turn, has driven profound political shifts" (p. 14).

As such, the main objectives of this research are:

I. To compare the ecosystems of traditional and new media, and critically examine how the convergent media environment appears to enable more access into and participation in the media from citizens.
II. The study will also look at the nature and impact of new media, the expanded range of media available as well as how this noticeable shift in choice of channels for political communication is affecting Nigerian politics.
III. To examine whether new media and the growing influence of activist new media it has produced can be hardcoded to lock in some of the benefits such as mass, active participation for the public good.
IV. To examine whether the emerging phenomenon is impacting the political process in any way.

**Key Research Questions**

Therefore, this study seeks to address the following primary research questions:

I. To what extent are new media platforms like Sahara Reporters enhancing access into and participation in the political discourse?

II. How has new media helped to expand the range of citizen's choices in the Nigerian media space?

III. How are elements of the ecosystem of new media helping to expand the discursive space in the fourth republic?

IV. To what extent have new media practices diminished or strengthened Nigerian media's credential to enhance the democratic process and deepen democracy?

**Significance of Study**

It is not for nothing that new media technologies have been described as technologies of freedom. Indeed, as seen in the OccupyNigeria protests and in the growing influence of online publications in national discourse, there is no denying the value and potency of new media. However, as a one-time journalist, I also appreciate the checks and balances that a newsroom provides in the processing of news, which the convergent media environment is eroding. Drawing from my personal experiences as a journalist and most recently as a corporate communication manager for a Tier-1 capital bank in Nigeria, I am well aware of how media capture can impair journalistic outputs in media houses whose models are advertising-driven. Fundamental issues are in the development of the media in any country: would it be better to have newspapers impaired by media capture? Or, activist media, which are receiving donor-funding, with all its implications for sovereignty? Which of these is best for deepening democracy and enhancing good governance in the country? Ultimately, it is hoped this research succeeds if it, first, contributes to knowledge of alternative and activist new media and helps emerging democracies like Nigeria achieve more political stability by enhancing good governance. Second, I hope that in addition to contributing to knowledge, this research is also instrumental to initiatives for media reform that improve traditional media and new media in ways that enhance the quality of democracy in Nigeria. For instance, the critical review of the media in the eras before the fourth republic when journalists operated under far more difficult conditions will provide a basis for analysing the struggles of contemporary Nigerian media. How were West Africa Pilot, Lagos Weekly Record of the early newspaper era; The News, Tell of the post-independence era able to stand out with their critical reporting even when they had to deal with similar pressures. This will, hopefully, happen if the outcome and

recommendations inspire newspapers and other traditional media organisations to embrace digital strategies that incorporate more participatory practices. These strategies will enhance their journalistic output while improving the growing the segments of online publications in the media market without necessarily undermining the creativity and freedom that are the hallmarks of the activist new media.

## Thesis Structure

### Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

This chapter provides the contextual background for the study by critically examining Nigeria's socio-political environment to highlight the inability of ordinary Nigerians to access the media space is key to assessing the performance of the fourth estate. The chapter situates the media in a historical background to be able to map the media's normative role in democracies and critically assess its actual performance in the changing political environment, especially since independence in 1960. The chapter also focuses on the problems facing the media and how those problems have affected its ability to perform its normative role post-1999. Furthermore, it questions how ordinary Nigerians have embraced new media and citizen journalism in order to access communicative spaces. The chapter then explains the motivation for the study, as well as providing a critical examination of the media's performance in the fourth republic at a time when more critical reporting is essential. In addition, the research objectives and main research questions to be answered in the study are outlined. The chapter concludes with the structure of the thesis.

### Chapter Two: Literature Review (Historical Context)

The chapter highlights the early influences on the Nigerian media beginning with the establishment of the Iwe Irohin by missionaries. Moving to later influences on newspapers and televisions by politicians which has shaped the journalism practiced in the country to date. The chapter concludes with a critical review of how some of journalistic practices, especially the critical and adversarial reporting styles of the early days, influenced the independent media to stand up against the heavy-handed approach of the Nigerian military. It also highlights how this has all shaped the citizen journalism and online media practices in the fourth republic.

### Chapter Three: Literature review (Digital Disruption, Citizen & Activist Media)

The chapter examines how digital disruption has provided the perfect setting for citizen journalists and new, digital-born newspapers to operate in the communicative space. The chapter details the telecommunication reform of the Nigerian government post-1999 and the relatively more conducive political environment that combined to transform the new media space. As well as empowering ordinary people who can afford mobile devices and the data to connect to the Internet and become more actively involved in the communicative space. The chapter also highlights the fading tradition of critical investigative reporting and how this is encouraging ordinary people and the new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable to embrace the opportunities provided by new media. This allows them to sidestep traditional media to directly monitor and report the activities of the government and its officials.

**Chapter Four: The Media in a Democracy - A Normative Inquiry**

This chapter examines all the contestations around democracy and the media by interrogating the normative role of the media. It begins with an historical overview of democracy from its origins in Greece, and its many manifestations in different regions across the world. Also, the chapter critically examines the arguments around liberal democracy such as its limitations especially when exported wholesale to culturally diverse places like Africa. It also establishes why the freedom of the media is a key component of a democratic society by highlighting the normative role of the media as connecting all members of society. In addition, the chapter examines contestations about the public sphere and how the ideal communicative environment it describes is difficult to achieve in even liberal democracies. The chapter concludes by critically examining how the Internet has positioned new media as the closest semblance to Habermas' public sphere.

**Chapter Five: Theoretical Framework**

This chapter explains the choice of critical political economy and public sphere as the preferred theoretical foundations for the study. The chapter highlights that these two theories are most suitable because, as the research delves into issues bordering on contestation about access into and participation in the media communicative space, the contestations relate to such considerations as who owns the media, what influence this has on those allowed access, who controls the communicative power, and, ultimately, how this impacts the political processes? The chapter equally highlights how combining both theories help to address some of the

contestations about how and why mediated communication mirrors the power relations in the polity.

**Chapter Six: Research Methodology**

This chapter describes the choices that were made at different levels of the research design including the philosophical direction, research approach, data collection and data analysis. The chapter also discusses the decision to use mixed methods, which allows the research to properly focus on the six selected newspapers through the case studies and phenomenology approaches. In addition, it outlines the choice of the primary data sources of qualitative interviews and online survey, as well as the secondary data from published news stories. The chapter also details sampling to explain why the six newspapers were selected; as well as the choice of thematic analysis and content analysis as the methods for analysing the data.

**Chapter Seven: Digital Disruption, Citizen Journalism and Impact on Political Process**

This chapter analyses the data from the qualitative interview with the twelve senior journalists, the online survey and the content analysis. The discussion and analysis are presented in clusters of seven of the fifteen themes identified across all data sets. The focus of this chapter is on the way the digital disruption has changed the media industry, empowered ordinary Nigerians and the impacts of these on the political processes. These are designed to answer research questions relating to: (i) how new media and citizen journalism are being used as channels for political communication; and (ii) how the ecosystem of new media is encouraging or hampering political communication and the potential impact of this on political processes.

**Chapter Eight: Access, Alternative Media and Public Trust**

This chapter analyses eight of the fifteen themes identified during the analysis of data. The focus in this chapter is on the contestations about the normative role of the media as meeting points for Nigerians where political issues are discussed. The chapter also discusses how this role rests on equal access and representation; why alternative channels become useful; and how public trust is affected when the media fails in performing its normative roles. This chapter is designed to answers research questions relating to: (i) whether new media are viable alternatives to traditional media as channels of political communication; and (ii) how the useful features in the ecosystem of new media can be grafted into traditional media to make it more effective.

**Chapter Nine: Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter focuses on the findings and highlights the lessons that can be learnt from them. The chapter draws on the constitutional guarantees for the media operations in the country as well as the findings to recommend immediate steps that can be taken to address some of the salient issues raised.

# CHAPTER TWO
# LITERATURE REVIEW (HISTORICAL CONTEXT)

## Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to provide a contextual background to the study by reviewing the problem that has inspired the research. I will do this through a critical review of the history of the Nigerian media beginning with the establishment of the first newspaper, the 'Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba' (meaning A Newspaper for the Egba and the Yoruba), hereafter called the Iwe Irohin. This chapter will trace the historical significance of Iwe Irohin in the growth and development of the tradition of critical and adversarial political reporting for which much of the Nigerian press has come to be known. I also map the growth of this dominant reporting tradition beginning with Iwe Irohin through three distinct phases: pre-independence (1914-1960); post-independence (1960-1999); and post-1999 (fourth republic)[10]. This contextual mapping is intended to highlight the influence of early newspapers on the activist new media that are at the centre of a new trend of aggressive and investigative political reporting in which non-traditional media are influencing the political process. This historical context will contribute to the overall understanding of the nature and impact of the emerging phenomenon on the political processes in Nigeria.

## Colonial and Post-Colonial Influences

### Mission-Backed Newspapers

Media historians and scholars identify three early influences on the Nigerian press that are worthy of mention because of the way they shaped journalistic practice in Nigeria. First, like its counterparts in other countries of West Africa, the Nigerian press benefited from the involvement of early Christian missionaries who started the first newspapers; introduced western education, thereby, training people to read; and whose brand of journalism started the culture of critical political communication (Omu, 1996; Maringues, 2001; Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011; Bourne, 2018).

Second, historians also note the influence of politicians and activists like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ernest Ikoli and Hebert Macaulay, who established newspapers in colonial Nigeria. These were principally channels for political communication and were used for the

[10] Pre-independence, in this case, includes the years of anti-colonial activism, while the Post-independence period includes the first republic, second republic and the military interventions intersecting the two.

promotion of their personal and party ideologies. Indeed, many went on to use their publications to support the campaign for self-determination and were leading figures in the negotiations for and the eventual attainment of independence from colonial Britain

Third, intersecting these two eras is the influence of ex-slaves, otherwise known as Saros[11], who returned from Sierra Leone to Abeokuta and Lagos. Their subsequent involvement in the newspaper business helped to create what is known as the Lagos press (Omu,1996; Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011). This section will review these three influences and highlight how they, in their different ways, aided the development and growth of the early newspaper press, the oldest media form in the country. Furthermore, it will outline how that impact has continued to influence the development of the Nigerian media since the first newspaper was established in 1859.

As previously noted, the Nigerian press and those of the entire West African region benefited immensely from Christian missionary activities. By providing Western education, the missionaries invariably laid the foundation for newspaper readership and the growth of the press. This began with the Royal Gazette established in Sierra Leone in 1801; the Royal Gazette Gold Coast, established in the then Gold Coast in 1822; and the Accra Herald in 1858 (Maringues, 2001; Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011).

In 1859, a year after the Accra Herald started in the then Gold Coast now known as Ghana, Reverend Henry Townsend established Nigeria's first newspaper, the Iwe Irohin in Abeokuta to promote the culture of reading. The short history of the Iwe Irohin illustrates the influence of the press in the politics generally, for while it might have been established to promote reading culture as well as missionary activities, it soon became a rallying point for political communication that was critical of the colonial administration. As such, it served as inspiration for the other newspapers that came after it. Referencing a letter Townsend wrote to a friend in 1860, Maringues (2011, p.185) notes the fact that Iwe Irohin's main objective was "… to get the people to read, i.e., to beget the habit of seeking information by reading". However, as noted previously, like all the other early newspapers promoted by the Christian missionaries, Iwe Irohin provided coverage not just of religious activities, but also the abolition of slavery,

[11] The Saros, or Creoles, were freed slaves who returned to Nigeria and other West African countries including Sierra Leone at the beginning of the 1830s. They were known locally in Lagos, where they eventually settled. as Saros, an elided form of Sierra Leone, from the Yoruba *sàró*.

education and civil rights. Perhaps more importantly was its focus on politics of its day (Bourne, 2018; Omu, 1996; Maringues, 2001).

For the avoidance of doubt, the Iwe Irohin, based in the politically significant town of Abeokuta[12], was active in the coverage of politically-charged issues like the Ijaye war and the American Immigration Scheme, against which it wrote critical editorials (Omu, 1967). The paper's critical reporting of events of its time shot Iwe Irohin into prominence, political relevance and, in the process, made Townsend not only influential but also a target for criticism (Omu, 1967).

The paper started as a Yoruba-language fortnightly publication on November 23, 1859, and became a bilingual newspaper on March 8, 1860, when an English language supplement was added. Based in that ancient town in South West of Nigeria, the newspaper's critical reporting (of the proposed plan to settle American Negroes in Abeokuta) and subsequent troubles with the colonial authority are documented by both Omu (1996) and Maringues (2001, p.185). Maringues particularly describes how the newspaper "… quickly fell afoul of the colonial authorities in Lagos, and Townsend was consequently sent back to Britain". Omu also adds that the emergence of Ajayi Crowther as equally influential led to division within the mission and the decision to summon Townsend to England for consultation.

Mohammed and Mohammed (2004, p.232) have suggested that the establishment of Iwe Irohin "… like the deployment of Sierra Leonean ex-slaves to Badagry and subsequently, Lagos and Abeokuta, was part of the process of establishing the structures of colonialism," and that the newspaper "… was primarily, though not exclusively, a political instrument for the articulation, propagation, coordination, and defence of imperialist ideology in Egbaland". Even if this were the case, Iwe Irohin went on to become a platform for critical reporting of issues that were considered antagonistic to the colonial government and, therefore, provoked official sanction.

Omu (1996), Maringues (2001), and Hachten (1971) all note the fact that early newspapers established in Nigeria and the other West African countries with the backing of Christian missionaries started with the main objectives of educating and promoting missionary activities.

[12] Abeokuta is believed to have been established in 1830 by refugees escaping the Yoruba wars and became the first port of call for the Christian missionaries who arrived in 1846 and established a base from where – beginning with Lagos - they spread into Yoruba land.

However, and going by available records of the newspapers' journalistic practice of the time, there is sufficient ground to believe that they eventually became platforms for political advocacy.

It would seem ironic that a newspaper established with Christian missionary support would be critical of the colonial administration. However, Omu's (1967) detailed description of Townsend's management of the paper provides some clues as to the substance of Iwe Irohin's editorial approach and how they were sometimes at odds with colonial policy. If Mohammed and Mohammed's (2004) arguments that the missionaries were part of the plan by colonialists to build their hegemonic structures are to be accepted, it seems Townsend's arrival in Abeokuta and subsequent assimilation into the community soon created rifts with his other missionaries and his superiors. Among other issues, Townsend's support and commitment to the interests of new converts, as well as his political support for Abeokuta in its competition with other towns like Ibadan, were often at odds with colonial policies. His harsh criticism of the planned American immigration scheme and the newspaper's opposition to the policy led to him being recalled to England for consultations and, according to Omu (1967, p.42), "… prompted by Colonial Office displeasure at the Abeokuta press offensive, cautioned Townsend to exercise restrain".

Long before Iwe Irohin ceased publication in 1867 after its premises were burned down during the anti-white riots known as the Ifole uprising (Salawu, 2004; Maringues, 2001), Townsend's deep involvement in local politics and support for the Egba of Abeokuta had negatively affected the fortunes of the paper. Omu (1967) captures the negative impact of Townsend's politicking through Iwe Irohin, and how this eventually led to a decline in his influence in Abeokuta. Detailing the impact, he says: "The British annexation of Lagos and its aftermath exacerbated Egba distrust of the British and demolished the former's feelings of friendship and gratitude for the latter and thus the basis of Townsend's influence. With the rise in 1865 of the Egba United Board of Management under G. W. Johnson, which the Iwe Irohin totally ignored, Townsend reached the nadir of his influence" (Omu, 1967, p.43).

While Townsend's politicking and Iwe Irohin's critical reporting of the colonial administration's policies attracted hostilities from the colonial authorities and contributed to the decline of the paper before its eventual death in 1867 (Maringues, 2001; Omu, 1996; Salawu, 2004)), its place in the early development of Nigeria's press remains mostly

uncontested. Undoubtedly, and regardless of its relatively short history, the paper's legacy is the robust, radical reporting that has come to define journalistic practice in Nigeria. I will return to this theme in later sections because a critical examination of the factors that contributed to the rapid development of newspapers in Southern Nigeria will aid the understanding of the communicative environment in pre-independent Nigeria. It will also help in understanding how this set the tone for political communication in post-colonial as well as present-day Nigeria.

**Missions, Printing Presses, and Newspapers**

The early influences of the newspapers that were established by the Christian missionaries were not limited to the editorial direction or the journalistic output. Odunlami and Adaja (2011); Omu (1967); and Oso, Odunlami, and Adaja (2011) detail how the provision of schools and printing presses by the Christian missionaries also contributed to the growth of newspapers in the West African region. Christian missionaries first brought printing presses to Liberia in 1794, then Calabar in 1846,[13] and Abeokuta in 1854. Omu (1967), regarded as one of the leading authorities in the history of the early press in Nigeria, says of this development: "Townsend fitted up a printing press and inaugurated a printing school in the mission compound at Abeokuta" (p.37). He goes on to say that the "… establishment of the Iwe Irohin revitalized the printing school and thus swelled the numbers of apprentice-printers some of whom printed some of the early nationalist newspapers" (p.44), and that the newspapers that were then established in Abeokuta and Lagos from 1920 onwards were inspired by Townsend.

The missionaries' provision of printing presses between 1854, and the training of printers after the establishment in Lagos in 1910 of the Tika-Tore printing works, were significant factors contributing to the early growth of the Nigerian press. Of the Tika-Tore printing works, Coleman (1958, p.186) says it was, "… the first in a country-wide network of small presses printing polemical literature, which grew up during the following forty years" and helped to deepen the publishing and media business in Nigeria. The growing availability of presses encouraged returnee slaves and politicians who went into newspaper publishing albeit for different reasons.

[13] According to Omu (1967), Hachten (1971), and Ainslie (1966), the press that was established in Calabar by the Reverend Hope Waddell of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission at first printed Bible lessons and later educational materials, hence, its significant difference to the one established in Abeokuta by Henry Townsend, which was used for newspaper publication

**Newspapers As Political Platforms**

While Iwe Irohin inspired the establishment and the growth of the newspaper business in the early days, thereby, laying the foundation for Nigerian media as a whole; the entrance of political activists in what is regarded as the third early influence, cemented Nigerian media's position as arguably the most vibrant in Sub-Saharan Africa. From 1880 until 1920, the nascent newspaper business underwent a significant transformation with the establishment of what Maringues (2001) called "politically-oriented press" (p.185). Bourne (2018), Omu (1974), as well as Oso, Odunlami, and Adaja (2011) all note the fact that the newspaper was the primary weapon of activists against the colonial authorities, not just in Nigeria but in the rest of West Africa.

The papers, Coleman (1958, p.186) observes, were "… the media through which the nationalistic ideas of educated Africans found an outlet; they were partly responsible for the ever-growing number of Nigerians predisposed to nationalist ideology". However, this should not be taken to mean that Iwe Irohin, being the first newspaper and established as it was by the missionaries, was altogether apolitical. I do not think this is what Coleman (1958); Maringues (2001); Bourne (2018); Omu (1974); and Oso, Odunlami, and Adaja (2011) are trying to suggest. As already mentioned, and so that the role and influence of political activists are properly understood, for as long as it remained in publication, Iwe Irohin served as a platform for political discourse, amongst other things.

What media historians and scholars do, however, agree is that political activists who went into the newspaper business in the era following the first set of publications started by Christian missionaries were not just committed to educating the people. Rather, they were concerned that the knowledge should form "… the basis for an informed strong opinion which the colonial government could not ignore" (Omu, 1996, p.2). As Ainslie (1966, p.1) correctly notes, "… the impetus for most of the early publishing in those early days 'was from the beginning a political one."

So, in contrast to Townsend's Iwe Irohin and the other newspapers inspired by Christian missionaries, these newspaper owners were actively involved in politics. Their publications, at a time when there were no political parties, "were the only significant vehicle of public opinion and the medium of political pressure and propaganda" (Omu, 1974, p.521). Omu further notes

that owning and editing the newspapers helped these politicians and activists to grow their spheres of influence.

Omu's analysis of the press in this period agrees with that of Coleman (1960), who notes that the press did not just provide politicians and activists access to political power but that most of the nationalist movements of the time developed around publications rather than any organised membership. For instance, he cites the example of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) which, despite being at the forefront of nationalist agitations in Nigeria at the time, "existed only in the pages of Nnamdi Azikiwe's chain of newspapers" (Coleman, 1960, p.350), even when it was already in decline. He goes on to suggest that the influence of the press in determining the outcome of political contests made the ownership of or the support of a newspaper a significant factor in the calculation for running for office.

The establishment and ownership of media by politicians become prominent due to their primary motivation was to use the publications as their mouthpieces. Of particular importance to the contextual understanding of the development of the press by political activists is the promotion of the politician's and parties' political ideologies (Akpojivi, 2018; Hachten, 1971). For instance, they describe how the West African Pilot established by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was used to promote the ideology of the National Council of Nigerians and Cameroons (NCNC). Azikiwe's model was copied by other politicians like Chief Obafemi Awolowo[14], who established the Nigerian Tribune to promote the ideology of the Action Group (AG). As well as Samuel Ladoke Akintola, who started the Daily Sketch for similar reasons (Hachten, 1971).

Azikiwe's West African Pilot is credited with redefining journalism and saving newspaper publishing which was in decline from the early 1920s and the early 1930s. Omu (1996, p.6) notes that the West African Pilot, which was established in 1937, became known for its "vivid format, dynamic and combative style and ideological salience anchored on a campaign against

[14] Obafemi Awolowo, the prominent Yoruba politician from Western Region, along with Nnamdi Azikiwe and Tafawa Balewa played significant roles in the independence movement. However, Awolowo's rivalry with Azikiwe and the events of the Western Nigerian elections when it looked like the House would elect the latter as head are believed to have shaped Nigerian politics negatively. Fearing defeat on what was his home turf, Awolowo was said to have 'stolen victory' by appealing to tribal sentiments. The rivalry between the two continued outside politics with both instrumental in the establishment of media groups, though Awolowo's Tribune newspaper is regarded as the oldest surviving private-owned newspaper in Nigeria.

racial superiority and domination" and that the newspaper's entry into the market heralded "the intervention of a new and formidable journalistic force". Having started and edited the African Morning Post in the Gold Coast from 1934 to 1937, Azikiwe (known as Zik) was not new to newspapering. Having been tried for seditious libel by the colonial authority (Bourne, 2018), neither was the adversarial approach for which the West African Pilot was known from the outset.

Coleman (1958, p.222-223) notes that Zik, who studied journalism in the United States, had also been influenced by "the sensationalism and pugnacity of American yellow journalism, and particularly the obsessive race-consciousness of American negro newspapers." He also notes the fact that Zik's brand of journalism was built on the principles of "racial inequalities and injustices and the need for positive action to right historical wrongs." Among other innovations credited to Zik's West African Pilot is aggressive marketing involving the appointment of sales agents in the provinces; the coverage of provincial news in the paper; as well as the establishment of provincial dailies in Ibadan, Onitsha, Port Harcourt and Kano (Coleman, 1958). By all accounts, the West African Pilot blazed a trail, and many consider it a reference point for the early development of professional journalism in Nigeria. Coleman (1958, p.223) agrees when he says that Zik's paper "was the first major effort to Nigerian journalism" and "was crucially significant in the spread of racial consciousness and ideas of nationalism in the interior."

Owing to its commercial success, the West African Pilot became the first of a chain of newspapers (Omu, 1996). However, it's most-remembered legacy has to be its adversarial political reporting which it adopted from Iwe Irohin which had first pioneered this style of journalism. For instance, the newspaper's critical reporting, and especially its campaign for "rapid movement to independence and nationalization of the tin mines" pitted it against the colonial government in the same way that Henry Townsend's Iwe Irohin had and eventually led to a temporary closure of all Zik's newspapers by Governor Arthur Richards (Bourne, 2018, p.165).

Awolowo, another notable figure in the early history of Nigerian newspapers, trained briefly at the Nigerian Daily Times in 1934 and established his Amalgamated Press in 1949 publishing the Daily Service, Sunday Express, and Irohin Yoruba (Bourne, 2018; Omu, 1996). His towering stature in the politics of the Western Region in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria

often rightly dominates discussions of the man. However, his media ventures and the ideological imprints they made on the media organisations he established are equally significant.

**Government-Press Relations and the Early Newspapers**

Closely tied to the involvement of political activists in the establishment and rapid growth of newspapers, and perhaps contributing to that development, is the conducive political environment at the time. Unlike other colonised countries of Africa, Nigeria and a small number of colonies in West Africa enjoyed relatively "greater freedom for political activity and expression, partly because of British and French liberalism, and partly because of the absence of a European settler oligarchy whose repressive influence and press monopoly have elsewhere acted as a deterrent" (Coleman, 1960, p.349). Scholars and commentators alike are usually quick to say that the Nigerian press is the freest in Africa. Indeed, if we take the freedom to publish as well as the aggressive political reporting of the press as the only measures of freedom, they might be correct.

Granted, in relative terms, the Nigerian press might have enjoyed the freedom that allowed them to start and control newspapers, and even to use them to promote their political ideologies. However, as previously noted, the amount of political influence in the early press, where newspapers "developed as organs of individual political leaders or the parties of which they are head" (Coleman, 1960, p.350), as well as the legal framework imposed by the colonial administration does suggest, at best, a qualified use of the term 'free press.'

This point is well made by Mohammed and Mohammed (2004), who detail how the colonial administration sought to control the critical media by using a combination of measures, including financial inducement. The rapid growth in the number of newspapers and the strident criticisms of government activities led the colonial administration to pass a number of ordinances. The first was in 1903, requiring all newspapers to register; and another in 1917, requiring the editor to post a bond of 250 Pounds against penalties for blasphemous, seditious or other libellous publications (Coleman, 1958; Seng & Hunt, 1986). According to Seng and Hunt (1986), the press functioned only within whatever rights the colonial laws made possible. While they were designed after British laws, they note that, the freedom under which the press was allowed to function was relatively more limited. In addition, the subsequent passage of a

seditious offenses ordinance in 1909 to discourage the publication of negative information about the colonial government were part of measures to further limit press freedom.

**Returning Slaves In Newspaper Business**

The third of the early influences on the Nigerian media is the Lagos press, intersecting the era of Iwe Irohin and others supported by Christian missionaries, and that of the West African Pilot and others established by nationalist politicians and activists. While the latter can be credited with laying the foundation for the critical political reporting for which the Nigerian media is known, the former's contributions to the growth and development of the Nigerian media is not limited to increased political consciousness but also the commercialisation of newspapers.

As mentioned previously Iwe Irohin and its peers across West Africa, which were established by Christian missionaries, were motivated by humanitarian service (Omu, 1996). However, the freed slaves who went into the newspaper business, and who are credited with starting the Lagos press, set up their publications primarily as businesses to make money (Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011). The structure of newspapers established by these Sierra Leonean (Saro) returnees was significantly different from that of missionary newspapers. Their journalistic work appeared to have been directed towards "political participation by the educated indigenous elite" and operating as money-making ventures (Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011, p.5).

Omu, expanding on this general approach to journalism in the early days of the Lagos press,[15] notes that the lifestyle of the Saro returnees "provided narrow social basis for journalists," with the effect that journalistic practice of their time "was elitist with limited coverage of the underprivileged in the urban and rural areas" (Omu, 1996, p.6-7). He adds that, as Lagos became a social melting pot of sorts, the elitist approach of the Saro returnees was soon replaced with a widening "social basis of the mainstream profession," where "the voiceless and underprivileged now found a mind and voice in the new journalism" (Omu, 1996, p.7).

Media historians and scholars agree, the commencement of the Lagos press under the influence of the Sierra Leonean returnees during this period was also significant as it marked the

[15] The term, Lagos press, is used to describe the publications based in Nigeria's former capital but its origin dates to the early 1920s, when the first sets of Nigerian journalists became involved in the newspaper business. This second wave of newspapers was established and edited by returning slaves otherwise called Saros

involvement of high-profile Nigerians in newspapering (Omu, 1996; Maringues, 2001; Bourne, 2018). The result being a marked improvement in the quality of journalistic output from that period onwards. According to Omu (1996), these early newspapermen, with the exception of a few, lacked professional training but "were erudite, talented, resourceful, and enterprising" (p.3). Some of the best-known practitioners of those early days, who in varying degrees and in their unique ways, contributed to the development and growth of the Nigerian press include Adeoye Deniga, George Alfred Williams, Christopher Josephus Johnson, James Bright Davies, Ernest Sesei Ikoli, Richard Akinwande Savage, Herbert Macaulay, Duse Muhammed Ali, John Payne Jackson, Thomas Horatio Jackson, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Kitoye Ajasa.

It would be near impossible and impracticable to detail their individual contributions because of a paucity of a detailed records of those early days of the press in Nigeria. However, a few examples of these men, as well as of their unique talents and approaches to newspaper journalism, would be enough to illustrate their impact on the Nigerian media.

One of the most exciting practitioners was Adeoye Deniga, who published the Lagos Astrological Mercury in 1909, and who "personally and laboriously wrote out all the copies which he circulated among a small circle of people" to get around the high cost of printing (Omu, 1996, p.3). Such resilience might have failed to help him transform the paper into an economic success, but his approach of inviting donations to fund his publication (Omu, 1996) appears to have presaged the crowdfunded and donor-funded media that is currently finding its way into the Nigerian media as a model of choice for activist new media[16].

Amongst the early practitioners who are also remembered for his impact is John Payne Jackson, reputed to be one of the most radical newspapermen of his time (Omu, 1974; Maringues 2001; Ainslie, 1966). John Jackson, a trader from Liberia, started the Lagos Weekly Record in 1890 following a dispute with R. B. Blaize, whom he had teamed up with in an attempt to revive the ailing Lagos Times. He went on to develop the paper into one of the "most commercially successful among its contemporaries" (Omu, 1974, p.521). The newspaper is reputed to be not

[16] A crop of activist new media platforms, including Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are operating with substantial foreign donor-funding, some of which is directed at specific advocacy. On its part, the Premium Times is trialing the crowdfunding model that the UK Guardian pioneered, asking its readers to make small donations in support of free, quality journalism

just the most popular of the period but created a unique style with Jackson's “pungent criticism, expressed in lengthy editorials,” which, according to Coleman (1958, p.184), “always hung on the edge of sedition”. Committed to a campaign against European imperialism and colonial misrule, John Jackson, in the words of Omu (1974), was “an uncompromising tribune of the people, a great evangelist of social and political reform, a most articulate propagandist and an acknowledged Nigerian patriot” (p.523). John Jackson’s radicalism, advocacy, and his belief that the opposition press owed a duty to hold the authorities to account, are worthy of mention not just because of their immediate contributions to the nationalist movement of the early 1940s, but also, and perhaps more important, for the impact this has had on Nigerian journalism since.

John Jackson's brand of journalism has been regarded as the “combination of erudition and energetic and forcefulness helped to establish a tradition of fearless and energetic political journalism which underpinned the propaganda of the independence movement” (Omu, 1996, p.4). This tradition – of using the newspaper as a platform for political engagement – encouraged others like his son, Thomas Horatio Jackson, as well as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo (Bourne, 2018; Omu, 1996; Omu, 1974). Like his father, Thomas Jackson’s time at the Lagos Weekly Record was significant, not just for the commercial success of the newspaper but also for the quality and brand of journalism, the major feature of which was “a militant disposition, forcefulness, critical ability, flowery language” (Omu, 1996, p.5).

The review of these early influences illustrates that the early Nigerian press deservedly gets the credit for the vibrant emergent media that played prominent roles in the campaign for independence and, which would go on to do the same against military rules. This is not to suggest that radio and television have no place in the development of Nigerian media and journalistic practices. Rather, and as subsequent sections will attempt to show, in comparison to newspapers, the impact of electronic media on political communication has been, at best, limited.

**Electronic Media, Government Control and Political Communication**

There are several factors that appeared to have limited the contribution of electronic media to the overall growth and development of Nigeria, and which established newspapers as the channels of choice for political communication. For one, the newspaper press in Nigeria has a longer and richer history. The first broadcasting service in Nigeria did not begin until seventy-

three years after Iwe Irohin was established. Also, where private ownership in newspaper is as old as the Nigerian media itself, commercial private broadcasting is only a recent development since 1992. The implication is that in its early form, newspapers enabled relatively more diverse participation unlike the earliest forms of radio and television in the country, which substantially limited access by shutting out private ownership.

Mackay (1964) and Akpojivi (2018) describe how Nigeria's broadcasting era began in 1932 with the relay of radio programmes from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). These rebroadcasts, initially to the significant towns - Lagos, Ibadan, and Kano, were the foundation of broadcasting in Nigeria. The service, then known as the Radio Distribution System (RDS), allowed Nigerians and people in other British colonies to listen through special loudspeakers called Rediffusion to BBC programmes distributed in collaboration with the Empire Broadcasting Service (Mackay, 1964).

While radio had been introduced to Nigeria by the colonial government primarily to promote its activities, television was birthed in Nigerian on the back of a significant political disagreement that pitted Awolowo against the federal government. In a development that mirrors what political activists had done with newspapers, the Western Region established what was Africa's first television station in Africa, the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) (Mackay, 1964). The decision followed Awolowo's protest in 1953 against the Macpherson Constitution and his anger that he could not push his position through the stations controlled by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) (Mackay, 1964; Akpojivi, 2018). The establishment of the WNTV primarily as a platform to promote the ideology of Awolowo and the Western Region was soon followed in 1960 by the Eastern Nigerian Television (ENTV), owned by the Eastern Region; and in 1962 by the Northern Nigeria Television (NNTV), owned by the Northern Region.

As evident from the early history of broadcasting in Nigeria, not only does it have a relatively shorter history, but unlike what happened with the early newspapers industry where the growth was driven by private investors, it has mostly been controlled by governments. So, while it can be argued that private ownership of newspapers through the involvement of the Christian missionaries, the Saros and the nationalists aided the growth and establishment of the early

press and its evolution into the robust and most vibrant channel of political communication in Nigeria, the same cannot be said of broadcasting.

Until 1992, when commercial broadcasting was opened up to private ownership, the development of radio and television, especially as it concerns citizen access and participation, lagged behind the print media as a result of the state policy that ensures more stringent regulatory control than that for print media (Ojo & Kadiri, 2001). As the next section will show, these different backgrounds and equally contrasting fortunes in the early growth, development, and evolution of print and broadcasting media in Nigeria was further enhanced in the years after the country's independence in 1960 and the period under military rule.

**The Post-Independent And Military Years**

The attainment of independence, the divisions which characterised democratic governance, and the incursion of the military into politics all impacted seriously on the performance of the press in Nigeria (Mohammed & Mohammed, 2004; Hachten, 1971). In looking at the Nigerian media in the post-independence era, it would appear that three factors have shaped its performance. Along with the political and ethnic divisions that were already visible during the nationalist era and, perhaps as a result of it, the military incursion; as well as the entrance of university-trained, professional journalists have all left their imprint on the media. While the Nigerian press stepped up to lead the struggles against the military, sometimes having to adopt unorthodox methods including printing underground; the establishment of quality newspapers and magazines by professionals equally contributed in no small measure to the overall development of the media, as well as the campaign to restore democratic governance.

**Divisive Politics and the Media In the First Republic**

As noted already, the press in the years heading into independence in 1960 was highly political, with politicians and nationalists using their publications as campaign platforms (Akpojivi, 2018). Interestingly, it seems that Ekeh's (1975) theory of the two publics, in this case of the outgoing colonial elite and the Nigerian educated elite, was not limited in its struggles to the spoils of political office. Mohammed and Mohammed (2004), who also highlight the hegemonic struggles between the two classes, stress the jostle for the establishment and control of the media as a critical front in the struggle for political relevance. They note the fact that the colonial elite, or what they call the colonial petite bourgeoisie, established mass media to promote imperialist ideologies and meant the emergent Nigerian elite began to see and use the

media as “an instrument to agitate for accommodation within the bourgeois state by championing the cause of national independence” (Mohammed & Mohammed, 2004, p.233).

In trying to contextualise the establishment of mass media by the regional governments, Mohammed and Mohammed (2004, p. 233) argue that “within these two social classes, engaged a fierce political struggle,” in which both sides weaponised their respective media of mass communication, then became another front in their bitter political contestations. Their argument about the political struggle for positions and influence supports that of Hachten (1971), who also notes the bitter rivalry between the nationalist press and the colonial government, signifying the early signs of ethnic and political divisions in the media.

There is general agreement that the nationalists were united in their hatred for colonialism and campaigned for self-rule but that this unity of action was destroyed once power had been transferred into the hands of Nigerian politicians (Mohammed & Mohammed, 2004; Omu, 1996; Dare, 2011). So, while the press, which in the years leading to independence in 1960 had the colonial government as their common enemy, and lined up behind their activist-publishers, it soon shaped up into the fractionalised politics of post-independence as the first republic took off.

Oso, Odunlami and Adaja (2011, p. 7) make this point succinctly in their analysis of the socio-historical analysis of the development of the Nigerian media, noting that, “a survey of the Nigerian press post-independence reveals a structure of ethnic ownership.” They argued further that this was because” the political parties which owned many newspapers were local in outlook and based on affinity with specific ethnic groups” (Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011, p.7).

Omu (1996) and Dare (2011) equally stress that the situation was compounded by the emergence of government-owned newspapers in the late 50s and early 60s, which added to the fragmentation of the press along ethnic, political and regional lines. According to Oso, Odunlami and Adaja (2011, p. 7), the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) published the Nigerian Citizen (later New Nigerian); while the Awolowo-led Action Group (AG) and Zik’s National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) relied on the papers that they had established to cover mainly local politics and amplify their respective ideologies.

In addition, they also note the fact that the Federal Government, headed by Tafawa Balewa, established the Post Group to counter the NCNC and AG. Expectedly, the journalists in these government-backed media organisations were constrained, a situation that negatively impacted the legacy of the pre-colonial and nationalist era. Omu (1996, p.10), in a clear description of the period, says: "Journalists in the employment of government-owned newspapers were not expected to enjoy much opportunity for individual self-expression. They functioned within the narrow confines of official interests." Of the period, Bourne (2018, p.166) also says: "The adversarial spirit of the anti-colonial struggle carried on into an anti-government bias in the independence era, sharply reciprocated with suspicion and hostility by the military." The takeover by decree of controlling shares in the Daily Times by the military administration of Yakubu Gowon (Bourne, 2018) was illustrative of a pattern of ownership and control of newspapers post-independence.

Hachten (1971, p.151), who details the division in the camp of nationalist politicians and media owners, notes that at the transfer of power in 1960, "Nigeria has four systems of government-controlled mass communications, not just one: a national system based in the teeming federal capital of Lagos; a Western Region system in Ibadan, the metropolis of the Yorubas; a nearly self-contained system controlled by the Moslem Emirs of the North; and another in the Ibo-dominated Eastern Region." Being used as they were as political tools against opponents, it is easy to agree with those who contend that the Nigerian media was "directly involved in and seriously affected by the tumultuous events beginning in the late 1965"[17] (see p. 151) and which arguably redefined Nigerian politics permanently.

Those events, leading to the first military coup in January 1966 and culminating in the civil war of July 1967 to January 1970[18] fought between federal forces and secessionists from the South-East, appeared to have worsened an already bad situation. The media, already weaponised as platforms for political communication, was accused of being complicit in the

[17] Disillusioned by the corruption and general failure of the political class after independence in October 1960, a group of young, UK-trained army majors led by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, seen by many as idealistic, overthrew Nigeria's democratic government in a violent military coup, killing many prominent politicians in the process. Accused of targeting Northern politicians, a counter-coup was staged by officers who were loyal to the North just six months later, setting off a pattern that was repeated many times over until 1999.

[18] The counter-coup against Nzeogwu and other officers led to many Igbo deaths in reprisal attacks. Questioning their continued survival in a united Nigeria, the Igbos, led by Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, declared a Republic of Biafra and the Eastern Region's secession from the rest of the country on May 30, 1967. Five weeks after the declaration of a separate state by the South East Region, the Nigerian government declared war that was to last thirty months and led to between 500,000 and 2,000,000 deaths.

military takeover, as well as subsequent ones, with the biased coverage of and criticism of civilian governments as calls for intervention (Uko, 2004). The pattern continued into the second republic, with politicians using newspapers for the propagation of political ideologies. One notable example being of M.K.O Abiola's Concord, which became a choice platform for the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), of which he was a chieftain (Oso, Odunlami & Adaja, 2011).

Once the military seized power, they went on to create new states supposedly for political balance, many of which went on to establish their own television and radio stations (Akingbulu & Bussiek, 2010). One other outcome of the post-independence political divisions and one directly resulting from the military takeover is the consolidation of all regional broadcasting stations into single entities. In 1961, T.O.S Benson, the Minister of Information, obtained amendments to the 1956 NBC Ordinance that allowed the government to bring all the regional broadcasting systems under federal control (Uche, 1989). The consolidation opened the floodgates to more stations with the creation of more states after the military takeover of 1966. Of the growth in broadcasting stations at the time, Akingbulu and Bussiek (2010) said: "After the military had overthrown the civilian constitutional government in 1966, it created 12 states to replace the regions as the second tier of government. New states established their own broadcasting stations. The federal broadcasting corporation, NBC, also began to expand in 1967, building a station in each state." They also note that all the stations, except those in Lagos, Ibadan, and Enugu, were later taken over by the NBC while the Kaduna station went to the Broadcasting Corporation of Northern Nigeria.

The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) was established in 1976 to run all the RDS stations owned by the state governments while the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was established in 1977 to run all television stations (Mohammed & Mohammed, 2004; Bourne, 2018). This is in addition to the establishment in 1978 of Nigeria's only news agency, the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), to provide news to media organisations.

The military coup of January 16, 1966 was the beginning of a vicious cycle that saw Nigeria going through eight military putsches and the country being ruled for twenty-nine years between independence in 1960 and 1999 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Nigerian Leaders Since 1960

| S/N | LEADER | CONSTITUENCY | REGION | YEARS IN OFFICE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Tafawa Balewa | Civilian | North | 4 |
| 2. | Nnamdi Azikiwe | Civilian | South | 3 |
| 3. | Aguiyi Ironsi | Military | South | 0.6 |
| 4. | Yakubu Gowon | Military | North | 9 |
| 5. | Murtala Mohammed | Military | North | 1 |
| 6. | Olusegun Obasanjo | Military | South | 3 |
| 7. | Shehu Shagari | Civilian | North | 4 |
| 8. | Muhammadu Buhari | Military | North | 4 |
| 9. | Ibrahim Babangida | Military | North | 8 |
| 10. | Ernest Shonekan | Civilian | South | 0.3 |
| 11. | Sani Abacha | Military | North | 5 |
| 12. | Abdulsalami Abubakar | Military | North | 1 |
| 13. | Olusegun Obasanjo | Civilian | South | 8 |
| 14. | Umaru Yar'Adua | Civilian | North | 3 |
| 15. | Goodluck Jonathan | Civilian | South | 5 |
| 16. | Muhammadu Buhari | Civilian | North | 6 |

For obvious reasons, the military years are mostly remembered for the destruction of democratic institutions and values. However, equally significant is the impact of those years on the media at a time when the state-media relation was mostly characterised by crude repression (Obadare, 1999; Adebanwi, 2011). In that suffocating environment, the media developed a resilience that has been, for a good reason, praised and condemned by media scholars and historians in equal measure.

**Threats to Media Practice, Military and Underground Press**

As Seng and Hunt (1986) note, attempts to gag the media predate the military. For example, the Nigerian parliament in the first republic passed an Official Secrets Act in 1962, as well as the Newspaper (Amendment) Act of 1964. The second republic, they suggest, was no different with the government's detention of journalists and attempts to appoint friendly editors for state-controlled newspapers like the Daily Times (Seng & Hunt, 1986 p.91). However, because of the absence of any legitimate claim to power and also possibly because of some of the brutal measures, the military years, as can be expected, are regarded as some of the worst periods in

the history of the Nigerian media. Those military years were characterised by not just the suspension of the constitution but also the enactment of anti-media laws aimed at stifling free speech and the brutal enforcement of those laws.

Beginning with the military regime of Aguiyi Ironsi (1966), whose government promulgated the Defamation and Offensive Publication Decree (No. 44) of 1966 as well as the Circulation of Newspaper Decree (No. 2) of 1966 (Seng & Hunt, 1986), successive juntas upon seizing power issued decrees to regulate the media and punish offenders. In the process of enforcing the provisions of those decrees, many publications were proscribed; copies of whole editions of newspapers and magazines were seized; and many journalists were imprisoned and sometimes even killed (Ogbondah, 2018). The measures to curtail the press also included printing and distributing fake editions of critical newspapers and magazines, as well as the imposition of 'no-go' areas to prevent the press from reporting certain issues (Maringues, 2001). In addition to the more radical publications like The News, Tell, Tempo, and Newswatch, other critical publications like Punch, Sketch, the Concord Group, Guardian, and Newsbreed were closed in the aftermath of the 1993 political crisis.

As noted above, all the regimes issued anti-media decrees, differing only in the degree of their vicious implementation of those laws. For instance, the Yakubu Gowon regime (1966 to 1975) issued the Newspaper (Prohibition) of Circulation Decree (No. 17) of 1967, while the Murtala Muhammed and the Olusegun Obasanjo regimes (1975 to 1979) also issued the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree (No. 11) of 1976, as well as the Newspaper (Prohibition of Circulation) (Validation) Decree (No. 12) of 1978. It is important to stress that, regardless of the name they called them, the aim of these media laws as well as the outcome, were the same: the brutal repression of the media and attempts to curtail free speech.

For reasons already cited previously, the regimes of Ibrahim Babamosi Babangida (1985-1993) and Sani Abacha (1993-1998)[19] are often singled out for special attention when analysing the terrible consequences of military rule in Nigeria. In addition to being two of the most corrupt, in terms of state-media relations, theirs as well as that of Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985), which preceded them in the office, are the most repressive. Buhari's Public Officers (Protection

[19] As detailed in Chapter One, the regimes of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993) and Sani Abacha (1993-1998) stood out due to the incidence and magnitude of the corruption as well as the brutal repression of opposition within the military, civil society and the media.

Against False Accusation) Decree (No. 4) of 1984 and the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree (No. 2) also of 1984 were brutally enforced. Under the infamous Decree 4, Nigeria witnessed for the first time, the trial and imprisonment in 1984 of two journalists, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor, both from the Guardian newspaper (May 1984; Bourne, 2018). While Buhari's regime provoked international outrage with the imprisonment of the two journalists, the arrest and detention of journalists continued under both the Babangida and Abacha regimes with the implementation of anti-media laws perhaps even more brutally enforced.

For example, Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka (1996), in his assessment of the Abacha regime's relationship with the media, says the attack on the press was unprecedented. "The press, that once vibrant voice of the Nigerian nation, is officially dead, wiped out in one fell swoop, unprecedented in the history of Nigeria by the present dictator, Sani Abacha" (Soyinka, 1996, p.123).

The brutal suppression of the media under these two regimes, starting with Babangida, is noteworthy for birthing a new approach to oppositional press that some believe serves as inspiration for the new activist media of today (Kperogi, 2016; Dare, 2011). Obadare (1999) Olukotun (2002), Adebanwi (2011), Ojo (2007) and Soyinka (1996) all agree that the crackdown on the Nigerian media by the Babangida regime radicalised a section. As a result, opposition elements and civil society then mobilised in the campaign to ensure an early return to democratic rule. The News, Tell, Tempo and others like them, which critically reported on the military governments and their officials sometimes had to operate underground in order to escape from security operatives on their trail. Such tactics, of producing off-site and reprinting when copies were seized, led to such journalistic practices being described as 'underground press' or 'guerrilla journalism' (Obadare, 1999; Olukotun 2002; Adebanwi, 2011).

However, and as already mentioned, while the performance of the press in this most repressive era has been praised by those who acknowledge the rugged determination to continue to publish in the face of the military government's heavy-handedness, others are critical. Media scholar Obadare (1999), like most journalists who were practicing in the country at the time, is understandably positive in his assessment of the performance of the press at the time. For instance, he cites what he describes as the show of "greater ingenuity and resourcefulness" by the press to counter the introduction of "more deadly weapons into its arsenal of repression"

(Obadare, 1999, p.39). By greater ingenuity and resourcefulness, he refers to what has been termed guerrilla journalism[20], or the practice whereby opposition media operated away from their offices, mostly in secret locations, in order to evade arrest and disruption to their operations.

In their analysis of this phenomenon, Obadare (1999), Adebanwi (2011), Dare (2011) and Olukotun (2002) note the aggressive state campaign against the critical free press and how this policy threatened the diversity of opinion. As Olukotun (2002, p.78) explains, the development followed what were "sustained security siege of the opposition media and the outright closure and proscription of newspapers," which then "forced a section of the media to develop an underground strategy to stay in business and to struggle against dictatorship." This he goes further to say it "was a notable departure in state-media relations and involved a hit-and-run operative style, in which journalists, operating from hideouts continued to publish critical journals in defiance of the state" (Olukotun, 2002, p.78), mostly to the praise of civil society and opposition. Acknowledging the contribution of this segment of the press to the overall struggle against military rule, Soyinka (1996, p.123) says, "but the existence of a vigorous risk-taking underground press speaks volumes, and this remains one of those signs that inform us that the combative spirit of a nation is not yet extinguished".

Olukotun (2004, p.78) argues that, at a time when government policy limited the choices available to people, the guerrilla media "filled a critical gap in keeping people informed of the goings-on in government" and, therefore, constituted "an alternative media and counter-hegemonic forum that allowed civil society a space in which to express itself". The critical, radicalised press, especially The News, Tell, and Tempo, which operated in this way, truly saw themselves as activists rather than journalists. This may help explain the unconventional editorial practices for which they are often criticised. Adebanwi (2011, p.49), who also was a principal actor of this practice as a staff of The News, notes that "for the prodemocracy press and the journalists on the staff of the concerned newspapers, journalistic canons of objectivity and impartiality were sacrificed in what was seen as a struggle to 'reclaim' Nigeria from the military marauders who were intent on destroying the country."

[20] The term describes the journalistic practice of the military era, especially between 1983 to 1998, when the assault by Head of State, Sani Abacha, forced many journalists and politicians underground. Some critical press (The News, Tell, Tempo) operated underground to evade security operatives, and many stories and articles were published using pseudonyms.

This section of the media has sometimes been criticised for its unorthodox approach, bordering on the unethical. In their struggle against the Babangida and the Abacha regimes, they were willing to adopt any method, "including secret tape-recording of government meetings and gaining access to classified or confidential documents through disguised identities or through the cooperation of insiders" (Ojo, 2007, p.548). Like real guerrilla forces, Adebanwi (2011, p. 51) affirms that the critical media enjoyed the support of subversive forces within the government who leaked official secrets to journalists of The News and Tempo. Such leakages, "were symptomatic of the subversion within hegemony and the strategic alliances that journalists can forge with agents of the state" (Adebanwi, 2011, p.51).

Regardless of the positive descriptions by some of the principal actors in the media practice known as guerrilla journalism for their methods and the overall impact of the media in the military era, there are suggestions that journalists lost the moral high ground, led the call for military rule, romanticised military rule and were complicit during the period (Uko, 2004). According to Uko "The public was no longer sure whose cause the press was fighting, or indeed, what the press stood for: truth or falsehood, integrity or duplicity, democracy or dictatorship" (2004, p.123). That a press praised by many, including practitioners and activists, can be accused of duplicity might sound outrageous, but those criticisms may not be far off the mark.

Obadare (1999) agrees that the press is never neutral, explaining that "while it acts as a representative of specific interests in civil and political society and the state, its own professional concerns are always somewhere within the purview of its considerations" (p.40). Comparing the attitude and relationship of the press to the regimes of Abacha and Abdlusalami Abubakar, he notes, a marked difference with the media being more receptive and cooperative to the latter. However, his suggestion that the different treatment of both regimes and their transition programmes by the media owed to the friendly disposition of the Abubakar regime and the changing international opinion regarding the administration is unconvincing.

Given the Abubakar regime's profligacy and acclaimed recklessness in his short time as Head of State (Africa Confidential, 1999a; 1999b), the following questions are raised: did the press fail to perform its duty to hold the regime to account; did it fall to a general's charm offensive; or did it succumb to inducements? Whatever the answer is, it is difficult not to agree with Uko's

(2004) criticism that the press lost the moral high ground during those years.

**Private-Owned Press Comes Of Age**

Notwithstanding the accusations of duplicity, the Nigerian press appears to have done very well post-independence, with the Lagos-based newspapers and magazines regarded as some of the most vibrant in sub-Saharan Africa.

A lot of the credit goes to the private-owned newspapers that were established during the second republic, mostly in the late 70s and early 80s (Bourne, 2018; Jason, 1996; Omu, 1996). The establishment of private-owned newspapers, including the Punch (1976), Concord (1980), Vanguard (1983), Guardian (1983); and magazines like Newswatch (1985) brought new levels of journalistic quality and dynamism into the newspaper business in Nigeria. Equally important was the entry into the profession of university graduates from different backgrounds, which redefined journalism in no small measure (Omu, 1996).

In their respective contributions to the advancement of quality private ownership of press, both the Guardian and Newswatch perhaps stand out for their pioneering roles. Newswatch, established by four journalists, Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese, and Yakubu Mohammed, all of whom came from "a good background of academic and professional training and experience" is credited with pioneering "high-level reporting, investigation, and interpretation" (Omu, 1996, p.12). Its success is believed to have inspired the establishment of the African Concord, the African Guardian, and This Week, all of which appeared to have followed in the footsteps of and used the format of Newswatch. The Guardian was established in 1983 with a commitment to liberal traditions of balanced coverage and neutrality. The paper, in "the poise and polish of its language, its cultivated and intellectual approach to argument and controversy, in its penetrating and persuasive analysis and interpretation, in its promotion of ideological pluralism and in its endeavour to place events in their historical perspective" quickly established itself as a truly national newspaper (Omu 1996, p.11)

The influence of The News, Tell, and Tempo in spawning a new kind of underground activist media has already been mentioned, but before those publications were established, Newswatch blazed a trail that others followed. Newswatch, according to Bourne (2018), "set a new standard for combative, investigative journalism". The influence of Newswatch went beyond

the quality of journalistic work, as some scholars have highlighted. For Maringues (2001), the establishment of Newswatch and others like Tell, is noteworthy because it marked a new phase of newspaper ownership and control by professional journalists rather than the government or wealthy Nigerians. The relative financial independence, she argues, allowed the journalists to pursue investigative stories. In addition, essentially, it seems to have inspired others who are committed to the ideals of a free press and, therefore, favour this model over the use of capital from wealthy politicians or businessmen that would otherwise stand in the way of critical, investigative reporting.

In addition to infusing editorial and journalistic quality into newspapering, The Guardian (a quality daily newspaper) and Newswatch (a weekly magazine) also appear to have re-established the advertising revenue model that Zik's newspapers had successfully implemented in the years leading to independence. To ensure business stability, the Nigerian press began to establish sound business models, built on advertising revenue. In order to drive advertising, newspapers then had to provide content that readers would be willing to pay for, with Newswatch pioneering critical investigations of the government (Omu, 1996).

While The Guardian, Newswatch, and Concord which were established by business tycoon and later presidential aspirant, M.K.O Abiola, thrived under the new approach to journalism, the political and economic instability produced by military interventions in Nigerian ultimately had a negative impact on the media (Jason, 1996; Egbochukwu, 1996). The restructuring of the economy by the military and the resultant crippling business environment meant the press suffered low copy and advertising sales, as well as mounting production costs (Egbojukwu, 1996). In Nigeria, where the government remains the most significant player in the economy, the recession that resulted from the structural adjustment programme impacted the privately-owned newspapers more than their government-owned counterparts (Maringues 2001).

While post-independence years and the second republic saw an explosion in the establishment of privately-owned newspapers for a number of reasons, the spread across the regions of the country was uneven. In the North[21], for example, the development of the press has struggled to

[21] The focus of most analyses of press development in Nigeria understandably is on the South West or what is referred to as the Lagos axis because of its association with Abeokuta, which birthed Nigeria's first Newspaper; as well as its relatively more rapid development. Other regions like the South East and the North have relatively shorter histories and less decorated rate of development.

keep pace with that of the South, especially in the second republic. This is either because of what Haruna (1996) described as a lack of private investment; a weak readership base; inadequate management know-how; or because of the relatively more extended history of the press in Lagos and Southern Nigeria in general. As Maringues (2001) notes, the absence of capital and the same socio-political reasons that were at play in the colonial era continued to hold back the growth of the press in the North. Of the state of the press during this period, Haruna (1996, p.57) says:

> Today, the southern press is by far more numerous and wider in circulation that the northern media. Currently, there are perhaps no more than three newspaper groups in the north namely, New Nigerian, Democrat and Today, as against at least 12 in the south, i.e., The Guardian, This Day, Vanguard, Punch, Concord, Daily Times, Champion, Third Eye, Tribune, The Post Express, AM News and Daily Sketch, not to mention seemingly thriving evening papers like PM News and TNT (Today's News Today).

The first newspaper in the North, the Northern Provinces News/Jaridar Nigeria Ta Arewa /Jaridat al Nijeriya al Shimaliyya was established by Britain in 1932 and published in three languages. The 22-page newspaper focused on new activities of the colonial administration. This appeared to have opened the way for the first Hausa newspaper, the Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo, which commenced in 1939. In 1948, Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo gave birth to an English edition named Nigerian Citizen (Okidu, 2011). Others like Maringues (2001), have suggested, and perhaps correctly too, that the social structure of the North, with its relatively lower literacy level and hierarchical submission to authority, does not support a diversified communicative environment

Even in the south, there is a disparity in the development and evolution of the press, with the South West experiencing far more success than the South East. While the South East featured prominently in the earlier years of the development of the press with Zik's West newspaper groups by far the most prominent; the region has altogether struggled to keep up with the pace of Lagos and the South West either in terms of sheer number or success rate. The Eastern Nigerian Guardian (1940), which was based in Port Harcourt; the Nigerian Spokesman (1943), based in Zik's hometown of Onitsha; and The Daily Comet, which started with Anthony Enahoro as editor, were all examples of successful newspapers based in the then South East.

As to why the region lags behind Lagos and the South West, Ekeocha (1996) believes the

extreme republicanism of the Igbos of the South East, which discourages them from pooling capital together, is the chief reason. He suggests that newspapers established in the South East struggle to match their Lagos and South Western counterparts because the "financial base of these proprietors is further weakened by their exclusive ownership mentality" (Ekeocha, 1996, p.85). In addition, other regions like the North, Ekeocha (1996) also notes, suffers from weak readership base and a lack of management know-how.

**Post-1999 And The Beginning Of Citizen Journalism**

In Nigeria's history, 1999 is significant because the Presidential election of that year was the culmination of a tortuous transition programme that began in 1998. As previously highlighted, and as Olukotun (2004) notes, the struggle to wrest power from the military had the media as the vanguard, providing the rallying point for civil society and opposition. However, as Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) and Olukotun (2018a) say, there are concerns already that the kind of critical reporting of the military era is fast disappearing. Given its role in the nationalist era, where it helped to sustain opposition and attacks on the colonial administration, as well as that of the military years, where it stood with the people in the face of brutal repression, the questions surrounding how well the media has fared post-1999 is understandable.

Nigerians, having endured years of misrule with the majority of which was under military rule, expectantly went to the polls 1999 in the belief that the country was heading into a new era of prosperity, security and national development. At the beginning of the 4th republic where President Obasanjo ruled, amongst his immediate challenges were repairing an economy still reeling under a mismanaged structural adjustment programme; halting corruption; and uniting a nation that had been sharply divided and brought to the brink by the annulment of the 1993 Presidential Election[22] (Economist, 1999).

While Nigeria is in its longest democratic stretch since independence, with six elections cycles already recorded, there are reasonable grounds to query the quality and depth of democracy and the benefits to ordinary Nigerians. There are suggestions that the elite is undermining

[22] The 1993 presidential election organised by the military regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (Rtd.) to end a long transitional process is adjudged the freest and most transparent even in Nigeria's history. The election pitted Yoruba businessman, M.K.O Abiola of the Social Democratic (SDP) against Northern, Bahir Tofa, of the National Republican Convention (NRC). The government's decision to suspend the announcement of the results mid-way and annule the election triggered nationwide protests and political unrest that led to the military's withdrawal when an Interim National Government headed by a civilian was installed.

democracy by subverting the will of the people through the manipulation of the electoral processes, political institutions, as well as the security agencies (Obi, 2011).

Even though there is still widespread support for civilian rule, Nigerians say they are unhappy with the quality of their democracy. For instance, an Afrobarometer survey tracking the mood of Nigerian since 1999, reports that "Nigerians are broadly discouraged by the performance of their political system and do not generally believe that they have reaped the dividends of democracy" (Afrobarometer, 2006, p.2).

The report shows that people expressed "deep concerns about political violence, corruption, ineffective government, unresponsive leaders, and economic deprivation" (Afrobarometer, 2006, p.1). The study also showed that while 81% supported democracy in 2000, only 65% did so in 2005. In 2005, 25% of the populace said they were satisfied with democracy as against 84% in 2000. More interestingly, the report shows there is a sharp decline in the number of those who are satisfied with the performance of government officials, with the President experiencing the biggest loss of support. Support for the president is down from 72% in 2000 to 32% in 2005. People equally disapproved of the performances of the National Assembly (down from 58% to 23%) and Local Government Representatives (down from 67% to 28%). Perhaps most worryingly, the report shows that people thought that political liberties (encompassing freedom of speech, freedom of association, and electoral freedom) were freer under the military than in the new dispensation. "Nigerians are disheartened by the state of political liberties in the new regime. Currently, only about half of citizens view the political climate as freer than under previous military rulers. This is an especially adverse judgment since it speaks to the essential political qualities we associate with a democratic regime," the report adds (Afrobarometer, 2006, p.10). In this context, it would be reasonable to believe that people would worry that the media has either been silent or lenient in its coverage of the elected officials in whom the Nigerians have lost faith. This failure of the mainstream media to perform its normative role that includes watchdog journalism appears to be fuelling the growth of citizen and activism journalism.

The media in Nigeria, like those in other African countries, are regarded as crucial elements in the democratic process with the "potential to contribute to the exercise of civic rights and responsibilities, the communication of political information, the (re)construction of cultural identity, and the achievement of developmental goals" (Wasserman, 2011, p.5). To effectively

do this, the media ought to reflect the liberal theorists' description of a force that enhances accountability (McChesney, 2010; Norris, 2014).

Norris (2014, p.525) posits that the very idea of a media that functions in this mode suggests that it exists as "an independent guardian located in civil society and counterbalancing the power of executive, legislature, and judiciary branches of government". Viewed in this way, it is easier to understand the recent developments in the Nigerian media landscape and the key question would be whether the fourth estate is effectively fulfilling what Norris (2014) calls the twin roles of investigative reporting and critical reporting – the bedrocks of watchdog journalism. As a study by Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) found, it would seem that the Nigerian media has indeed abandoned this important aspect of their normative role. Their conclusion that investigative reporting is a dying tradition appears to properly reflect the true state of media practice in the country post-1999.

A recent assessment of the media in the fourth republic, which references criticisms that the media has been captured[23] and, therefore, lost its appetite for aggressive and critical reporting for which it has come to be known suggests the press is failing. Of this development, Olukotun (2018a, p.2) says:

> In other words, even though the media have enjoyed more freedom in the period since 1999, freedom which was deepened by the passing of the Freedom of Information Act in 2011, there are critical doubts whether they have lived up to the billings predicted by their crusading role under the military, when they invented rebellious communication outlets, such as alternative newspapers and a pirate radio to enhance the struggle for democracy.

The criticisms cited by Olukotun (2018a) should be taken in the context of the political environment prior to the fourth republic, but most notably in the repressive military era when the critical press was the rallying point for the campaign against unconstitutional rule. As it did in the nationalist era and during the struggle against military rule, it would be natural for Nigerians to expect the press to take the lead in critical reporting of issues such as political

[23] Media capture refers to the corrosive influence of and control (subtle or otherwise) of media and communications. There is an agreement within media scholarship that commercial influence, ownership, government control, and regulatory policies all represent media capture because they not only shape but result in biased coverage (See Stiglitz, 2017).

violence, corruption, ineffective government, unresponsive leaders and economic deprivation (Afrobarometer, 2006). They are the same concerns which are leading many others like Obi (2011, p.367) to remark that that "Nigeria has experienced a political transition without a democratic transformation." If there is any failure on the part of the media to aggressively cover these issues and the government's weak response to them, and there is good reason to believe that this is the case, then the obvious question is why have they been failing?

In answering this question, it is necessary to examine the preparedness and capacity of the press to continue to play such a leading role post-1999 as it did in the nationalist era and in the years of successive military incursion into Nigerian politics. While the media watchdog principle has been around for over 200 years and interpreted in many ways depending on prevailing culture and circumstances (Coronel, 2010), the ability of the media to continue to function effectively in this role depends on such factors as ownership, digital disruption, as well as the perception of media users (Olukotun, 2018b). In making this point, Olukotun adds: "Hence, despite the fact that many Nigerian newspapers have crusading titles, such as Vanguard, the Punch, Nigerian Tribune and the Champion, their performance of the watchdog role which is also stipulated by Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, is a matter to be determined less by a militant press ideology than their strength or weakness as players in the economic and technological market place" (2018b, p.138).

If the new activist new media arose out of the guerrilla journalism of the military era, by the accounts of some of the journalists who were involved in the struggle, even they were influenced by the journalism of the colonial era. Ibelema (2003, p.174) states that, "Tell's philosophy was to be more advocatorial in the tradition of the nationalist press," going on to quote Nosa Igiebor, one of the magazine's founding editors as saying that the activist journalism of Azikiwe and Awolowo were his inspiration. To the extent, therefore, that Azikiwe and Awolowo, as well as the other owners of the early press, were themselves influenced by the political reporting of Iwe Irohin, and as Igiebor has said that he and the guerrilla journalists of the military era were inspired by the nationalists; I will argue that the new activist media that have been established post-1999 are natural progressions of the tradition established by Nigeria's first newspaper.

That tradition of critical political reporting established by Henry Townsend's Iwe Irohin, and which was rigorously pursued by John Payne Jackson's Lagos Weekly Record and Nnamdi

Azikiwe's West African Pilot is ingrained in and forms a core part of the adversarial journalistic practice for which Nigeria is known and of which the guerrilla journalism of the military era is a constant reminder. The connections between the underground and guerrilla practices of the time, and especially of the watchdog roles they performed even in those dire times are noticeable in Sahara Reporters and similar publications. It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that critical political reporting during any of the phases of Nigeria's journalism development, including post-1999, has been shaped by the likes of Iwe Irohin, the Lagos Weekly Record and the West African Pilot and continues to be influenced by that tradition.

The fourth republic brings new threats, with technology enabling communication in ways that easily remove the gatekeeping function that had allowed the press to be at the centre of national political discourse, thereby exerting its influence. The emerging trend where new, digital-born newspapers are becoming central to national discourse holds the potential to influence political processes and Nigerian democracy. As such, it deserves a more critical analysis. This is because, even though it offers hope to allow those who have hitherto been denied access and participation in political discourse, citizen journalism remains open to abuse. Citizen journalism is breaking down some of the boundaries that once prevented the spread of disinformation and fake news (Titcomb, 2018) and, therefore, undermining its inherent potentials. The recent developments follow the apparent failure of the Nigerian state and the inability of mainstream media to hold politicians to account. However, the wider implications of the digital disruption as it relates to the media industry and the political process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Early Problems, Unresolved Issues**

Regardless of the varying fortunes of print and broadcasting, there remain some commonalities. Looking at the early history of Nigerian media, it is clear that some of the problems identifiable with the Nigerian media today have their roots in the practices of those early days when organisations were tightly controlled by politicians or those close to them, and when ethnic divisions overshadowed journalism. Bourne (2018), Adebanwi (2004) and Coleman (1958) highlight how ethnic divisions crept into the media as the competition for political influence and power between activists from the different regions spilled over into media wars.

For instance, Coleman (1958) details how on one occasion, Ernest Ikoli (Ijaw) and Samuel Akinsanya (Ijebu Yoruba), who were involved in the founding of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), contested for a vacant legislative council. He notes how the selection of Ikoli as the candidate of the NYM "was interpreted by Akinsanya and Ijebu Yorubas and by Azikiwe and the Ibos, who supported Akinsanya as the main manifestation of tribal prejudice against Ijebus and Ibos, the result being that Azikiwe and most Ibos, as well as Akinsanya and some Ijebus, left the movement" (see p. 227).

This contest for the legislative council seat held by Dr. K. A. Abayomi and the subsequent ethnic divisions and press war that broke out as a result of the disputed outcome speaks to the socio-ethnic divisions that defined the struggle for independence; for the first republic and every other one since then; and from which the country has failed to recover. Besides, it also speaks to the penchant of media owners and journalists to be dragged into political, ethnic, and regional power contestations, thereby, eroding public trust in their ability to serve as unbiased watchdogs.

The break-up in the Nigerian Youth Movement; the administrative division between Eastern and Western regions which led to tensions between Igbo and Yoruba; the hegemonic struggles for Lagos; as well as the gulf between the North and the South on the timing of independence from the colonial administration, all became press issues with newspapers taking sides along ethnic lines (Bourne, 2018; Adebanwi, 2004; Diamond, 1983). Coleman (1958) goes further to suggest that "the Akinsanya crisis was the first major manifestation of a tribal tension that affected all subsequent efforts to achieve unity" (p.227). In practical terms, this set the tone for a politically and ethnically-biased media. Diamond (1983, p.471), in his analysis of the event, notes how the "press warfare and continuing streams of mutual vilification" embittered politicians on both sides. Furthermore, this pattern was repeated in 1953 when Northern politicians were the subject of Southern criticism for allegedly blocking the motion seeking independence for Nigeria in 1956.

Going by this argument, it is easy to see why the later establishment of regional broadcasting stations by the three regional governments fed into the brewing ethnic divisions. Further, it is evident how pages of newspapers and airtime were deployed in those hegemonic battles; as well as why these have remained unresolved issues in the Nigerian media to date.

One other element of the early development of the Nigerian press, which also has implications for understanding the media landscape today is provided by Maringues (2001, p.186). She notes how even in those early days, the "characteristics of the contemporary Nigerian press were already discernible," with newspaper owners acquiring "great personal wealth". Among other elements of the characteristics of the early press, her observation that "the most widely read newspapers were those that were most critical of the government" is as important as the fact that those who cooperated with the colonial administration were rewarded with government subsidies and advertising. This is because they point to the use, by successive governments in the country of the same approach, of rewards for less critical media, but treating the critical ones with heavy-handedness.

From the foregoing, it is safe to conclude that, from its modest beginning in 1859 with that first newspaper the Iwe Irohin, the Nigerian media has grown with every passing phase of the nation's history to be regarded as one of the critical elements of national development. On the evidence of: (i) its early development, growth and performance; (ii) its evolution and more recent history under the years of military rule; and (iii) despite its highly political affiliations in the period of nationalist struggle, it is difficult to fault those who say the early influences described above have been mostly positive.

For instance, Oso, Odunlami and Adaja (2011, p.2), in their assessment of the early press in West Africa, assert that "of the lot, the Nigerian media system has evolved over time to become what has been acknowledged as the most robust and vibrant on the African continent," and their analysis appears to speak to the performance of the Nigerian media in post-independence. The next chapter will focus on a critical interrogation of the media and its performance in the fourth republic,  The idea is to examine the evolution of the media -owing to the interplay of factors including digital disruption and the changing political environment..

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore the historical development of the Nigerian media as channels of political communication. The discussion has traversed from the first Nigerian newspaper (Iwe Irohin) to the emergence of citizen and activism journalism that became prominent in the fourth republic. In looking at the growth and development of the Nigerian media as platforms for political communication, I have shown the influence of Christian missionaries, nationalists and ex-slaves on the early press. I have also shown how these early

influences shaped journalism and media practice by highlighting some of the issues relating to the media pre-independence, post-independence, during the military years, and in the fourth republic. The chapter also narrates the emergence of alternative and activist new media such as Sahara Reporters and shows that the critical political reporting of Iwe Irohin and other newspapers of the pre-independence era, as well as the guerrilla journalism of the military era, are precursors to the new media environment. However, and regardless of what the changing media environment suggests, the threat of disinformation and fake news to the democratic process is well noted and will be addressed in the next chapter, which examines digital disruption in detail. Equally important is the question of whether donor-funded media is the best for Nigeria going forward. The forthcoming chapter will look at these questions in greater detail.

# CHAPTER THREE
# DIGITAL DISRUPTION, CITIZEN AND ACTIVIST MEDIA

## Introduction

New media has driven the rise and growing influence of citizen journalism across the world. This enables the participation of ordinary people in the communication process and has helped to break the hold of traditional media on communicative processes. Saka (2018), Patrikarakos (2017), Blaagard (2018), Kperogi (2016), Rosen (2012), Gillmor (2006) and Allan (2013) all make the connection between technology and the ability of ordinary people to perform acts of journalism. While this has impacted journalism and democracy in mostly positive ways, there are still doubts about the exact contributions of technology to politics (Morozov, 2011; McChesney, 2013). Understandably, the optimism might be more prominent in nations like Nigeria where alternative media have not traditionally been part of the media architecture, but where technology is now empowering ordinary citizens as active participants in political communication and the democratic process (Schiffin nd Rodrigues, 2016; Banda, 2010). New media is empowering ordinary people in a country where traditional media has dominated the communicative spaces over the years such that there have been limited opportunities for non-professional journalists to participate in serious political discourse. The letters to the editor, and phone-in's to radio and television stations allowed a few people to participate in the media but this is nothing compared to the most recent development. Indeed, new technology allows anyone with a smartphone or tablet to produce and distribute news, and in the process create alternative channels to compete with the narratives from mainstream media.

## The Media in the Fourth Republic

For nations like Nigeria, activist new media are, therefore, welcome and positive additions to the traditional mass communication media because of their potential to allow the voiceless to join political discourse and strengthen democracy as a result. In his analysis of this trend, Obijiofor (2015, p.186) posits that "participatory communication is an important pathway for development of a strong, vibrant and dynamic public sphere that promotes democracy." The optimism notwithstanding, the democratic credentials of new media in the context of African politics is still being questioned because the continent is still far away from achieving universal coverage for Internet access (Banda, Mudhai & Jettey, 2009; Obijiofor, 2015.

The telecommunications changes in Nigeria have attracted comments and analyses because of the rapid gains in the last 20 years, however, social inequalities refuse to go away (Smith, 2006). The urban-rural, rich-poor divides mean that many people are still unable to access the expanding communicative spaces. However, regardless of its criticism, Banda, Mudhai and Jettey (2009, p.2) add that new media has added value "in the fact that they have supplemented, but by no means supplanted, old media forms". As valid as their arguments are, the significant difference in the political and media systems in Africa suggests that the impact of new media on politics would differ from country to country. For Nigeria, where a combination of factors have weakened traditional media and eroded trust in the years leading to the return to democratic rule in 1999, the very fact that activist new media are presenting themselves as credible and alternative channels suggests the appropriation of technology by non-institutional, and sometimes, non-professional participants for political communication is of significant importance.

**Fading tradition**

Various reasons have been adduced for the declining influence of traditional media. Most mentioned of these factors include unfriendly government regulations; crippling ownership structure; poor and delayed pay; corruption; inadequate funding; and skills gaps (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2020; Yusha'u, 2018; Olukoyun, 2004; Akpojivi, 2018; Nyamnjoh, 2004). In an assessment of the performance of the media, Bourne (2018, p.168-169) catalogues some of the issues the press has struggled with post-1999. These include digital disruption and competition from activist new media; shrinking circulation; the exit of investigative publications like Newswatch; as well as the inability of the media to conduct critical reporting due to their business model. Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) equally highlighted the disappearing tradition of investigative journalism due to compromising ownership structures and a nexus of clientelism, among other factors.

Other factors they cited as affecting the media's ability to conduct investigative reporting are professional deficits; ethno-religious considerations; poor remuneration and lack of insurance for journalists; poor or non-existent budgets; peer pressure; and self-censorship. The corruptive nature of ownership of news organisations was also noted by Yusha'u (2018, p.58), who described the clientelist-political paper and how the "owners have business, family and political interests even if there is an unlikely visibility of their interest in the coverage provided

by these newspapers". In addition to these, Ogbondah (2018) and Idowu (2018) also highlight other problems besetting the media, including the harsh economic environment as well as corruption. The twin problems of harsh economic conditions are particularly challenging, one fuelling the other and both sitting at the heart of the problem with the media. To survive the harsh economic realities, both the media and journalists are willing to compromise, thereby, failing in their duties as watchdogs. For Akpojivi (2018) and Nyamnjoh (2004), the issue of a regulatory environment that has hampered rather than aided the growth of the media in African countries are among the media's biggest problems.

While any of these problems in and of itself is enough to cripple the media and affect its ability to function effectively, in combination, as they currently assail the industry, they seem to be exerting a particularly crippling blow. Evidence of decline in the influence of the press surfaced soon after the inauguration of the fourth republic. The divisive and unbalanced reporting of major political events by sections of the media early in the fourth republic was not only an undeniable legacy of the long-standing political dichotomy that has existed since Nigeria became a country but equally a misstep into self-immolation. There is no better example of this than the two cases of certificate forgery involving the first Speaker of the House of Representatives in the fourth republic Salisu Buhari, and then governor of Lagos State Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The aggressive coverage of Salisu's claim that he attended the University of Toronto contrasted sharply with the relatively less aggressive coverage of Tinubu's false claim that he attended Chicago State University. This was an obvious reflection of the Lagos politician's touted strong connection and influence over the major news outlets in the country.

This variance in coverage led many to question the sincerity of the usually aggressive and robust privately-owned press (Olukoyun, 2004). The biased reporting of those events by the likes of The News appeared to confirm the negative impact of ownership and corruption on media practice to which Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020), as well as Yusha'u (2018) alluded. Regards the media's role in those events, Olukoyun's (2004, p.85) assertions that "most media proprietors and editors are quite close to the Nigerian political class and often get enlisted in their battles or alternatively seek to profit from publicized projects and outright deals with the political class" and that "corruption in the media, in the shape of taking bribes in return for killing or publishing stories, is a rampant feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic" were nothing new.

The difference, it seemed at the time, was that the selective and biased coverage of corruption cases involving politicians of a different ethnicity was probably an unwanted epitaph on the critical section of the press that was at the forefront of the struggle against military rule. With incidents like this, hope that the press, the choice channel for political communication, would retain its influence on the politics of the fourth republic began to fade. The result is becoming evident in the increasing acceptability of new, digital-born newspapers within the short time of their commencement. This can be seen from the number of people who connect with them through their digital assets (see Table 4).

Despite these problems that might be affecting the ability of the media to continue to serve as watchdogs. It is noteworthy, as with other national institutions such as the police and the courts, the media has endured its share of problems since 1999, operating as it is in the same stifling socio-economic and political environment. These problems alone may not help to explain the emerging trend whereby Nigerians appear to be abandoning traditional media in favour of new journalistic practices. The noticeable trend that allows more ordinary people to have a say in political discourse and, as a result, a chance to influence the political process, has been attributed to the vastly-improved telecommunications environment. However, access to the Internet remains uneven. Regardless of the giant strides of post-1999, there is reason to believe many people are still unable to join the ongoing conversation.

A recent survey by Afrobarometer (2020), for instance, found that only 19% of all Nigerians own a smartphone; 31% own both a smartphone and a laptop; and 44% own a phone without Internet access. Banda, Mudhai and Tettey (2009) noted this in their analysis of the technological advancements in African countries and how many are still left behind. Internet penetration is a modest 39.9% compared 58.8% for the rest of the world (Internet World Stats, 2020), while as much as a third of Nigerians are still without internet connection (NCC, 2020). It is clear that the technological reforms post-1999 are not the only factor responsible for the shifting pattern of access and participation in political communication. Therefore, this section will critically analyse the socio-political environment that has contributed to the adoption of new, digital media platforms as competing channels for political communication.

This adoption has been aided by the notable development of technological infrastructure, failure of politics, and worsening corruption, as well as the exclusionary practices of traditional media that shuts many Nigerians from the political process. Furthermore, the section will detail

the emergence of new critical reportage of politics, the mobilisation of effort around new online publications as critical, activist media that thrives on user-generated content. The next section will interrogate the subtle but evident ideological contest that appears to be driving the unfolding change as well as ethical issues surrounding the operations of the new digital-born publications. Given their rise into prominence in the fourth republic, questions about funding, as well as the tendency to sacrifice facts for sensationalism, are critical and will be addressed.

**The Changing Media Environment**

Digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable and others have been more aggressive in covering the Nigerian elite post-1999[24]. For instance, Rodrigues and Schiffrin (2016) cite the case of the former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, who was accused of using CBN money to pay for his mistress's trips and was eventually removed by President Goodluck Jonathan following the publication of stories on his abuse of office by Premium Times and Sahara Reporters. "It is hard to know exactly what impact Sahara Reporters had,' they add, but also suggested that while Premium Times first broke the story, Sahara Reporter's decision of '…relentlessly reporting on the subject and keeping it in the public mind it increased the pressure on the government to act" (Rodrigues & Schiffrin, 2016, p.130).

In another example of the newspaper's influence on politics, it's investigations of then Governor of Delta State James Ibori, outed the governor, forcing him into exile in Dubai, and eventually leading to his arrest, prosecution and conviction. Mojeed (2012) wrote:

> For years, Sowore beamed his searchlight on James Ibori, a powerful state Governor of the oil-rich Delta State and steadily assailed the Nigerian government with embarrassing information of his alleged plunder of state resources, including allegedly stealing of $100 million from the coffers of a state he had ruled for eight years. The former governor escaped to Dubai when the government moved to prosecute him, after it could no longer ignore the continuing, and disturbing reports on him. He was later arrested in Dubai and extradited to London where he is facing charges for corruption.

[24] Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable fit Lievrouw's (2011) description of activist new media and this is the basis of their selection as sample; as well as the focus of the inquiry to determine why they have shot into prominence within the short period of their establishment at a time when legacy newspapers like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune appear to be struggling.

The Premium Times has been equally influential when it comes to newspaper stories forcing the government to act. The newspaper exclusively reported how the then Minister of Finance Kemi Adeosun, skipped the mandatory the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and used a forged certificate of service while being considered for appointment as minister (Abdulazziz, 2018). The report was taken by international media and eventually led to the minister's resignation (Ohuocha, 2018; Bala-Gbogbo, 2018).

As noted already, the entry of Nigeria's first newspaper Iwe Irohin, could be considered the beginning of the critical tradition of political reporting that flourished in early newspapers like John Payne Jackson's Lagos Weekly Record and Nnamdi Azikiwe's West African Pilot. In the same way that Iwe Irohin inspired political reporting in the early days of the Nigerian media, the entry of Sahara Reporters[25] may well be considered the beginning of a new tradition of activist new media.

**Telecommunications Reform**

A radical reform of the telecommunications industry that began in 1992 with the enactment of the first Nigerian Communications Commission Act (Decree 75) set the tone for unprecedented investment and infrastructural revamp that is the foundation of the digital shift shaking up mass media communication. What has been achieved in the last twenty-eight years is remarkable. The country had only 18,724 telephone lines at independence in 1960 and less than 500,000 as at 2000 (Ndukwe, 2011). With a population of 42.7% at independence, this was a teledensity of 0.044% in 1960 and 0.4% in 2000, by which time the population had risen to 120 million, well below the African average of 1.67%. While the incoming administration of Olusegun Obasanjo inherited decaying telecommunications infrastructure, its decisive action with the reorganisation of the NCC in 2000 and the subsequent award of Digital Mobile Licences in 2001 revolutionised the industry and connected Nigerians in ways that were until the fourth republic impossible.

[25] Sahara Reporters is taken in this study as the beginning of a new tradition that injects advocacy into news reporting in the way that guerilla journalism did under the military regime. The newspaper's much-maligned style has inspired others like Premium Times and The Cable which are charting a new course that favours more aggressive reporting for which the likes of Newswatch, The News and Tell were renowned.

With an estimated population of 200 million[26], Nigeria has 184.6 million active phone lines as at the end of December 2019 or a teledensity of 96.7%[27] (NCC, 2020). Available data from the Commission also showed that there were 126 million Internet subscribers amounting to an Internet penetration of more than 61%. More than 37% (72 million) of all Internet subscribers had access to broadband (NCC, 2020)[28]. This remarkable growth in Internet penetration from just below 1% in 2001 to more than 60% at the end December 2019 (See Table 2) is making it easier for more Nigerians to consume their media in digital formats and, therefore, engage more with texts. Apart from the increase in the number of online news publications and blogs, traditional media organisations have also started to distribute their content digitally and are showing better results in that segment (Akoh & Jagun, 2012).

Table 2: Telecommunications Reform in Numbers (Kemp, 2021; NCC, 2021)

| | 2001 | 2006 | 2018 | 2019 | % CHANGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 126m | 140m | 195m | 195m | 54 |
| Phone Lines | 872,782 | 34m | 172.6m | 281m | 19,705 |
| Teledensity | 1.89% (2002) | 24.18% | 123.4% | 96.7 | 6,429 |
| Internet Users | 113,289 | 7.94m | 112m | 126m | 98,687 |
| Internet Penetration | 0.1% | 5.5% | 55.7% (31.4%) | 55.7% (31.4%) | 55,600 |

**Improved Internet Connection**

Closely related to the improved infrastructure in telecoms is the increase in the number of mobile Internet users. In what is a uniquely Nigerian phenomenon, the rapid growth in active phone lines in the country is driven by mobile connections, accounting for 99% of all active phone lines as at the end of 2019. NCC subscriber data from the end of December 2019 showed that 125.7 million of all mobile phone lines had active Internet subscription. As good as the number are, they must be understood in the context of poor telecommunications network service delivery, which forces many Nigerians to maintain multiple mobile phones (Obijiofor,

[26] Though the last official census was held 13 years ago, different estimates put the population as at the end of 2018 at between 186 million and 195 million.
[27] An explanatory note on the website of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) says the Commission, beginning from March 2019, began to calculate teledensity based on a population of 190 million
[28] It is usual in Nigeria for individuals to own more than one mobile number as many people hedge against network instabilities, hence, the relatively high total number of active phones against the total population figure, which is from the last official census in 2006. Even if the estimated population figure of 195 million is used, Internet penetration will still be more than 56%, a remarkable increase from the 2001 figures.

2015). This is perpetuated by the persistent digital divide that ensures more educated and affluent are more likely to have Internet subscription (Silver and Johnson, 2018).

The investment in mobile telephony, unique products and services in Africa's biggest market is obviously driving the growth. Mobile phone usage and Internet connectivity continue to grow, driven by the availability of 'lite' mobile applications like Opera Mini (Smith &Tran, 2017) and relatively cheap data packages from mobile network operators (Chair, 2017)[29]. The predominantly mobile connection to the Internet impacts media consumption patterns and transforms hitherto consumers into publishers (Akoh & Jagun, 2012). As a result of the affordances of mobile devices and Internet connectivity, more Nigerians (64%) were reported in 2017 as saying that Internet use has had a positive impact on politics, against 43% in 2014 (Silver & Johnson, 2018).

**Conducive Political Climate**

As mentioned previously, decades of misrule characterised by revenue losses through corruption in a country of immense potential like Nigeria has produced frustrations and energised the citizens who are finding their voices on new media platforms (Costa, 2007; Lee, Jideofor & Petty, 2016). This frustration appears to have triggered a hegemonic struggle for control of the communicative spaces. The appropriation of state power and resources by the elite in the years since independence in 1960 has created what Olaniyan (2010) describes as the anti-state, the coalition of non-conformists who challenge the status quo. Questions remain, however, as to whether Nigeria is an actual state given the disparate ethnicities forced into nationhood in 1914 and whether the forms of elitist control in the country fit the Gramscian definition of hegemony. While the resurgence of separatist agitations seems to reinforce the view that Nigeria is not a proper nation-state, they should be understood as manifestations of the anti-state, which fits into the hegemonic struggle for resources and not a negation of the geographical entity created by the British.

To the extent that communication is a tool for achieving control and, therefore, in itself an object of the contest (Castells, 2009), so too analysing the role and performance of the media-

[29] One 2017 study by Research in Africa titled 'Internet Use Barriers and User Strategies: Perspectives From Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Rwanda' found Nigeria offered the cheapest data of the four countries surveyed, at USD 3.35 for IGB. This is against Kenya (USD5.02), South Africa (USD7.04), and Rwanda (USD3.91)

state relations should also be within the hegemonic contests. Olukotun (2010, p.158), in his critical look at state-media relations in the military years, makes the point that "the opportunistic deployment of ethnic identities in intraruling class struggles, which are also reflected in the media, does not substantially alter the picture of hegemonic contestation". His description of a media divided "between those who legitimate the ruling class, and those who subvert it, with a few standing in between the broad divisions that could swing either way" (Olukotun, 2010, p.157) describes the Nigerian communicative environment post-1999 as well as it did Gramsci's Europe of the early 20th century. In previous sections, I have noted the fact that the harsh operating environment post-independence due to the economic recession and hijacking of power by repressive military governments shaped the Nigerian media. However, the events preceding the general elections of 1999 appear to have foreshadowed disenchantment with traditional media and the media activism that has defined the fourth republic.

The sharp divisions between the military, their civilian collaborators on the one hand, and opposition forces on the other meant a contest for the minds of the people, and the media was a channel for framing competing ideologies and narratives (Olusola-Olaniyan 2010). For the anti-state forces or what Olukotun (2004) calls the counter-hegemonic forces, sometimes unconventional measures were needed and were adopted to advance their positions (Olukotun, 2004; Olusola-Olaniyan, 2010). The emergence, therefore, of the radical press of the military era and their adoption of a guerrilla-style operational mode to evade restrictive regulations should not be seen only as a response to the proscription of privately-owned and critical newspapers (Olukotun, 2010), but equally as a regrouping of anti-state forces intent on keeping channels open to push competing narratives and ideologies.

The communicative environment in the fourth republic may be different from the repressive military era preceding it, but choices remain limited because the social-political environment has changed little. State-media relations have improved considerably in the fourth republic, and the 1999 Constitution and the Freedom of Information Act of 2011 are positive developments that should ordinarily provide a more conducive environment for media operations. However, the hegemonic contests remain and the only changes appearing to be the emergence of new digital-born publications as a possible alternative channel for opposition voices. With many of the major newspapers secure in the hands of prominent politicians or their business associates, diversity of opinion is missing. This is a situation that appears to be

forcing opposition voices to express themselves through news sites such as Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable.

**Failure of Old Media**

McChesney (2004) argues that the quality of the media determines the quality of the democracy, hence, the inquiry into the performance of the fourth estate in the fourth republic is understandable. The Nigerian media has traditionally operated relatively freely in its 161-year history, with the decades of military rule the exception, and has undergone a serious transformation in recent times as computer-mediated communication becomes a significant area of contestation[30]. As the previous sections have shown, Nigerian newspapers played significant roles in the years leading to independence and in the struggle to free the country from decades of military rule. However, they have been criticised for their performance since 1999 when the country returned to democratic government, and from then trust appears to have been declining (Olukotun, 2018a; Ogbondah, 2018; Lee et al., 2016; Dare, 2011). There are regulatory, economic and ideological factors adduced for the waning trust in the media, which has found itself in a relatively more conducive environment operationally.

Section 39(1) of the 1999 Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, while Section 39(2) provides the legal requirements for the establishment of media. Additionally, Section 22 guarantees the role of the media as watchdog, but this has not allowed the media to function without state pushback. “The press, radio, television and…the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the… accountability of the Government to the people,' the section states. Regardless of the provisions, though, ‘… attempts by the media to do so underpin the [tenuous] nature of state-press relations” (Ogbondah, 2018, p.23). One possible explanation for this is the existence of other laws that appear to negate the constitutional guarantees for media freedom or what Akpojivi (2014 p.100) describes as the “give and take nature” regulations, “which allows the state to maintain the status quo (i.e., of controlling the media) under the pretext of being committed to reforms and democratic principles”. The FOI Act, another piece

[30] The most recent Freedom House (2018) ‘global press freedom’ report ranks the press in Nigeria as being ‘partly free.’ The report notes (i) that Nigeria has a vibrant and varied media landscape, with outlets that openly criticize government policies; (ii) that journalists risk prosecution under restrictive laws, including the broadly worded Cybercrimes Act (iii). It goes further to note that Journalists face attacks while carrying out their work, sometimes by security officials and that attacks against journalists often go unprosecuted while an environment of impunity for attackers, combined with the threat of legal prosecution and harassment in connection with critical coverage, encourages self-censorship

of legislation that has been enacted in the fourth republic, has proved equally operationally difficult for the media. The law unequivocally guarantees access to official information upon request, and even has a provision in Section 1(3) which allows anyone requesting information recourse to the courts to enforce compliance.

The retention of the Official Secrets Act of 1962, which classifies all government-held information as 'top secret,' is at odds with the FOI Act and continues to be a stumbling block to the media's constitutionally guaranteed role as watchdogs. However, there are doubts whether the FOI Act would be sufficient in itself to address the penchant of government officials to operate behind a veil of secrecy. Akpojivi (2014, p.98) highlights this and the fact that the legislation "excludes disclosure on security matters; the conducting of international affairs; trade secrets; personal information and solicitor/client privilege; and financial, technical and scientific information of economic value". Ogbondah (2018) also details the other extra-judicial measures that have been deployed by the state to keep the media in check, including arbitrary arrests and detentions; media closure and confiscations; threats, physical assaults, and killing; as well as strategic use of the laws on criminal libel and sedition.

The harsh economic environment is another constraint on the media and its ability to perform its role of holding the elite to account. Nigeria's import-dependent economy means raw materials for newspaper production, as well as broadcasting equipment, have to be imported. The devaluation of the Naira, which in 1999 exchanged for 92 to 1USD (CBN, 2020; Oyinlola, 2018), has compounded the economic woes of most media houses. Further devaluations from 138.7 to 1USD at the end of December 2004 to 306 to 1USD at the end of December 2019 (CBN, 2020; Oyinlola, 2018), represents a 232% loss since 1999 means most media houses are barely surviving.

This rising cost is further exacerbated because poor copy and advertising sales mean dwindling revenue, making most media houses vulnerable and increasingly open to compromises. As Ogbondah (2018, p.32) notes, "It is due to financial difficulties that many newspapers are unable to pay the salaries of their workers for several months…," but the effects go beyond the inability to pay staff. The inability of the majority of media houses to pay their staff is fuelling corruption and unethical practices amongst journalists (Idowu, 2018; Ogbondah, 2018). This, in turn, resulted in what Idowu (2018, p.126), calls an "erosion of the fidelity attached to news

as the balanced, professional, and independent processing of information into news of value for the consumer".

More worryingly, and possibly of more negative impact by far, is the suspicion of unethical practices within industry leadership. The involvement of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) in the allocation of money from the Office of the National Security Adviser's (ONSA's) slush fund to some media houses in dubious circumstances was not only brazen but symptomatic of the rot in the media. The dubious scheme brokered by NPAN President and Publisher of This Day newspaper, Nduka Obaigbena, involved the payment of N9 million to thirteen newspapers as compensation for the seizure of editions of their newspapers under the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan.

Under the dubious scheme, Blueprint, Business Day, Guardian, Independent, Leadership, Nation, New Telegraph, Nigerian Tribune, People's Daily, Sun, This Day, Trust and Vanguard were to be paid, while an additional N3 million was to go to the NPAN Secretariat (Idowu, 2018). Such institutional involvement in under-hand deals, and the subsequent revelation that Obaigbena had equally been involved in another N550 million allocation from the same funds in the name of compensation for the bombing of This Day's Abuja office, further eroded public confidence in the press as the voice for the voiceless. Of the schemes, Idowu (2018, p.125) says:

> the NPAN scandal epitomizes grand corruption where the organized media agreed to collect public funds secretly from the government as compensation for earlier infractions against the media. It was not wrong for the media to reach an out of court settlement. What was odious was that it was done secretly; it was an abuse of entrusted power for private gain, which prevented the media from establishing the principle for the general good that in a democracy all actions by the government and the people must be rooted in respect for the rule of law.

It also calls to question the media's role as an institution of public trust, in which capacity their overall "goal should be to reflect public interest irrespective of the media ownership structure (i.e., public, commercial or community owned)" (Akpojivi, 2018, p.58).

Financial constraints mean media houses have to tread with caution when reporting on the government and many have been denied advertising patronage because they were perceived as being critical of the government. The fact that the government is the biggest player in the

economy is a significant challenge to the media. Some scholars, focusing on the right environment for free media, have raised concern for state influence through such patronage. “The state can use its purchasing power to place advertising only with those media that are supportive, and the state’s advertising budget may dwarf that of any competitor. Also, state broadcasting may use its subsidized position to undercut private media in the market for advertising, rendering it difficult for free and independent media to develop” (Price & Krug, 2000, p.14).

In what appears to be government’s attempt to pressure a critical newspaper, the Punch newspaper was denied advertising running into millions of Naira after it took a hard, public stance against the administration. The newspaper's decision to confront the government of Muhammadu Buhari in a hard-hitting editorial should be seen in the context of the conscious effort to build a business model that allows it to be editorially independent. That editorial, published on December 11, 2019, and titled, 'Buhari's lawlessness: Or stand' boldly declared that all its publications would “henceforth prefix Buhari’s name with his rank as a military dictator in the 80s, Major General, and refer to his administration as a regime, until they purge themselves of their insufferable contempt for the rule of law” (Punch, 2019). Only days later, the Punch was omitted when other major national newspapers published the President's New Year message as a 'wrap-around' advertisement, which on average costs $55,000 (The Cable, 2020c).

So, while Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, the economic realities, which in essence are similar to those during the military years, continue to hamper the operations of media houses. However, two clear models are emerging slowly as practitioners grapple with how to discharge their duties as watchdogs in a democratic setting where the government remains the most significant player in the economy and uses advertising patronage as a tool to beat newspapers into control. Traditional media houses, for example, have significant capital outlays, with many of them forced to maintain staff and offices across all the country in order to live up to being called 'national.' The cost of maintaining this presence and organising newsgathering across their areas of operation means they struggle during this time of falling copy sales and increasing competition for advertising. By contrast, digital-born newspapers require a small capital outlay because they do not maintain a presence across the nation. They rely mostly on user-generated content and stringers who are not on their nominal rolls and receive generous funding from foreign donors.

The acceptance of new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, and The Cable cannot be explained by their leaner business models which remove some of the pressure to compromise on their editorial. Punch newspaper has set itself up to operate similarly but is less influential when the magnitude and significance of stories published are considered. Years of being shut out of the communicative spaces by the print media appear to be a significant reason why people have embraced these platforms and made them attractive as alternative channels for political communication within a short period.

It would be difficult to assign Nigerian media into well-defined political ideologies, but that would only be because politics in the country is itself devoid of any serious ideological beliefs. Long-accustomed to serving the elite – in politics and business – the media have been accused of being part of the problem rather than the solution. Uko (2004) suggests this is mainly because ordinary people felt left out of the communicative process. Given the magnitude of corruption uncovered as the country transitioned from military to civilian rule in 1999, the situation was yearning for a viable media that could function effectively as watchdogs. However, it appears many soon lost faith in the ability of the press to continue to function in that capacity.

This apparent loss of trust appears to have created a vacuum for critical political reportage at a time when many believe that a genuinely independent and critical media is crucial to winning the country's war against graft (Kpundeh & Johnston, 2002). The harsh economic environment, which is forcing media houses into editorial compromises and driving them into underhand deals, is impairing its ability to serve as the voice to the voiceless. That vacuum is being filled by a citizen-driven, new media that has overtaken traditional media in terms of aggressive reporting that tries to hold the political and business elite to account (Lee et al., 2016; Kperogi, 2016).

Gillmor's (2006) paradigm of journalism by people for the people began to take root in Nigeria with the diffusion of technologies that make this type of media practice possible, and which offers access to the communicative environment that traditional media has never really offered. Long excluded from the traditional media space where political issues are discussed, many are now embracing "alternative platforms including blogspots, listservs, and video sharing websites" (Akoh & Jagun, 2012). They note that this has helped to "expand the public sphere for Nigerians globally, enabling issues to be exposed that might otherwise have been trapped

under the weight of legal or repressive restraints" (Akoh & Jagun, 2012, p.8). They also note the fact that digital platforms are increasingly used for "political activism and whistle-blowing" (p. 8). In the process, they have eroded "the gatekeeping agenda-setting and framing power of media organizations, have the potential of opening up the public sphere thus enhancing the discourse power of marginalized groups and challenging that of the power elite" (Oso & Akanni, 2018, p.186).

All other major newspapers have also embraced new media, revamping and operating online editions of their newspapers to keep pace with the newspapers like Sahara Reporters. However, the conscious decision by digital-born newspapers to appropriate the collective effort of ordinary Nigerian and incorporate elements of citizen journalism and activism differentiates them and is the source of their growing influence (Kperogi, 2016; Dare, 2011; Akoh & Jagun, 2012; Oso & Akanni, 2018). As seen from their digital assets (Table 4), the following of digital-born newspapers in the short time they have been operation is suggestive of an overall widespread acceptance by Nigerians.

**New Media and Activist New Media**

Broadly speaking, the journalistic practices that allow ordinary people or those whom Rosen (2012, p.13) refers to as "the people formerly known as the audience" to participate in production and distribution of content has been defined as citizen journalism, participatory journalism or grassroots journalism[31]. With regards to how they started, particular mention has been made of new publications by Nigerians in the diaspora that are not only disrupting the media space but also having positive impacts. In what is an indication of the struggle by traditional media to effectively function in the role of holding leaders accountable, there are suggestions that this set of new, more participatory publications were conceived as platforms to connect ordinary people and fill a void.

Amongst those who have made this observation, Olukotun (2018b) and Kperogi (2016) agree on the evolutionary influence of what they call diasporic online media. In his analysis of what he described as networked social journalism, Kperogi (2016, p.20) says the void created by the inability of the elite, traditional media to effectively play the role of watchdogs has "inspired

[31] Variously called grassroots journalism or participatory, refers to the use of new media (mobile devices and technology) by ordinary, non-professional journalists to tell a story without any necessary commitment the corporate production processes of institutional media.

the growth and flowering of several diaspora Nigerian citizen news sites that simultaneously hold governments to account and challenge the authority of – and sometimes set agenda – for the institutional mass media". Olukotun (2018b, p.138) further explains the impact of these publications on the Nigerian media, saying "Unsurprisingly, therefore, the watchdog role of the Nigerian media in the period under study has been enhanced by the emergence of a diasporic online media, typified by the investigative Sahara Reporters, which has often provided stimulation and actual corruption stories for the local media which are increasingly inserted into global news flows".

As mentioned already, this Gramscian domination[32] of the media, the most powerful system for producing and propagating ideas in an environment where significant media organisations are controlled by the elite creates room for counter-hegemony (Olukotun, 2004). This is especially true where the elite press appears to be leaving the readers behind as it does in Nigeria. Kunkel and Roberts (2001), in their criticism of United States corporate media, described how the press was leaving the readers behind. There is a sense in which the same may be true of the Nigerian communicative environment where ordinary Nigerians were left with little access to traditional media to air their views. The dominance of the media space that Obijiofor (2015) and McNair (2011) highlight left ordinary people with few options until the new media platforms like NigeriaVillageSquare.com, SaharaReporters.com, nairaland.com and others offered access and participation

Equally important to this understanding of the perceived role of the media is the public sphere or as platforms for the expression of people's views. Habermas' model is often criticised as too idealistic, but there is general agreement that the media ought to provide a platform for the democratic debate of issues of concern, and that much of the popularity of the critical press during the military era was because they made this possible. Kperogi (2016, p.22) makes this point when he says, "what particularly redounded to the success and wild popularity of the underground press was the fact that it practically served as the sole arena for the ventilation of popular sentiments, especially in the light of the fact that the broadcast industry was controlled by the government, and there was no popularly elected parliament".

[32] Gramsci description of hegemony suggests that dominant groups (elite) share affinities based on social, economic, and cultural positions and norms and that their influence derives from their collective control over the production of ideas (including the media and the education system). His theory suggests that through their control of the production and propagation of ideas, the elite find it easy to muscle out alternative viewpoints.

In addition to serving the interests of a public hungry for critical reporting that holds leaders accountable, Kperogi (2016) actually goes further to suggest two other factors are contributing to the ascendance of the new online publications established by Nigerians in the diaspora. The new online publications, he argues, also have a better online presence than those of traditional media which are considered backward; while they also have better sources, who most times are more comfortable dealing with those in the diaspora (Kperogi, 2016, p.25).

The establishment of online platforms like Odili.net (2002); Nigerian Village Square (2003); Narialand.com (2004); ElenduReports.com (2005) and Sahara Reporters (2006) all embody the emerging phenomenon, post-1999, of ordinary Nigerians coming onto new media platforms that allow them to join ongoing conversations about Nigerian politics. Others like Premium Times (2011) and The Cable (2014) made their entries into a crowded market and, along with Sahara Reporters, have since established themselves as popular destinations for Nigerians seeking alternative platforms for political communication.

While people found expression in the critical press of the military era, and in order to situate the void that was created post-1999, there is a need to examine the lack of similar platforms or the exclusion of ordinary voices from discourse in the post-1999 press. Obijiofor (2015, p.107) has detailed the penchant of traditional media in Africa to discriminate against ordinary people by: (i) giving gratuitous and excessive coverage to the government rather than the opinions of ordinary citizens; (ii) privileging the views of government officials over the voices of ordinary citizens; (iii) framing news from a rigid set of values that project the views of certain groups; and (iv) subjugating of civic deliberation to profit motives. New media, he says, serve multiple roles such as "promoting civic deliberation and participatory communication" (Obijiofor, 2015, p.107). He argues that these attitudes, much like those described by Kunkel and Roberts (2001) whereby corporate media serves only the interest of the elite, appear to be encouraging ordinary Nigerians to seek alternative platforms where their voices can be heard.

Closely related to the issue of leaving the readers behind and key to understanding developments post-1999, is the continued participation of prominent politicians in the newspaper business. As noted by Kperogi (2016, P.23), "many wealthy politicians, some of them elected state governors, have set up influential newspapers that compete with the independent media". Of the twelve surviving major national newspapers, Nation (Bola

Tinubu), Sun and New Telegraph (Orji Uzor Kalu), Independent (James Ibori), and Leadership (Sam Nda Isaiah) are owned by politicians, and promote the ideology of their owners or their political parties. This is in addition to other major newspapers like National Mirror and Newswatch (Jimoh Ibrahim), Compass (Gbenga Daniel), and Union (Diezani Alison Madueke), which were established within the period, but are no longer publishing.

This pattern is replicated in the broadcast segment, where federal and state governments control a vast network of radio and television stations, but where prominent politicians, including Tinubu (TVC and Max FM) and Raymond Dokpesi (AIT and Ray Power) are also prominent players. According to Kperogi (2016, p.23), this "crowding of the media landscape with these mouthpieces of often corrupt politicians further contributed to demoting investigative journalism to the backburner". It is important to note that as media capture is not limited to ownership but also includes financial incentives, censorship and cognitive capture (Stiglitz, 2017), the ability of the press to continue to act as watchdogs is severely hampered.

So, where the institutional press, like Punch, The Guardian, Tribune and others may have been leaving their readers behind, the new digital-born publications are enabling participation (Rosen, 2012; Gillmor, 2006). They also allow them to participate in political processes, as new studies in Nigeria suggest (Lee et al., 2016). Olukotun's (2004) description of the critical and radical press of the Babangida and Abacha era as representing a counter-hegemonic forum speaks to the emergence of new, digital-born newspapers. The entry post-1999 of those new, online platforms, allows ordinary Nigerians to counteract the narratives in institutional press and, therefore participate in discourse in better ways. To this extent, they, therefore, offer themselves for consideration as alternative channels of political communication. As mentioned earlier, most traditional media have also embraced new media by publishing online versions of their newspapers. Thus, the qualification has to be made between the new media represented by the likes of online editions of Punch, The Guardian, Tribune and others, as well as those represented by Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable, which are regarded as alternative media.

In defining alternative media, Fuchs (2010, p.178) points out that they are "mass media that challenge the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content,

distribution, and reception". He makes a distinction between elite journalism[33], which focuses on producing content solely with profit in mind, and the critical media which are characterised by critical form and content.

In other words, while traditional media now publish online versions of their publications, to the extent that the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune are extensions of their respective print editions and, therefore, set up as principally profit-making businesses, they should be regarded as belonging to elite journalism. Fuchs (2010) describes elite journalism as the 'for profit' commercial journalism that cannot effectively cater to the public. Viewed in this way, the online versions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune would not qualify to be described as constituting alternative, citizen media platforms. By contrast, I believe Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable more than the newspapers being studied here represent this new journalistic force that has emerged post-1999 for at least the simple reason that they operate on a different model with donor funding as a vital source of their operational revenue.

Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) in their description of alternative media distinguish between "participation in the media and through the media' but say that in both cases, 'the media see the (mass) communicative process not as a series of practices that are often restrictively controlled by media professionals, but as a human right that cuts across entire societies" (p. 11). Participation 'in the media,' the authors say, means "participation of non-professionals in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media decision-making (structural participation).' They argue further that participation 'through the media' means 'opportunities for extensive participation in public debate and for self-representation in public spaces" (Bailey et al., 2007, p.11).

As this study is designed to look at the nature and impact of citizen journalism on the Nigerian political process, these descriptions, including counter-hegemonic platforms, alternative media and activist media, are helpful in defining the scope of this study by allowing for the elimination of what does not qualify to be considered citizen journalism So, what then distinguishes the digital assets of the existing traditional newspapers from those of the online publications

[33] Fuchs defines elite media as 'for-profit,' but the term along with institutional media, legacy media in the context of this research refers to the media belonging to well-established corporate entities as differentiated from the upstart, platforms that are emerging in Nigeria without corporate backing.

selected as case studies, for the latter to be considered new media and citizen journalism platforms? The motivation for this study is my observation, first, of the shrinking newspaper circulation in Nigeria and what this means for the share of voice of the traditional newspapers in political communication; and second, the increasing popularity of online publications like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable.

The three online publications have also shown more commitment to appropriating user-generated content and using their platforms for advocacy. Something which is not seen in the traditional newspapers selected for this study. For instance, they all have different projects supported by donor funding, for which they provide editorial backing. With funding from MacArthur Foundation and Omidyar Network, Sahara Reporters opened a Civic Media Lab to support initiatives to address Nigeria's ailing democracy. However, and perhaps as a result of the impact of Sahara Reporters, both Premium Times and The Cable also appear to be building platforms that allow extensive participation by ordinary people in discourse. It is, therefore, appropriate to consider them alternative media in the way that Bailey et al. (2007) have defined it. So, whether it is citizen journalism (Moyo 2016, Kperogi, 2016), insurgent media (Labiste, 2016) or grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2006), there is an understanding that we are referring to counter-hegemonic platforms that are set up to challenge the status quo by propagating an alternative narrative and ideology.

Established in 2006 by a former student leader and activist Omoyele Sowore, Sahara Reporters is not the first Nigerian-owned online platform. However, is the first online newspaper set up to promote citizen journalism by encouraging ordinary Nigerians to report stories about corruption, human rights abuses and other political misconduct in the country. Different in design from older online platforms like odili.net (2002), nigerianvillagesquare.com (2003) and nairaland.com (2004), Sahara Reporters describes itself as "an online community of international reporters and social advocates dedicated to bringing you commentaries, features, news reports from a Nigerian-African perspective" (Sahara Reporters, 2020). Its payoff line, 'report yourself,' is clear in both intention and conception, and the publication clearly defines itself as a news website that "encourages citizen journalists to report ongoing corruption and government malfeasance in Africa" (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Rodrigues and Schiffrin (2016), Kperogi (2016) and Dare (2011) have all detailed the newspaper's adversarial exposés on corruption in high places and the platform encourages participation of ordinary Nigerians. The New York- based newspaper has been hailed as Africa's WikiLeaks for its dogged commitment

to investigative reporting of corruption in government (Shenon, 2017). Significantly, its approach appears to have been embraced as Dare (2011, p. 35) notes “In one year over 200 Nigerians in sensitive positions contributed important and sensitive information and documents. Presently it has over 500 citizen reporters who send stories and photos using blackberry messenger for free and a citizen volunteer corps of nearly 6,000 drawn from the Nigerian community”.

Criticised for its adversarial editorial policy, disregard for tradition and the basic tenets of journalism, Sahara Reporters led a return to aggressive coverage of corruption and governance in the fourth republic (Dare, 2011; Adebayo, 2006). Regardless of the criticisms, the newspaper also embodies what Kellner (2010) calls journalism of the spectacle, where sensationalism is pursued to attract more audiences. Sahara Reporters appears to have inspired many other digital-born newspapers, which operate in similar ways.

Like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times draws heavily on donor funding and user-generated content. The Premium Times was founded in 2011 by journalists who had worked for the failed Next newspaper including Dapo Olorunyomi who had also worked with The News magazine. The newspaper runs a Campus Reporters project to encourage citizen journalism; a whistleblowing project called Leaks.ng; and an investigative journalism project called the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism. In a move similar to the successful model introduced by the United Kingdom's Guardian newspaper, Premium Times recently launched an appeal seeking donation directly from the public in the hope that it would enable it to continue to practice critical, independent reporting (Premium Times, 2020b). With funding from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, OSIWA, MacArthur Foundation, and Ford Foundation, the publication, like Sahara Reporters, has produced ground-breaking journalistic work. For example, when it collaborated with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism (ICFJ) on the Paradise Papers report. This kind of journalistic work, touching influential Nigerians with advertising muscle like Godwin Emefiele, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and Jim Ovia, the Chairman of Zenith Bank Plc, would have been almost impossible but for the novel approach of relying largely on donor funding.

For its part, The Cable began operations in 2014 and runs two advocacy projects, PetroBarometer and Policy Radar Initiative (PRIN), the latter through funding from the MacArthur Foundation. Founded by an experienced journalist and former editor of This Day

newspaper, Simon Kolawole, The Cable says PRIN is intended to "support investigative journalism in Nigeria and to educate the public and other important audiences about issues related to corruption, with a focus on the electricity and education sectors" (The Cable, 2020a). This classification is supported by Oso and Akanni (2018, p.186), who, referencing Banda (2010) and Goode (2009), differentiated between institutional and non-institutional citizen journalism. The latter of which "places the individual at the centre of the content production process," and encourages ordinary people to generate and disseminate content.

The establishment of online platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable has benefited from the vastly improved telecommunications infrastructure and Internet connections that have put powerful tools in the hands of ordinary people. Those tools now allow non-professionals to bypass traditional media and engage in acts of journalism. Additionally, they have also benefited from the relatively more conducive political climate of frustration and media reform, as well as the perceived failure of more traditional media. Armed with new media tools, ordinary people are creating and disseminating news and opinion outside of more established channels.

There are acceptable grounds and practices where platforms run by professional journalists rather than ordinary citizens can be said to represent citizen journalism. In selecting Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable as case studies for activist new media, I have relied on Lievrouw's (2011, p.23; see Table 3 taxonomy of the genres of alternative and activist new media. Given the shrinking space – at least for ordinary Nigerians – for political communication at a time of mounting frustration, and the increasing use of other channels aside traditional media, there is a sense in which new media platforms can be considered, as Lievrouw (2011) does, as alternative and activist media. As she says, new media operators are finding the affordances of media convergence "fruitful arenas for action and expression" (p.215). The affordances, the author says, include the propagation of "opposition and alternative viewpoints and agenda" (Lievrouw, 2011, p.225). These factors will be examined in more detail in the next chapters, which explores both the historical development of the Nigerian media as channels of political communication; and the digital disruption that is powering participatory journalism of the type that Lievrouw (2011) has described as alternative and activist media.

Table 3: Genres of alternative and activist new media (Lievrouw, 2011: p.23)

| Genre | Social Domain | Forms | Purposes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Culture Jamming | Popular culture, mainstream media, corporate advertising | Appropriated images, sound, text from popular culture | Cultural critique, political and economic commentary |
| Alternative computing | Computing, telecoms, media infrastructure (hardware and software) | Hacking, open-source system, design, file sharing | Open access to and use of information and IT |
| Participatory journalism | Reporting, news commentary, public opinion | Online news service, blogs, Indymedia | Covering under-reported groups and issues, investigative reporting |
| Mediated mobilization | Social movements, identity, cultural politics, lifestyles | Social media, mobs, virtual worlds, blogs | Activist mobilization, lifestyle examples ("prophecy") |
| Common knowledge | Expertise, academic/technical disciplines and institutions, Socially sanctioned knowledge | Tagging, bookmarking, wikis, "crowdsourcing" | Mobilizing "outsider," amateur knowledge, comprehensive collection and organization of diverse, arcane knowledge |

Using this classification, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable will qualify to be considered as activist new media platforms because of their commitment to coverage of under-reported issues and investigative journalism. Conceptualising them as alternative activist new media, I am taking these two factors into account: (i) utilisation of donor funding allows them to focus on providing critical content devoid of consideration for profit, as Fuchs (2010) outlines in his description of alternative media; and (ii) commitment to using their platforms for activism. At the time when traditional media appears to be struggling to effectively perform their role of critically reporting on issues regarding the failure of leaders to deliver dividends of democracy, the emergence of these kinds of platforms, and their increasingly impactful journalistic output, are noteworthy.

Sahara Reporters' model of active, ordinary people engaging in the communicative process, fits the description of an activist new media and has been copied brilliantly by Premium Times and The Cable. Both also appear to be building platforms that allow extensive ordinary-people participation in discourse. The result, as Table 4 shows, is that in their relatively shorter history, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, and The Cable have endeared themselves to the people far more than the traditional press and, as a result, built up digital assets to reflect this. It partly explains while they have been selected as case studies for this study, of which detailed explanations will be provided in the methodology chapter.

Table 4: Digital Assets of Selected Newspapers as at October 8, 2021 (Olaniyan, 2021)

**DIGITAL ASSETS OF SELECTED MEDIA**

| | PUNCH (1976) | GUARDIAN (1982) | TRIBUNE (1949) | SAHARA REPORTERS (2006) | PREMIUM TIMES (2011) | THE CABLE (2014) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FACEBOOK | 1.77m | .799m | 1m | 3.21m | 1.23m | .458m |
| TWITTER | 3.3m | 1.7m | .364m | 3m | 1.3m | .521m |
| INSTAGRAM | .587m | .312m | .127m | .861m | .223m | .022m |
| YOUTUBE | .0014m | .0010m | .0012 | .348m | .0012 | .001 |
| ALEXA RANKING | 12 (Nig.) 1,221 (World) | 65 (Nig.) 6,180 (World) | 208(Nig.) 20,765 (World) | 92 (Nig.) 11,286 (World) | 33 (Nig.) 3,578 (World) | 190 (Nig.) 15,023 (World) |

Nevertheless, there are ways in which the developments of the last twenty years in Nigeria are aided by and fit into socio-political changes in the global context. The changing media landscape post-1999, during which these new publications were established and began altering the rules of engagement with readers, should be understood in the agenda-setting age of new media and its impact on politics. As already noted, many believe Sahara Reporters and other platforms like it are influenced by the guerrilla journalism that characterised the military era and is, in the belief of some like Adebayo (2006), actually the product of the moment, much like The News, Tell and Tempo had been. Adebayo noted at the launch of Sahara Reporters in 2006:

> As the Nigerian military state naturalized and sheer lawlessness became the norm, military tactics also infiltrated the press. Obeying the dictates of self-preservation, which is the first law of nature, journalists were no longer willing to trust their fate to a state, which murders its own citizens. Hence the rise of the 'guerrilla journalist,' an insurgent with a mobile typewriter who operated outside the laws as an intellectual sniper. Now, the journalist as journalissimo has arrived: an insurrectionist with a laptop who has carried the battle to the state from global space. It is the age of the new kids on the blog.

Regardless of the contributions of such journalistic approaches, there are ethical issues relating to the new online publications. Those approaches have often included unorthodox and aggressive news gathering methods, sometimes outright presentation of falsehood as facts by activist journalists, as well as the tendency for citizen journalists to embrace the ‘spectacle’ to

boost ratings. These have attracted criticism on the penchant of citizen journalists to cross ethical lines (Elliot & Spence, 2018). Other ethical issues centre around the contestations on who can be regarded as a journalist in the new media era, with the unorthodox methods deployed by non-professional journalists leading to questions about their operations within the space. Jenkins and Thorburn (2003), in their detailed study of the connection between new media and democracy, document the rise of independent media, beginning with Indymedia.org, to serve as platforms of alternative political perspectives.

In addition to the desperation to attract traffic and publish sensational news as a way of doing this, there are also concerns that online journalists are untrained and, therefore, inadvertently contributing to the growing problem of fake news. Winston and Winston (2021, p.4) call attention to this by making the point that "all journalism is information, but not all information is journalism". While the role of citizen journalism as producers of alternative news is acknowledged, the argument that institutional media appear to guarantee more reliable information is difficult to fault. Ireton and Posetti's (2018, p. 21) argument that "professional standards for ethical and accountable journalism are an important defence against disinformation and misinformation" only strengthens the view that citizen journalists have lowered the standard of practice.

In addition to the issues of misinformation and disinformation, access by these digital-born publications to donor-funding is another source of concern. Across the world, journalism is under severe economic pressure due to the digital disruptions.

As shown in this chapter, the economic pressure for the Nigerian media is more severe as a result of years of economic mismanagement, hence, the attraction to donor funding. However, as Scott, Bunce and Wright (2019) highlight in their critique of donor-funded media, the impact of that source of funding may not be on the quality of journalism itself but on issues bordering on ethics. Their study on the implications of donor funding found that "the boundaries of journalism itself that may be most affected by foundations… including 'the values and role perceptions of journalists (the news-advocacy boundary) and the boundaries of what constitutes professional journalistic practice" (Scott, Bunce & Wright, 2019, p.2051). Gadzekpo and Paterson (2019) also raised similar concerns, questioning the flow of Western and Chinese aid to African media, because, like all foreign aid, they aim to push certain Ideologies. Of the funders' agenda setting, Schiffrin (2017a) quotes Leon Willems of Free

Press Unlimited, an organization based in Amsterdam, as expressing fears about what it means for editorial independence: “I understand that donors want to specifically contribute to certain topics that they think need support. But as a journalist, I think this is a scary tendency that infringes on media’s independence and in (our) mind the independence is crucial for public’ trust. Donors have to be cautious not to be too interventionist.”

This chapter has detailed the emergence of the activist new media post-1999 in response to the perceived gap in the media for critical and investigative reporting to keep political leaders in check. The press, hitherto the preferred channel for political communication and moulders of opinion during the campaign for independence and against the military, has struggled since 1999. Faced with economic hardship, many are being forced into making editorial compromises that are eroding public trust. With increasing evidence that media owners are willing to sacrifice public good in order to preserve their personal interests, a new set of more aggressive, digital-born publications have emerged to fill the void left by institutional, traditional media. Buoyed by donor funding and a vastly improved telecommunications infrastructure, these new publications have established platforms that are appropriating user-generated content and providing access in ways that have endeared them to ordinary Nigerians. Their aggressive, investigative style stands in contrast to the moderate approach of the more established press.

If military crackdown was the disruptive force during the years of military rule, the media faces a new threat in the shape of new technologies of journalistic production that are being adopted for the propagation of alternative narratives. New media, which has become more widely adopted in the years since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999, is changing the business model in unimaginable ways, precisely because of perceptions that traditional media is discriminatory and biased (Obijiofor, 2015). It is changing the communicative environment by providing platforms where those seeking alternative channels of communication are either creating or mobilising around online news platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, and The Cable.

However, while the growing adoption of these new media as channels of communication may serve the needs of ordinary citizens, it is not without its problem. Citizen journalism is breaking down some of the boundaries that once prevented the spread of disinformation and fake news (Titcomb and Gentzkow, 2018) and, therefore, undermining its inherent potentials. In a country

where recent estimates put the total daily circulation figures of the 15 most prominent national newspapers at just under 300,000 (Ariyibi-Oke, 2011),[34] the impact of the expanding space for communication through non-institutional platforms control is potentially a big and intriguing one. Moreover, where online platforms are presenting themselves as strong alternatives to the press, the issues are more critical for the democratic process and Nigerian democracy. The rise of citizen journalism and the popularity of new media platforms as channels of communication should not obscure the obvious issues. New media may be serving those who feel left out by traditional media but is relatively more susceptible to manipulation and abuse.

**Conclusion**

The media has been impacted by the developments experiences in the fourth republic but whether these have produced any dividends are still open to question. The reform of the telecommunication sector improved internet connections while the relatively more conducive political environment appears to have provided the fertile environment for a more engaged and wider citizen participation in the media space. In the same period, traditional media appear to have lost its appeal among many Nigerians. However, the quality of democracy in the fourth republic suggest that the media has failed to capitalise on these positive developments to exert a more constructive influence on the political process. This gap between the potential that the new environment provides and the weak performance of the media post-1999 has been highlighted by Ogbondah (2018) and Idowu (2018) who are both critical of the missed opportunity to positively impact the political process.

The excesses and the drawbacks of new media have not escaped the attention of media analysts who have noted that the emerging phenomenon raises ethical questions. For instance, Oso, Odunlami and Adaja (2011, p.18) say that, while convergent media allows ordinary people to participate in the communicative space, “at the professional level, the arrival of the blogger on the Nigerian media scene raises some ethical and political/national issues chief among these is the question of sources, their veracity, reliability, and authenticity”.

[34] Circulation figures are highly controversial in Nigeria as the newspapers struggle with dwindling sales. There is a non-functioning Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), and so there is no audit of circulation. An independent audit by the Advertisers Association of Nigeria in 2009, the last of its kind was disputed by industry, and the report was published in only one national newspaper presumably because the report was unfavourable. Recent estimates are even less than the figures published by ADVAN.

The forthcoming chapter will provide a more detailed conceptual background for the study by critically examining the connections between the media and democracy; the emergence of new/digital media; and what it portends to democracy. The chapter will interrogate the contestations around the media as a public sphere by critically analysing issues of participation and access, alternative and activist media, participatory/citizen journalism, and how these apply to the Nigerian environment.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# THE MEDIA IN A DEMOCRACY: A NORMATIVE INQUIRY

## Introduction

As the previous chapters have shown, the media has been an integral component of the development of the Nigerian nation. The earlier chapters have also detailed the media's role in the years leading to Nigeria's independence in 1960 and during the military era by highlighting the contributions of an independent, critical media to modern-day democracies like Nigeria (Adebanwi, 2011; Yusha'u, 2018). However, and as argued in previous chapters, independent media began at a time when political activists who were involved in the early history of Nigerian media saw their newspapers as extensions of their political structures to promote their ambitions and that of their parties (Akpojivi, 2018; Omu, 1974; Adebanwi, 2004). This early influence has endured and continues to shape journalism practice in Nigeria. The result is a mass media that is relatively more vibrant than most in Africa but too close to the establishment to be considered genuinely free (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2020; Ogbondah, 2018; Idowu, 2018).

The shortcomings that have been observed post-1999 and the emergence of more critical and adversarial digital-born newspapers are focusing attention again on the role of the media in democratic Nigeria. Those normative inquiries into the media and its constitutional role in democracies have been around for as long as nations have been ruled democratically; and are relevant for two reasons. First, is because democracy is still evolving, hence, the need to examine the media in the context of its local environment. Second, as the role of the media and journalists or those who can be addressed as a journalist has now been altered by new media tools, an assessment of the media must take all this into consideration. This chapter will examine the origin of democracy, trace its developments over the years, examine its variants especially in the context of Africa, and consider why the term remains contested in scholarship.

## Democracy - A Short History

The argument surrounding the connections between the mass communication media and democracy appear to have been dialectically settled over the years. Many scholars now accept that a vibrant mass communication media is crucial to the success of modern democracies (Nordenstreng, 2000; Christians et al., 2009; McChesney, 2004).

Democracy continues to evolve, and while deliberative politics may appear to be the most popular variant, there are reasonable grounds now to question the one-cap-fits all application of the term outside developing countries like Nigeria (Papacharissi, 2010). Then, Web 2.0 and the affordances of convergent media have radically altered the media business that its role in a political environment that is itself in a state of flux needs to be critically re-examined (Min, 2018; Papacharissi, 2010). Thus, the need to critically examine the historical development of democracy and the role of the media in sustaining democracy.

From its origin in Greece more than 2,500 years ago, and as it made its way through Europe and the United States to the rest of the world, democracy has been defined in different ways and has meant different things to different people. What then is the most acceptable description of democracy? What makes for a functional democracy? Should the term be applied to forms of government in all nations including those in Africa, irrespective of cultural and historical differences? Where is the optimism that accompanied the spread of democratic ideas from the 1900s and a century later? Derived from two words: the Greek 'dēmokratiā' which was coined from dēmos ("people") and kratos ("rule") in the middle of the 5th century (BCE), democracy described the political arrangement in Athens and other Greek city-states (Ober, 1999; Raaflaub & Wallace, 2007).

In its original form, though, the term described a system that put power in the hands of a few rather than the people and, therefore, is significantly different from what we now know as democracy (Cartledge, 2007; Raaflaub, 2007). From that imperfect administration of ancient Greek cities, the idea of citizens (demos) and kratos (rule) has evolved over the last two and a half centuries to mean an ideal and inclusive form of government that is the basic form of measuring development.

In addition, as Raaflaub and Wallace (2007, p.22) point out, "democracy is constituted through institutions, practices, mentalities, and, eventually, ideologies"., As such, finding an acceptable description for the term will require looking at the 'what' and 'how' of this form of government. In its simplest form, democracy is defined as "a system of government in which the people can choose and replace their leaders in regular, free, and fair elections" (Diamond, 2019, p.34). For Christians et al. (2009, p.91), democracy in whatever form is sovereign and "represents the triumph of the rule of the many over rule by the few". As both descriptions show, for any form of government to be considered democratic, it must meet certain minimum conditions. Dahl

(1998) expands on the value-driven description by differentiating between ideal and actuality, where the former represents what is considered desirable, and the latter speaks to the conditions that make the ideal achievable. This value-based description is evident in Norris's (2000, p.23) definition of democracy as encompassing three dimensions: pluralistic competition among parties and individuals; people-participation in the selection of parties and representatives through free, fair, and periodic elections; and freedom of expression and organisation.

Whereas the Athenian 'dēmokratiā' limited access of the dēmos ('people') who could operate the kratos ('rule'), it provided the foundation for representational democracy of 19th century in Europe and North America, and for which liberal theorists like John Locke, John Milton and John Stuart Mill are the leading figures. The liberal theorists focused on the individual and the rights to civil liberty, political determination and equality (Terchek & Conte, 2001). Terchek and Conte (2001); Walker (2001); Faulkner (2001); Cunningham (2002); and Schapiro (1943), all highlight the preoccupation of these early thinkers with the liberty of man, and the influence they had on liberal democracy.

Locke's arguments for equal rights were laid out in his 'Second Treatise on Government', in which he stressed the equality of all humans and sovereignty of the individual, each of whom he said possessed the rational capacities to enable them to make personal choices (Dunn, 2003; Shapiro, 2003). Mills, on his part, focused on expanding personal freedoms. He argues in 'On Liberty' and 'Considerations on Representative Government', that enhancing personal liberty and especially the freedom of thought and opinion was beneficial to society at large and a condition for progress (Kateb, 2003; Bromwich, 2003). While Milton, in 'Paradise Lost' and in what is interpreted to be a repudiation of the monarchy, makes the case for the legitimacy that derives from the people being ruled by those who are worthy of such office (Campbell & Corns, 2008). The exclusionary model that began in Greece made its way to Europe and North America and, by the Eighteenth century, began to show elements of inclusiveness (Dahl, 1998), influenced in large parts by the works of Locke, Mills and Milton.

The Athenian model of democracy, as exclusionary as it was, was the basis of and has inspired the variants of elective governments across the world in the last two centuries. Huntington (1991), whose use of waves to describe the shift from non-democratic to democratic regimes within a period, highlighted three such changes beginning from 1826. The first wave was interrupted by the World War II but was followed by a second short-lived wave that saw thirty-

six countries being identified as democracies by 1962. The third wave, began with the Portuguese Revolution in 1974, bringing changes to Latin America, parts of the Asian Pacific, Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. As Doorenspleet (2000), in his review of the three waves, correctly notes, each of the waves was followed by a reverse wave. There were periods when regimes slipped back into non-democratic forms. The waves have failed to inhibit the general and worldwide acceptance of the ideals of democracy, though what form it was practiced over the ages is still subject to arguments.

In its purest form, democracy would be a system of government that allows equal and active participation for all adults, who are politically enlightened and whose will as expressed in regular election cycles is supreme. For this to happen though, there is an assumption that institutions such as the judiciary, the press and security forces are independent and enhance the democratic process. If defining liberal democracy is straightforward, the question of whether those ideals can take root outside the West, where institutions are traditionally weak, is far more complex.

Liberalism and democracy appear to be well-suited to each other, promoting and protecting each other. Mounk (2020, p.393) says of this suggestion, “It is not just that we care both about the popular will and the rule of law, both about letting the people decide and protecting individual rights. It’s that each component of our political system seems necessary to protect the other”. The criteria, and the way they were weaponised in the ideological war between the West and the East, especially during the cold war, are often cited by critics of liberal democracy. The criticisms centred on the way America and the West pushed liberal democracy as an ideology that was capable of solving all developmental problems. Regardless, and given what now looks like Fukuyama's (1992) overstated optimism when he made those kinds of arguments in ‘The End of History and the Last Man,’ there are questions on this variant of democracy. Particularly with regards to its application in places like Africa, which are culturally different to Europe and North America. His book was built on a 1989 essay ‘The End of History’, written at a time when socialism was collapsing, and the end of the Cold War had forced the East into retreat. Thus, providing the backdrop to his declaration that liberal democracy had won the ideological war.

In an introduction to the book, Fukuyama (1992, p.xi) argues that a “remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism” and that liberal democracy may constitute the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government". While his arguments, highlighted by Tharoor (2017), essentially suggested that globalisation would help spread liberalism across the world and that the rule of law and institutions would provide the foundation for lasting peace, they have failed to materialise.

The market recession; increasing influence of authoritarian nations like China and Russia; the existential threat to the European Union; and the resurgence of right-wing nationalism across the globe all suggest the ‘End of History’, and fuel Fukuyama’s own worries about the survival of liberal democracy (Tharror, 2017). Yet, it appeared Fukuyama’s arguments were logical because the end of the second World War and the Cold War appeared to have fostered the expansion of liberal democracy across the globe (Freedom House, 2020). The Economist (2018) noted these gains, stating “in 1941 there were only a dozen democracies; by 2000 only eight states had never held a serious election”. It also noted the struggles to maintain the momentum after the financial crisis of 2007-2008, and the fact that most assessments suggest that this was indeed the case. The Economist (2018) stated in an article with the ominous title, ‘In Retreat: After Decades of Triumph, Democracy is Losing Ground’:

> The latest survey by Freedom House, an American think-tank, is called “Democracy in Crisis”. In 2017, for the 12th consecutive year, countries that suffered democratic setbacks outnumbered those that registered gains, it says (see chart 1). According to the Democracy Index from The Economist Intelligence Unit, a sister company of *The Economist*, 89 countries regressed in 2017; only 27 improved.

As to why liberal democracy is unravelling, Freedom House (2020) attributed it to the rapid expansion that followed the end of the Cold War and the fragile foundation for the fundamental changes that were required. “As that momentum has worn off, many countries have struggled to accommodate the political swings and contentious debates intrinsic to democracy. Rapidly erected democratic institutions have come under sustained attack in nations that remain economically fragile or are still riven by deep-seated class or ethnic conflicts” Freedom House said in its report.

Fears over the long-term survival of the liberal democracy that has been championed by the West are not new but have recently resurfaced. This time, with more apprehension of what the future portends (Edel, 2018; Woods, 2019; Rachman, 2018; Mandeville and Mitchell, 2018; Cartledge, 2018). Giddens (1999) decried what he termed the "paradox of democracy," a term he used to describe the people's disenchantment with politics and procedure in more mature democracies. The election in America of President Donald Trump, may signal the ascendancy of populist governments across most of the free world, but appears to have pushed democracy closer to the precipice (Mounk, 2020; Gawthorpe, 2020). The worrying signals have been there that, "political corruption, polarization, and decay" were disillusioning people and threatening politics both in the United States and elsewhere (Diamond, 2019, p.4).

Such failures have always been exploited by populist politicians who challenge "the legitimate authority of the 'establishment" and who "claim that the only legitimate source of political and moral authority in a democracy rests with the people" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p.4-5). They add that that "populist rhetoric seeks to corrode faith in the legitimate authority of elected representatives in liberal democracies. But the revolution finds it easier to destroy the old than rebuild the new" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p.6). Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p.5), who argue that populism is a contested concept, however, stress that "all forms of populism include some kind of appeal to "the people" and a denunciation of "the elite." Accordingly, it is not overly contentious to state that populism always involves a critique of the establishment and an adulation of the common people". As Norris and Inglehart outline, populist leaders like to depict themselves as outsiders intent on disrupting the status quo to the benefit of the people. However, they "draw fuzzy lines between the interests of the state and their personal interests – along with that of their family and cronies" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p.6).

In Africa, this tends to involve fearmongering and spectacle, feeds on governance issues and how they affect the vast majority of the populace impoverished by corrupt politicians (Akpojivi, 2020). The appeal to and exploitation of popular sentiments have put people in power around the world and undermined democracy. Diamond's (2019) frank assessment of American democracy is shared by others who decry the erosion of the same principles that have been used to promote multiparty elections in the free world, and as a result encouraging authoritarianism in many countries (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Those fears might not be misplaced given the way the electoral success of populist leaders in some of the most developed

democratic nations is changing the whole notion of politics and threatening the very basis of liberal democracy.

Those liberal principles, Diamond (2019) suggests, made their way through the free world on the strength of American and Western European promotion but are now threatened by two geopolitical powers, China and Russia. Modern-day democracy, based on the principle of representation, was born in the era of print media, freedom of expression and public opinion. However, it has witnessed bitter contests since the seventeenth century. Though different from the more direct format of the Greek model on which it was built, democracy is loosely understood to mean the form of government where people have a say in who rules (Diamond, 2019; Dahl, 1998). Nevertheless, the early influences on democratic theory were originally motivated by principles other than liberty. Plattner (2012) describes how John Milton and John Locke, motivated purely by the liberal project of enlightenment rather than concerns for individual liberty or democracy, led the struggle for a free press in England. He also notes how in their writings, first, Spinoza 'Theologico-Political Treatise' and then, David Hume 'Of the Liberty of the Press', made the connection between freedom of expression, liberty of the press and representative democracy.

Both philosophers argued for the freedom of man to think and to communicate with others. They believed that freedom of expression could best be achieved only in a democracy. Regardless of the how it has been transformed over the ages or its variants, there appears to be some agreement on the elements of a good democracy. Diamond and Morlino (2003), who examined what constitutes a good democracy, based their assessment on the three criteria: procedure, content and result. Using these criteria, they suggested that a good democracy would be one which provides space for people to freely participate in the political process; where that participation is on an equal basis; and where people can exercise some level of control over public policy and policy makers though well-established institutions.

> Such a regime will satisfy citizen expectations regarding governance (quality of results); it will allow citizens, associations, and communities to enjoy extensive liberty and political equality (quality of content); and it will provide a context in which the whole citizenry can judge the government's performance through mechanisms such as elections, while governmental institutions and officials hold one another legally and constitutionally accountable as well (procedural quality) (Diamond & Morlino, 2003, p.22).

In other words, they argue, a system of government would not be democratic unless it (i) is established on the rule of law, upon which the rights, privileges and responsibilities of everyone is enshrined; (ii) allows competitive participation, where everyone, regardless of status, race or religion could potentially compete for and hold office; (iii) is competitive to the extent that there is fair, open and regular competition among political parties and individuals for office; (iv) promotes accountability to ensure that political office holders can be called to answer for all their actions; and (v) upholds freedom, including political, civil, and social (or socioeconomic), which enables political participation and the checks and balances needed for accountability. If the quality of a democracy depends on these sets of elements, it is no doubt why early media were considered a central part of the process.

For instance, Diamond and Morlino (2003), in their analysis of how political participation can be achieved, note the limitations involved and, therefore, suggested education as a means of bridging a social divide that could prevent people from participating in politics. "A fundamental condition for widespread participation in a good democracy is broad diffusion of basic education and literacy, and with it a modicum of knowledge about government and public affairs" (Diamond & Morlino, 2003, p.24). This is a principle highlighted by Plattner (2012), who, referencing two pieces of legislation on both sides of the Atlantic, argued that the early press was established primarily to promote different ideals. The first piece of legislation, a 1766 Swedish royal ordinance regarded as the first law to expressly guarantee press freedom, was written to promote "enlightenment in various useful subjects," which "promotes the development and dissemination of sciences and useful crafts" (Plattner, 2012, p.65). The second, an "October 1774 letter from the First Continental Congress to the people of Quebec," in addition to the promotion of enlightenment, lists freedom of the press as one of five rights that will make life meaningful for people.

The press, by this piece of legislation, was required to (i) advance the truth; (ii) facilitate communication between the government and the people; (iii) accommodate all viewpoints and unite the people; and (iv) keep watch over oppressive officers and shame them (Plattner, 2012, p.65). Min's (2018) suggestion that the birth of journalism is tied to democracy reinforces the spirit of the second piece of legislation as well as the referenced works of Spinoza and Hume. It also highlights his argument that disenchantment with journalism may not be unconnected with the crises of democracy itself. This presupposes that this study is taking the view that

democracy rests more with a free independent media, without which other pillars including regular elections are threatened.

**Democracy And Its Limitations**

There are at least five reasons the democracy should be cautiously applied, especially in Africa. First, as Ake (1982) strongly argues, the Western idea of democracy, much like its intellectual foundation, is imperialistic. This is because it focuses on shaping African countries in the mould of countries in the rich North.

> Western social science scholarship on developing countries is imperialism in the sense that (a) it foists, or at any rate attempts to foist on the developing countries, capitalist values, capitalist institutions, and capitalist development; (b) it focuses social science analysis on the question of how to make the developing countries more like the West; and (c) it propagates mystifications, and modes of thought and action which serve the interests of capitalism and imperialism (Ake, 1982, p.1).

Ake further suggested that the Western theory of political development followed the need to preserve its hegemony across the globe. This was then exploited in an attempt to sustain the exploitative post-colonial socio-economic relationships that links liberal democratic values to market capitalism.

According to Ake (1982), Western scholarship uncritically backed the questionable policy of conquering African nations, dismantling existing systems, imposing hastily-constructed replacements and signing them off as standard. The arguments are similar to those Ake (2000) made in another book, 'The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa,' in which he criticised the Western liberal democracy as having been too distorted from the Athenian participatory model to make it effective. Second, the postcolonial burden on African countries like Nigeria undermines the very ideals of liberal democracy and, as Ake (1996) and Lancaster (1992) posit, the foreign 'imposition' of self-rule and support for elective governments by the rich West was influenced by their needs to protect selfish national interests. Ake's (1996, p.131) argument that "Northern governments were happy to cooperate with the newly independent African governments in a "partnership in development"; they gave indulgent support to authoritarian African regimes in order to maintain influence and to protect their interests," provokes the sentiments of a disingenuous model of continued exploitation of Africa.

Third, Bates (2010) calls attention to the republican societies found in much of Africa before colonial rule. His point, that "without seeking to romanticize the past, we can note the democratic tendencies that infused precolonial societies in Africa," (Bates, 2010, p.1133) eviscerates any pretensions that the principles of representative government are alien to Africa.

Fourth, and even if it were to be accepted that liberal democracy was bequeathed to Africa and offers the best hope for development, it is difficult to accept that in its best-known form democracy is the most suitable for African countries like Nigeria. Mouffe (2000), who critiques Habermas and Rawls for their theoretical update to liberal democracy, proposes a more inclusive model. She argued in 'The Democratic Paradox' against the form of consensus-building that both Habermas and Rawls pushed; and against what she called the rationalist consensus of the elite. Instead, she canvasses a more-radical democracy that is more inclusive and expansive. Nyamnjoh (2004, p.1) captures it well by his assertion that Africa's struggle to successfully implement the Western model of liberal democracy is evidence of a clash of values and suggestive of the penchant to ignore the continent's unique cultural realities. He describes the reductionist promotion of liberal democracy in Africa to the Western marketing of slimness around the globe as espoused in the Barbie doll. "Seen in terms of democracy, Barbie (slimness) is imbued with the mission of freeing the individual of relationships or the excess bulk (obesity) of responsibilities standing in the way of personal consumer success," he argues (Nyamnjoh, 2004, p.1). He adds that such a model of democracy frees the rich from responsibilities and instead fattens the poor with "responsibilities, dependencies and a pounding sense of worthlessness". According to him, his Barbie model takes the form of a dictatorship making life difficult for ordinary people, comparing the insensitivity to the behaviour of "a Lilliputian undertaker who would rather trim a corpse than expand his/her coffin to accommodate a man-mountain, or a carpenter whose only tool is a huge hammer and to whom every problem is a nail" (Nyamnjoh, 2004, p.3).

Fifth, and perhaps summarising the other four reasons, there are reasonable grounds to interrogate the question of whether there is an African-style democracy. The real questions are whether, as Bates (2010) argues, democracy was already rooted in Africa in the form of the social organisations that helped to run communities or whether there is a uniquely African-style democracy that is distinct from the liberal democracy imposed by the West. For instance, Gumede (2015), Lopes (1996) Mohiddin (1970) have all questioned the Western imposition of liberal democracy and suggested that its failure to take root is because the African element is

often ignored and discounted. On what the African democracy looks like, Gumede (2015) says it "is best defined as an adaptation of the worst kind of colonial methods and systems combined with the worst kind of African traditions, behaviours, laws, and practises, the result being 'a "democratic" system of toothless democratic institutions staffed by docile incumbents and unending empty rhetoric about democracy".

In addition, he argues the "African-style democracy is often the most minimalist, most limited and most elementary kind of "democracy." It is often based on the premise that democracy is only about elections: if an election takes place, the country is supposedly democratic". This is clearly at odds with the ideals of liberal democracy that was held up as a universal standard at the end of the Cold War and helps to explain why it has failed in places like Africa. It also highlights the question of a lack of commitment among African nations to the implementation of democracy in its purest forms.

The failure of nations like Nigeria to build state institutions like the judiciary and the police, as well as half-hearted commitment to the separations of power, all affect the quality of democracy. Bates (2010) and Gumede (2015) amplified arguments that had been pushed by others including Obadare (2006), who suggests that ethno-cultural groups and religious groups should be considered as constituents of democracy. However, as access into and qualification for leadership positions in those groups are restrictive, those assertions must in themselves be qualified. Religious groups and age-grades are by their nature exclusionary and, therefore, suggesting that they represent an African variant of democracy might be stretching the arguments, even if those organisations encourage participation.

In trying to make sense of what democracy means to the African audience and why the continent has struggled with appropriating the benefits of the ideals, Diamond (2007, p.2), citing the relatively poor quality of governance across most of the continent, identifies what he calls the "pathology of personal rule" as one major impediment to the development of institutions. By this he is referring to the neo-patrimonial structure which combines "the formal architecture of a modern bureaucratic state - constrained in theory by laws, constitutions, and other impersonal rules and standards - with the informal reality of personalized, unaccountable power and pervasive patron-client ties" (Diamond, 2007, p.2). He suggests, as do Obadare and Adebanwi (2013), that this structure promotes ties that "radiate down from the biggest "big man" – the autocratic president - to his lieutenants and allies, who in turn serve as patrons to

lower-level power brokers, and down to the fragmented mass of ordinary citizens, who are trapped in relations of dependence on and support for their local political patrons" (Diamond, 2007, p.2). Nigeria is an interesting case in its resemblance to Diamond's (2007) analysis, gaining independence from Colonial Britain without having to take up arms, yet failing to build on this. Sixty years after independence, and countless elections later, there are still question marks over whether the country's democracy is truly participatory.

Two civilian administrations and seven military regimes between 1960 and 1999 did not result in the building of institutions that would deepen democracy, as the country still struggles to deal with its "political, historical, and cultural realities" (Ohaegbulam, 1999, p.414). The country's democracy continues to reflect those realities and the contradictions they represent. Ohaegbulam, in his analysis of the basis of Nigeria's struggle with democracy (see p.415-416), cites five elements as reasons why six election cycles in the fourth republic have failed to translate into stable democracy. It might not be a comprehensive list, but these salient factors are: the national question; shallow nationhood; poor political institutions; bad political leadership; and military intervention. They appear to sum up Nigeria's political history since 1960 which has been examined in Chapter 1.

As detailed in Chapter 1, the very idea of the Nigerian nation and its faulty beginning has created ethno-religious gulfs that have only widened to accommodate the mass communication media. In other words and based on the arguments of both Diamond (2007) and Ohaegbulam (1999), democracy in its purest form will continue to elude Nigeria and the rest of Africa. This will continue for as long as the institutional frameworks that allow equal and active participation for all adults who have equal access to the media and who know that their electoral choices made at regular cycles are upheld by the rule of law are in place. As the arguments in the section on 'Divisive Politics and the Media in the First Republic' suggest, the Nigerian media is still largely fractionalised along ethnic ownership. These division, which means political and business leaders can appeal to ethnic sentiments and find support among media practitioners from their ethnic groups, erodes the unity that should bind Nigeria politically. There is sound reason to believe that as Oso, Odunlami & Adaja (2011) argue, journalism suffers when practitioners behave as if their allegiance is to ethnic groups rather than the nation.

**Democracy and the media**

The question of the media's role in a democracy had agitated thinkers and scholars even before the first newspaper was established in Nigeria. From Alexis de Tocqueville's early attempt to critically analyse the role of the press in American democracy (Plattner, 2012), this inquiry has remained a permanent feature of media and political scholarship in the democratic world. Tocqueville, in his 'Democracy in America' published in 1835, identified the press, along with political parties and civil society, as channels for the formation and dissemination of public opinion. Therefore, they were more important than other institutions and the constitution (Plattner, 2012). Across the Atlantic, Edmund Burke coined the term 'Fourth Estate' to refer to the press, in addition to the Clergy, Aristocracy and Commoners in France. He made the point that while its role might be informal, the press had real political power (Hampton, 2010). Both Plattner (2012) and Hampton (2010) note the sub-constitutional role of the press in those early days and suggest that it derived its de-facto power and influence from the people and evolved into a crucial component of modern democracy.

As to the importance of the media to modern democracies, McNair (2011) provides some indication with his suggestion that modern democracies are marked by constitutionality, participation and rational choice. He goes on to argue that for the people to be able to make informed choices, political contests must be public, and choices made based on public opinion.

> The importance of an informed, knowledgeable electorate dictates that democratic politics must be pursued in the public arena (as distinct from the secrecy characteristic of autocratic regimes) … while democratic theory stresses the primacy of the individual, the political process nevertheless demands that individuals act collectively in making decisions about who will govern them (McNair, 2011, p.17).

Those decisions, Negrine (1994) adds, come from the knowledge and perception of political and social problems and their resolution, all of which are provided by the media. Beetham and Boyle (2009) expand on the media's role in modern democracies by listing other functions, in addition to providing a channel for public opinion, including acting as a channel for promoting government programmes. They add, however, that the media's role goes beyond being used for government propaganda, and includes "to investigate government, to inform the public, to provide a forum for political debate, and to act as a channel for public opinion and popular pressure to reach government" (Beetham & Boyle, 2009, p.21). Considering the contestations around the best form of democracy, and by extension the normative role of the media,

Scammell and Semetko (2018) go further by differentiating between the assigned roles in different democratic models (see Table 5).

While reference to democracy in this study is to the model that has been influenced by classical liberal thinking, the differentiation by Scammell and Semetko (2018) is perhaps more useful in highlighting some common grounds, much like Beetham and Boyle (2009). As the table shows, whether the reference is to classic liberal, direct democracy, competitive elitism, pluralism, neo-pluralism, libertarianism, or participatory democracy; the media is expected to perform four roles: (i) information; (ii) representation; (iii) watchdog; and (iv) propaganda.

Table 5: Media and its democratic duties (Scammell and Semetko, 2018, p.xli)

| Theory | Information | Representation | Watchdog | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classic liberal | Media essential for information and education of an informed citizenry | Media essential for representation of competing opinion/electoral parties | Free media essential as counterweight to the state<br>The state conceived as separate from civil society | |
| Direct democracy (Socialism) | Media essential for information and education of an informed citizenry | Limited media role<br>Principles of direct and delegate democracy reduce need for media to represent opinion | No watchdog role necessary<br>The state subject to direct control<br>No concept of public opinion separate from the state | State propaganda necessary against internal and external enemies of socialism<br>Media necessary for transmission of social goods: art and culture |
| Competitive elitism | Information essential for the (self-selecting) elite | Media essential for representation of competing opinion/electoral parties | Watchdog function essential | Propaganda necessary: between states, for competing parties, for mass consumption |
| Pluralism | Media essential for information/education of citizenry | Media essential for representation of competing interests/groups | No need for watchdog against the state<br>State neutral<br>Watchdog role against powerful groups | Social training of citizens<br>Democratically responsible press |
| Neopluralism | Media essential for information/education of citizenry | Media essential for representation of competing interests/groups | Watchdog role against prospect of 'guardian' state<br>As above re interest groups | Responsible media essential for representation of competing interests/groups |
| New Right/Libertarianism | Media essential for provision of informed citizenry | Media essential for representation of competing opinion/electoral parties | Free media essential for watchdog role | New Right: propaganda inevitable and necessary for the state against enemies |
| Participatory democracy | Media essential for informed citizenry<br>Open, free information system | Media necessary for representation of competing opinion/electoral parties<br>Principles of direct democracy reduce need for mediated representation of opinion | Watchdog role implicit, against state and powerful interests | |

Even if these normative roles were to be accepted, it leaves the question of their wholesale application to African countries like Nigeria still open to contestation. The wholesale application terms such as 'liberal democracy' or the media's 'role' in it has been validly challenged by the likes of Rodny-Gumede (2017), Nyamnjoh (2004; 2011), and Akpojivi (2018), largely because they fail to consider Africa's unique culture and history. The African media, founded as it was in the colonial era, struggles to accurately define its role under postcolonial governments and issues of freedom, independence, and the plurality of the media are contested (Wasserman & Benequista, 2017). Banda, Mudhai and Tettey (2009, p.5) identified those variants listed by Scammell and Semetko (2018) in three democratic models

of democracy in Africa, "occurring at specific historical moments" and reflecting "some of the features of the seven varieties of democracy listed above". These, they go on to say, are: (i) the diffusion/modernization model which sees the media as agents of modernity; (ii) the dependency-dissociation, which treats new media as continuing dependence on Western forms of technology and politics; and (iii) the participatory-communication model, which stresses the importance of cultural identity and democratization/participation at all levels. They, therefore, align with others who urge caution when analysing democracy in Africa.

Regardless of the shortcomings, the normative approach serves as the starting point for assessing the Nigerian media in this study. The obvious questions then would be, how well has the Nigerian media performed in those identified roles? Have they served as effective channels of political information? How well have they accommodated all viewpoints? How diverse is the ownership and control of media assets? Is the media a watchdog or a lapdog? Has the media allowed itself to be used as propaganda channels? Obijiofor's (2015) description of a media that favours the elite and the emergence of digital-born newspapers post-1999 suggests that the Nigerian media may have been failing to live up to expectation with regards to many of its normative functions. As noted earlier, the media's role is guaranteed under Section 39(1) and 39(2) of the 1999 constitution, the FOI Act, and Section 22 explicitly guarantees the role of the media as a watchdog.

However, as Olukotun (2018a) and Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) have highlighted, the media is struggling in its role as watchdog. Despite constitutional guarantees, the Nigerian media is only partially free and currently ranked 115 out of 180 countries in freedom. Reporters Without Borders[35], which tracks press freedom across the world, says of Nigeria, "Nigeria is now one of West Africa's most dangerous and difficult countries for journalists, who are often spied on, attacked, arbitrarily arrested or even killed" (RSF, 2020). Freedom House equally ranks the country as only partly free with an Internet Freedom score of 64 out of 100. Press freedom indicators like the ones published by Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House are often not transparent, and Becker, Vlad and Nusser (2007) raised fears in their article 'An Evaluation of Press Freedom Indicators' in which they questioned the methodology. "The methodologies employed in creating these indices of media freedom are not always transparent,

[35] As referenced in the works of Becker, Vlad and Nusser (2007), rankings like those of Reporters Without Borders are highly contested because of fears that they represent Western systems of assessing democracy and the media

however, and charges are often made about biases in the underlying assumptions behind them. Nor are the conceptual bases for the indices always obvious" (Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007, p.5). Burgess (2010, p.3), who also evaluated press freedom indices, cited the tendency to default to "a homogenous view of mass media," as well as the impartiality of panel members as grounds for questioning the rankings.

I have noted in earlier sections the radical and adversarial influences on the early press as well as the contributions of the media in the period before independence and under military rule. I have also detailed the gaps that appeared post-1999 when institutional media appeared to have lost its way and its ability to perform its normative role. The emergence of more aggressive and adversarial digital-born newspapers and the way they are filling a void in investigative journalism is central to this study. The next section will examine new media and its impact on politics. It will also critically review arguments regarding whether and how this is changing the effectiveness of the media in performing its normative role**.** The emergence of new technology that connects computers, communication and content, or what Jenkins (2006) calls media convergence, allows ordinary people to perform acts of journalism that are changing political communication. New media has changed the consumption pattern for media content and is impacting society in profound ways.

Since Toffler (1980) in 'The Third Wave' brought attention to the emerging consumer habit of consuming and producing at the same time, the culture he called 'prosumer' has gone mainstream. This is a culture that McQuail (2008) points out is changing the power equation by shifting the balance of power from traditional media organisations to ordinary people. Rosen's (2012, p. 13) famous reference to "the people formerly known as the audience" who seek to be noticed and who desire a power shift calls attention to the complete transformation of the media user. Empowered by the affordances of new technologies, the media user is no longer passive but has been transformed into "the writing reader. The viewers who picked up a camera. The formerly atomised listeners who with modest effort can connect with each other and gain the means to speak – to the world, as it were" (Rosen, 2012, p.13).

Despite the profound impact of new media on media use and society at large, it is essential to keep in mind the fact that for all the optimism about new media, and despite fears about the long-term survival and continued relevance of television, radio and newspapers, traditional media remain key in many media markets. In response to digital disruptions, many have

adapted and embraced new technologies to improve their practice and efficiency (Newman, 2009; Daniels, 2014). This understanding of the impact of new technology of Internet-mediated mass communication necessitates an interrogation of its impact on the way people interact; the attractions that make new technologies ubiquitous; and why media consumption has moved from passive engagement to people actively being involved as prosumers.

These questions will allow us to critically analyse how our politics is also changing as a result of the disruptions to the way journalism and the media are forced to work. Although the Internet has changed journalism and the media in profound ways by enabling ordinary people to create content, form communities, and, therefore, mobilise around social and political causes, was developed as a communication tool for a different purpose. From its beginning in the Advanced Research Projects Agency's Wide Area Network (then called ARPANET) in the 1960s, the Internet now connects computers across the world using telephone lines and cable (Slevin, 2000). Initially meant to enable collaboration between military, business and government researchers, the Internet now has social and political applications, and has been adapted for networking (Castells, 2002). The networking and connections encompassing digital text, graphics, voice, video and computer programmes are vital to the Internet's adaptability and public attraction (Meikle and Young, 2012).

One of the features of modern-day democracy is the primacy of collective decision-making regarding who represents the people in government (Dahl, 1998; Fraser, 1990; Voltmer, 2006). Gunther and Mughan (2000), Scammell and Semetko (2000), and Negrine (1994) all make the same point, that the media is the channel through which political communication is conducted and which helps the formation of collective opinion. The collective decisions that define deliberative politics require a rigorous discursive process that translates individual viewpoints into public opinion and can potentially determine voting and shape public policy (McNair, 2011, p.17).

The process is significant because, according to Moeler (2008, p.185), the media is key to the deepening of democratic values "when they themselves become more accessible and more accountable, when they put out more information and when they work hard to ensure accuracy". The media in Habermas' (1989) model provides the platform and processes the collective viewpoints. His description of the public sphere, the ideal communicative environment that allows private citizens to come together to engage in 'rational critical debate'

models the media and its primary role of providing the space for a free exchange of ideas. This is also what liberal theorists called the market place of ideas (Campbell & Corns, 2008; Browmwich, 2003).

The Habermasian public sphere borders on access and participation and allows for critical analysis of the media's role in modern democracies (Navasky, 1998; Agre, 1998). The clear connection between Habermas' coffeehouses and contemporary media, including new media, is evident (Navasky, 1998; Agre, 1998; Papacharissi, 2002; Dahlgren, 2005). Therefore, an assessment must consider easy access into and participation in mediated discourse. Traditional media is reputed for its “hierarchies reflecting their own centralized, top-down model, with distinct control points,” but the exclusive gate to what constitutes newsworthy content has been uprooted by the affordances of new media (Gillmor, 2006, p.45). The traditional and hierarchical model works against the principle of equal access and participation and is one of the major criticisms against institutional media. This is also one of the reasons advanced for the optimism for new media and citizen journalism. The fact is the media ought to promote pluralism and deepen democracy by connecting people (Gunther & Mughan, 2000) and informing them (Scammell & Semetko, 2000).

However, McNair (2011, p.156; 205) argues that "… politics has become not only a persuasive but performance art, in which considerations of style, presentation, and marketing are of equal if not greater importance than content and substance”. Referencing King (1987, p.10), he adds that access to the media is strongly influenced by ‘performance factors’ such as “situational credibility, perceived sincerity, and rhetorical skill in conveying the message”. Stressing the importance of performance politics and its effect on access and participation in the media, McNair (2011, p.151-152) calls attention to disadvantaged groups which struggle for access and participation in traditional media. This is because they (i) lack the funds which enable the elite to make news and set public agendas; (ii) they are unable to afford qualified professional and skilled creative personnel, advertising and public relations material, etc.; and (iii) they, therefore, do not have the 'cultural capital' held by political actors – the credibility and authority which tends to accrue to officeholders and members of recognised elite groups. As noted by Scammell and Semetko (2000), Bittner (1989) and Min (2018), media practice is shaped by the political and regulatory framework, but the normative approach makes the same demands of media regardless of where they operate.

Commended for its performance in the pre-independence years and assistance to activists, as noted earlier, the Nigerian press struggled during post-independence due to political and economic changes (Uko, 2004). Uko notes that the media thrived under military rule but was also complicit because journalists lost the moral high ground. Yusha'u (2018), in a more recent assessment of the Nigerian media, identifies four broad categories including the clientelist-political newspapers; the commercial newspapers; the online and diasporic newspapers; and the local language newspapers. His approach provides some indication of the level of access and public participation their ownership models permit.

Of the clientelist-political newspapers (like Sun, Daily Telegraph and Nation), he notes that they "are those established by politicians, former or existing government executives while holding public office or immediately after leaving office," and whose owners "have business, family and political interests even if there is an unlikely visibility of their interest in the coverage provided by these newspapers" (Yushau, 2018, p.8). He goes on to argue that the commercial newspapers (like Daily Trust, Punch, Vanguard, The Guardian, This Day and Leadership) "are privately owned newspapers managed by professional journalists," but in line with the classical liberal model, with 'profit-making' as their motive (Yushau, 2018, p.9).

In addition to these ownership models narrowing the space for minority voices in the media, the overall operating environment is equally important. The harsh economic environment and digital disruption discussed in Chapter 3 means news organisations operate under a more competitive environment, mostly on a tight budget. This sometimes leaves many journalists either poorly paid or going for several months without pay at all. The result is that many are succumbing to cash-for-stories to survive (Skjerdal, 2010; Nwabueze, 2010; Idowu, 2018). In addition, media houses are more likely to put advertising and business considerations before editorial.

To the extent that the media remain central to nurturing democracy and the convergent media is hailed as liberation technology (Diamond, 2012; Morrissett, 2004), it is necessary to highlight the impact of the changes produced by new media on political communication. Van Dijk and Hacker (2018) cite the emergence of spreadable media in contrast to the sticky media of traditional media, and remixing, a hybrid media system where political communication freely moves between broadcasting or print (offline), telephony, email, messaging, websites

and social media. Spreadability and remixing are critical to our understanding of new media because power is generated from critical mass.

If new media is important for establishing and sustaining liberal democracies, and if networks derive power from critical mass, any assessment of the performance of new media ought to focus on the kind of access it provides (Olaniyan, 2014). The question of access and participation are defining principles in looking at alternative media as defined by Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008). Their reference to participation in the media, by non-professionals is indicative of the enlarged space for diverse views in the communicative space as well as the opportunity that new media offers minority groups to self-present. For this inquiry on how new media is being used for political activism, the question is whether there is equal access for everyone, what determines this access, and who controls the access. If the events of the last decade are considered, it is easy to take the appropriation of convergent media by ordinary people to bypass the media's strict top-down model as a sign of improved communicative environment.

Such ability to bypass "hegemonic mass media gatekeepers by navigating through the online sphere to inspire collective political and social involvement" is evidence of real progress (Mutsvairo, 2016, p.3). There are at least two reasons why it is difficult to conclude in the affirmative. According to McNair (2011), Sitglitz (2017) and Atal (2017), the extent of latent control the political elite have on the media cannot be easily dismissed. While McNair (2011) alludes to lobbying and the use of physical force, both Stiglitz (2017) and Atal (2017) cite financial incentives as the means by which such control is exercised.

The questions then would be, how has convergent media been appropriated by ordinary people to engage politically? Are there realistic alternatives to traditional media? Additional questions would be whether everyone in society, irrespective of social class, has equal access to the media. The next section will examine the increasing influence of new media as an alternative channel of mass communication and how the ordinary, but relatively more active, people are appropriating these affordances to make their voices heard.

**Conclusion**

This chapter interrogates the normative role of the media in a democracy. Such an inquiry sets the framework for the critical analysis of the performance of the media in Nigeria during the fourth republic. In examining the concept of democracy, its historical evolution has been explored and situated within the normative role of the media as an enabler. That role is rooted in the pioneering works of liberal theorists like John Locke, John Milton and John Stuart Mill, who focused on issues of civil liberty, political determination, as well as equality.

While the liberal democracy exported from the West is touted as the bedrock of development, its failure in South-East Asia and Africa suggests a cautious use of the term. It also reinforces the arguments about the existence of other variants, especially given cultural differences in other regions outside the West. Hutchinson (1991) makes similar arguments by maintaining that modern democracy is often associated with the development of a nation-state. He then goes on to suggest that there have been three waves of democratisation, with a wave representing the shift from non-democratic to democratic regimes, with Nigeria classified as being the third wave.

Those contestations about what variant of democracy is best for Africa or whether the processes in most African countries including Nigeria can be described as democracy should not becloud the arguments. This study has taken Dahl's (1998) work as the basis for defining democracy as the system of government that allows equal and active participation for all adults who are politically enlightened and whose will, as expressed in regular election cycles, is sacrosanct. The gap between what liberal democracy entails and what countries like Nigeria practice has, therefore, been highlighted. The challenges with African democracy have equally been critically examined in a way to address any confusion about the media's place in it. The failure to develop democratic institutions in the years since independence has a direct bearing on the quality of democracy and governance and is sure to continue to deprive Africa of much-needed development. Whatever the variant in Africa, the media as the enabler is still charged with providing the platform that allows people unfettered access to education and deliberations that enhance democratic practices. Whether or not they do is still subject of arguments. The next chapter will examine some of those arguments through a critical review of the political economy of the media.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## Introduction

The mass media has long been regarded as crucial in helping to build societies. Leo Bogart (1998, p.4) suggests that "representative democracy is inconceivable without forms of mass communication – to create awareness of public issues that face a society". Others, like Mulroney (1998), believe that society will struggle to achieve freedom and prosperity without free media. These beliefs that the media determine the quality of life and affect politics to this extent lead to obvious questions. Questions like: Who owns the media? What business model is used? What cultures influence their production? are necessary for any critical analysis of the media or its role in democracies.

While there may be no consensus on what effects media content has on people, McQuail's (2010) distinction between media effects, whether or not they were intended, and media power, which is the potential to influence, suggests close scrutiny of the media is needed and beneficial. This chapter will critically examine the issue of ownership, control and access into the mass communication media in Nigeria and the broader implications these have on democratic processes.

At the heart of this study is the question of the role of the media in the Nigerian democracy. The idea is to interrogate the performance of the Nigerian media in the fourth republic by revisiting the long-standing debate about ownership and how it affects access into the media space and the ability of the media to fulfil its constituted duties. To address the proposed research question on ownership and control, access and power relations affecting media production, the study will adopt critical political economy theory inspired by the pioneering works of people like Karl Marx as well as public sphere theory as propounded by Jürgen Habermas. This chapter will explain in detail the choice of both theories as the preferred tools of analysis and explain their suitability for the study.

## Critical Political Economy of Communication

Smythe (1960, p.594), one of the first to apply political economy to analysis in cultural studies, also acknowledged the scarcity of resources as a fundamental principle. Political economy he said, is "concerned with how mankind arranges these scarce resources with a view toward

satisfying certain needs (and leaving certain other needs unsatisfied)". This, he added, involves two questions: (i) who gets what scarce goods and services, when, how, and where? (ii) Who takes what actions in order to provide what scarce goods and services, when, how, and where? He went on to argue that the "central concerns of the political economy of communications … are the policies by which communication agencies are operated, and the structures which they assume" (Smythe 1960, p.572). This includes broad policy areas of production; allocation; capital, organization, and control. In other words, the political system, which invariably controls the economic relations between people, influences the media system.

The media system is crucial because it is the main channel for the discussion of and aggregation of what is the people's culture. Baran describes culture as "socially constructed shared meanings" (2014, p.9). In their analysis, Murdock and Golding (1973) call attention to the fact that mass media are commercial businesses of critical ideological importance and that this should be the basis for analysing the media. "The obvious starting point for a political economy of mass communications is the recognition that the mass media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organizations which produce and distribute commodities," and that "in addition to producing and distributing commodities, however, the mass media also disseminate ideas about economic and political structures. It is this second and ideological dimension of mass media production which gives it its importance and centrality, and which requires an approach in terms of not only economics but also politics" (Murdock & Golding 1973, p.205-206). They also argue that capitalist media have a double role in fostering commodification and ideologies.

The ideological value also attracted the attention of Garnham (1986, p.24), who averred that "the purpose of a political economy of culture is to elucidate what Marx and Engels meant in The German Ideology by 'control of mental production'". Of central importance to this study, Murdock and Golding (2005, p.61) also distinguish critical political economy of communication, which they argue analyses "the wider structures that envelop and shape everyday action, looking at how the economic organization of media industries impinges on the production and circulation of meaning and the ways in which people's opinions for consumption and are structured by their position within the general economic formation". They add that the analysis starts with sets of social and power relations. For instance, who owns, and controls media assets is significant in analysing the media because of their overarching influence on editorial policy. They also note that political economy is "interested in seeing how

the making and taking of meaning is shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations" (Murdock & Golding 1973, p.205-206). What makes critical political economy relevant is that "it always goes beyond situated action to show how particular micro contexts are shaped by general economic dynamics and the wider formations they sustain" (Murdock & Golding 1973, p.62).

In other words, do ownership and control of media assets affect the messaging on platforms and confer ideological advantages? Garnham (1990, p.30) goes further to add that "one of the key features of the mass media within monopoly capitalism has been the exercise of political and ideological domination through the economic" and also to enumerate two types of intellectual production, payment of ideologues by profits or wages; and industrialisation of the superstructure or the commodification of culture. As a communication research tool, this tradition focuses on the relationship between an economic structure and the media industry, and in this focus on the base and the superstructure. Garnham (1990, p.23) cautions against falling into what he describes as the "twin traps of economic reductionism and idealist autonomization of the ideological level". He also argues for shifting attention from seeing the media as ideological creations of the state to seeing them as economic entities with clear roles both as direct "creators of surplus value through commodity production and exchange as well as indirect creators of surplus value in other sectors of commodity production like advertising" (Garnham, 1990, p.23).

Communication studies and research efforts in this area see the media as part of an economic system with close links to the political system (McQuail, 2010). These links have helped to shape the research focus from region to region. Where issues of increasing consolidation of media are significant issues in North America, class power and class struggle issues are dominant themes in places outside of the West. American corporations are dominant in the media space and have used their positions to push their ideology to the rest of the world. In the developing world, the dominant theme is often the relationship between the media and socio-economic development. According to McQuail (2010), the main strength of this approach to media research is its ability to make propositions about the market that can be empirically tested. For instance, cultural studies has a broader approach to cultural analysis because it believes that culture – including media products – is ordinary and produced by social actors rather than by an elite, as is the case in political economy (Mosco, 2009).

So, where political economy of media looks at the political and economic dimensions of communication, critical political economy, which would be the preferred method of analysis in this study, "describes a tradition of analysis that is concerned with how communication arrangements relate to goals of social justice and emancipation," and have media control and ownership as their primary focus (Hardy, 2014, p.3). The real question suggested by Hardy's position is whether the Nigerian media at present is able to champion social justice and emancipation. If, as highlighted earlier, ownership is a shackle and prevents it from truly professional production and distribution of content, then it would appear that the answer is an obvious no. Wasko (2004, p.311) made a similar point when she said, "studies of ownership and control, political economists document and anlayse relations of power, a class system, and structural inequalities".

What is evident from the foregoing is that there are many descriptions of political economy and many approaches to studying the media; however, as Fuchs (2009, p.6) has suggested, a unity of the different approaches is possible if a "model that focuses on the Marxian division into production, circulation, and consumption as three differentiated and connected dialectical aspects of the economy" is used. As illustrated in the analysis of the media in this study, critical political economy is interested in: (i) how capitalism or ownership affects the media and the cultural industries; (ii) how different classes of society are affected by this model which is designed to make profit (iii) how social and economic factors affect access into the media; and (iv) how corporate ownership affects what the media produces. Essentially then, critical political economy interrogates how all these factors affect discourse and, ultimately, the political process.

**Communication, Contest For Access and Control**

Applying critical political economy to media analysis means asking the obvious question, how do ownership, size and control of the production process, and the distribution of media content affect the production and distribution of media content? Smith (1977), who cites what he called the invisible hand of the market, argues that this invisible hand would allow wealth to flow from the richest to the poorest. This position is dialectically opposed to Marx's position that the market polarises wealth, enriching only a few and pauperising many. Unlike Smith, however, Marx (1867) argues that the collective ownership of resources is the only way of ensuring an equitable distribution of wealth. Where Smith's argument assumes that people

would act out of self-interest, and to the betterment of all, Marx assumes that people would act out of solidarity and for the good of society as a whole.

The Marxian assumption that people will act in the collective interest is easily tested by critically questioning communication media content. McNair (1998) defines news as a social construct, suggesting that there are many factors like the prevailing operational environment that affect and shapes news. Herman and Chomsky (1988), in their propaganda model for media analysis, focused on the operational environment by listing political and economic filters like size; ownership; revenue source; source of information; regulation; and ideology, which affect news production.

Media size became an increasingly critical factor with the concentration of ownership across America and Europe, resulting in the domination of the global communication by Western media corporations. Concentration rode on the back of two developments - the free market and globalisation. At the outset, they were hailed as packed with benefits for the rest of the world and sold as accessories to liberal democracies. O'Neil (2006, p.15), who pushed this notion, said a "free market brings with it a free press that supplies the diversity of opinion and access to information that a citizenry requires in order to act in a democratic, responsible manner. The free market, journalism, and democracy form an interdependent trinity of institutions in an open society". Backed by agreements pushed through the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) by G7 nations, the liberalisation of media markets and telecommunications became a standard that was supposed to benefit all nations (Wilkin, 2001).

However, the impact of globalisation and the free-market on Africa and other places where the Bretton Woods institutions sold one-size-fits-all economic solutions along with questionable gains from liberal democracies, suggest otherwise. The oligopolistic tendencies of global media corporations and the level of control they wield over the production of cultural products diminish diversity. This is supposed to be the real benefit of the free market (Golding & Murdock, 1997). Ultimately, they negatively impact society as McChesney (2012) notes in his paper 'A Real Media Utopia'. One other obvious problem is that it is difficult for new entrants in any segment of the market to break in. Scholars using structure–conduct–performance (SCP) and concentration ratios to measure market concentration, found most of the media industry in the US and the industrialised world "are characterized by oligopoly or monopolistic competition," with this type of market structure mostly expected to "influence aspects of

market conduct including pricing behaviour, product development strategy, advertising strategy, and new product strategy as well as the propensity to cooperate or compete" (Flew, 2011, p.89).

These corporations are dominant in the American market and across the whole world. Winseck (2011, p.38) calls attention to the dominance of the Western media corporations with a graphic description. He noted, "in 1998, the US media market accounted for one-half of all worldwide media revenues; in 2010, the figure was less than a third. The four largest Anglo-American markets—United States (1), United Kingdom (5), Canada (8), and Australia (12)—still account for about 44 percent of media revenues worldwide, but this is a drop from 60 percent in the late 1990s". Apart from the US, China and Russia have also been spreading their own ideology on the continent through media content. Thus, putting Africa at the centre of another contest involving major world powers for control and influence (Wasserman, Gadzekpo & Paterson, 2019; Schiffrin, 2017a; Harding & Burke, 2019). The contest for the market and minds in Africa is not new, the continent has already witnessed exploitation of cheap labour and resources by multinational corporations that controlled different territories from a single policy centre (Arrighi & Saul, 1973).

This raises crucial questions regarding the immense power that comes from distribution of such cultural products (Garnham, 1990). As well as the financial gains that have accrued on them, which allows them to produce at profit, hindering other players (Murdock & Golding, 1977, p.20). The obvious questions arising from all of this are twofold. First, can media products like the ones produced by these corporations and which eliminate other providers and some users be good for society in the long run? Second, most of these corporations have perfected the industrial production processes that exploit entertainment themes and turn them into profits in the way that the likes of Disney and Cable News Network do. As such, can this Disneyfication of media content really advance the public interest?

Downey (2006) highlights three questions that are relevant in analysing the relationship between media companies and their products. Those questions are: Does ownership matter? Do size and market share matter? Does internationalisation matter? These are useful in this essay as they provide a road map in this analysis. Both Winseck (2011) and McChesney (2012) strongly argue that size and ownership matter in the aftermath of globalisation. For economic reasons, the dominant players in the Nigerian media market are either wealthy individuals or

their associates. They have been joined lately by new operators using donor funding. This raises new questions of the new-liberal influences of its own. The new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters appear to offer alternative channels but it is difficult to see any difference in the way their platforms are set up. China's increasing media operations in Africa and the 'soft power' associated with it have been highlighted as another form of hegemonic struggle for Africa (Maweu, 2016; Wekesa, 2016). While this may represent a contrasting or competing narrative to the Western one; it is still viewed with suspicion by most media audiences across Africa. The general perception is that the more established commercial media in Nigeria limits access, while the new digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters are more open. However, the new approach of using donor funding is fraught with problems including external influences on editorial direction. Additionally, the heavy reliance on a web architecture that is controlled by profit-making neo-liberal corporations raise the question of how much control digital-born newspapers have on their production process.

Media scholars have always singled corporations like Disney, CNN and, more recently, Google and Facebook as illustrations of the intersection of politics, economics and culture in contestations over mass communication media. They are perfect examples of oligopolies which have developed and perfected the commodification of cultural products and thrive on privileged associations with sister companies (Mittell, 2010). This model, known as synergy, incorporates five "hypothetical possibilities for a corporation to derive economic benefits from conglomeration across media and media-related industries," including diversification, repurposing, cross-promotion, branding of media content and exploitation of subsidiary rights (Flew, 2011, p.92-93).

Critical analysis of their models sheds light on how political, economic and cultural factors intertwine to affect the mass communication media and its ability to perform its normative role. The implications for Africa and the relatively less developed media markets of the global South are that such well-drilled and financed corporations control the narrative through their news production and reporting. The impact of 24-hour television programming pioneered by CNN, for instance, led the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996), to describe the channel and similar ones as operating like the sixteenth member of the Security Council.

Some scholars have noted that Marx, whose work on class struggles is a major influence on political economists, focused not on individual ownership but rather on the actions of collective ownership and the assumption that oligopolies in capitalist economies may not really work together (Downey, 2006). Regardless of this and of the fact that companies like Disney, CNN and the others cited are publicly owned, the global media system in which they operate requires them to push the corporate and commercial agenda of owners" (McChesney, 2010). In doing this, he points out that corporations with a global network like CNN denigrate and ignore whatever is not beneficial. Also noteworthy is that CNN is significantly funded from advertising, unlike the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which is funded by TV licence fees. The limits and shortcomings of funding through advertising, especially as it affects content production, are well noted (Bagdikian, 1999). Aside from the impact of advertising, ownership and sources of funding also impact corporate culture.

The Walt Disney Company is another clear example of a multinational media company with interests in everything from production to distribution. With five main divisions, Disney appears to have perfected the art of commodifying communication, with brands, cartoon characters marketed across different platforms – Disney, ABC, Pixar and Marvel – the aim being to maximise profit. It's the kind of formula referred to by Klein (2000), whereby corporations ruthlessly exploit cheap labour across their global operations and then use the profits on branding, on advertising, and to strengthen their positioning in people's mind. The ownership structure of corporations like Disney and CNN in turn affects their business model and the corporate culture, which is often too significant to ignore, especially because they are involved in the production of what is considered a cultural product.

In practice, Oligopolies tend to narrow the space for competition and, therefore, limit the choices available to the consumer (Golding & Murdock, 1997). According to Mittell (2010), concentrated media markets are beneficial to the companies but do not guarantee the benefits of free markets to the consumers. Another downside to holding a sizeable market share is that the increasing profitability of such ventures enables the corporations lock down segments of the market. This pattern, while not visible in Nigeria, is operational in the more developed media markets such as South Africa, where a few corporations dominate. Here, the industry is dominated by big players such as Naspers; Caxton Publishers; and Arena Holdings (Wasserman, 2020), which affects diversity both in the management of the news production process and, ultimately, the narrative (Brodie, 2019).

The commercial model has been copied by media organisations across the world and in Nigeria, where the media serves only the elite for profit reasons. In reality, people without the economic means of participation are excluded from the communicative process. The elite control noticed in the African media and highlighted by people like Obijiofor (2015) threatens the democratic process. This will be analysed in this chapter and in the presentation of data collected for this research. There are also cultural implications for the critical examination of media ownership and control. In Nigeria, for instance, the largest television and radio networks are the government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), which, because of state support, hold an advantage over their commercial competitors.

As Murdock (2011) highlights, cultural and communication goods are uniquely important in their relationship to what he calls the commodity culture and ought to receive attention to prevent their exploitation and harming the common good. The model has worked to perfection and leaves other players and the rest of the non-Western world second best, regardless of the power new media tools offer. Putting the influence of the corporations in perspective, Patelis (2013, p.122-123) notes:

> the strategy for colonizing the web has to a large extent been successful. Oligopoly social media services as well as Google's indexing services now constitute a uniform interface, the cultural text at the heart of the web. It is as familiar to us as a Hollywood movie, so much so that many of us identify it with the web itself: we refer to our daily structured network experience through Windows, augmented by Explorer, scanned by Google, and enriched by Facebook.

Culture is what binds society and is important because, as Schlesinger (2015) argues, cultural policies combine with those on the media, communications, heritage and the arts. The globalisation of culture and communication he referred to, and which is illustrated by the operations of corporations like the CNN and others, strengthens arguments like those by Murdock. The consequences of such practices are highlighted by Murdock and Golding (2005, p.60), who argue that political economy allows for the analysis of "how different ways of financing and organising cultural production' impact the 'range of discourses, representations and communicative resources in the public domain". Communication being a shared experience, the question of how commercial mass media organisations and other for-profit

communication platforms advance a people's culture is pertinent. Additionally, and as Sierra (2015, p.137) maintains, "all symbolic production is the inevitable result of a process of exchange and translation that is culturally mediated by the entire social system" This means cultural systems influence the media. Even if the arguments of cultural systems are discounted, the globalisation of media still raises questions about content produced centrally and distributed across cultures without regard to local differences (Hardy, 2014).

As contemporary media is the modern-day equivalent of the public sphere described by Habermas, television news such as the one that CNN produces, can equally be subjected to the query regarding access to its space. Being a subscription-based network would suggest that CNN shuts out those who cannot afford to pay; but there are other inherent problems in the news production process. According to Iyengar and Kinder (1987), networks have the power to determine what receives priority attention. In highlighting this problem, they described priming, the practice of "calling attention to some matters while ignoring others," and note that television news, changes the "standards that people use to make political evaluations" (Iyengar & Kinder, p.63).

With this in mind, the question of whose agenda CNN and other such broadcasters pursue is a legitimate query similar to the question of whether, contrary to its pretences, CNN has the interest of anyone outside of its fee-paying audience and its shareholders at heart. This is an area of interest to political economists, who understand how the "media and communications serve to sustain the interests of the wealthy and powerful" and how they "are connected to the ways in which power is sustained through meanings" (Hardy, 2014, p.11). Does commercial media serve the political interest of the elite who can afford to pay? Can a media funded by the elite represent everyone? These are not in themselves new questions but in the context of the emerging trend of new, digital-born newspapers appealing to Nigerians, they become more important.

**The Critical Political Economy of New Media**

Vujnovic et al. (2010, p.285) note that "journalism is a particularly relevant enterprise" in the context of Robert Babe's labelling of economics, markets, and technology as hegemonic doctrines. This is because its "core premises include a desire to democratize communication, widen information exchange and narrow the gap in civic participation" (Vujnovic et al., 2010,

p.285). However, Pereira (2009) says that, in the convergent media environment, critical political economy can also help uncover how and why it is difficult to achieve access to the media apparatus and content. The ecosystem of new media is unique, offering unending possibilities but equally vulnerable to abuse.

One of the features of that ecosystem is the easy access and participation allows ordinary people to become publishers in ways that traditional media does not. This feature, however, undermines the credibility of platforms and, ultimately, democracy. New media platforms including social networking sites are powerful platforms and command large global followership, with more than half of the world's population active on one or other social networking site. Facebook has 1.7bn average daily logons, 2.6bn monthly users, while Twitter has 166 million monthly average users and 300 million daily average users. They are among the biggest platforms and are the new media equivalent of Disney, CNN or what McChesney calls "killer applications" (2013, p.130).

Detailing the way new media corporations emerged by exploiting capitalism and became so big they threatened democracy, McChesney alludes to Google's domination of the search engine market; Microsoft's near-total domination of computers through its Windows operating system; as well as Apple iTunes dominant market share of digital music downloads. Like Disney and CNN before them, these digital corporations have exploited the network effect, software, technology standards and patents to strengthen their stranglehold on the global market (McChesney, 2013; Bartlett, 2018). Their size and dominance put them in a powerful position as tools for "capturing, manipulating and consuming attention unlike any other" and "means power over those media – be it the power of ownership, of regulation or clever hacking – is of immense political importance" (The Economist, 2017).

Though Nigeria does not have the kind of media concentration operating in other African countries like South Africa, the pattern of ownership still confers powers on media owners similar to the one being wielded by the likes of Facebook, CNN and Google. Wealthy media owners like Raymond Dokpesi (AIT); John Momoh (Channels); and Bola Tinubu (Nation, TVC, Max FM) are building networks of stations across the country's major towns. Additionally, it shields the owners from the rigorous scrutiny that they ought to be subjected to because of their involvement in national politics.

The huge cost needed to establish competing media platforms only enhances their hold on the markets and, therefore, limits diversity in content. This may help explain the high mortality rate of media companies, with the limited funds combining with mismanagement and the harsh economic environment to ensure they never last long enough to challenge the better-funded ones. While new media allows relatively more people access into the media, the barriers to such participation – in terms of the device and Internet connection – still means that many are excluded from the communication process. Disparities have been found across different regions of the country in Internet usage mostly due to economic and social factors (Adeleke, 2020).

Aside from their size and user numbers, the ideological paradigm of corporations is problematic because content – including those labelled fake - are created for commercial, political and sometimes propaganda purposes (Hirst, 2017, p.87). They add that, "the commercial motive behind journalism is to make money by selling the news commodity." With the commodification in the new media age effected through either a "simple aggregation of eyeballs that involves the audience in the active 'work' of viewing content" or "the category of audience labour that actually creates content which is then appropriated by media capital without payment" (see p.87).

They further add that, "both types of labour are essential to the circulation, commodification and valorisation of fake news via digital channels and platforms" (Hirst, 2017, p.87). Haridy (2017) argues that the sharing and clicking of links by social media users is inadvertently driving the growth of fake news websites, with many people building profitable businesses around such user habits. According to him, those kinds of businesses thrive by using believable headlines that appear to come from reliable sources (Haridy, 2017).

The capital gains made possible by Google's AdSense no doubt fuels the process (Davey-Attlee & Soares, 2017; Boyle, 2017) and has drawn many into digital labour, sometimes with some of the content makers working in industrial styled operations (Subramanian, 2017). The contribution of such free labour is key to understanding the ecosystem of new media. Many scholars, including Wittel (2012), and Fuchs and Sevignani (2013) believe it is essential to focus on the concept of free or digital labour. The argument being that the "capital accumulation model of contemporary corporate internet platforms is based on the exploitation of users' unpaid labour" (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013, p.237).

To understand the place of free labour in the power of new media, it is useful to remember that Marx (1867, p.129) says a "use-value, or useful article therefore has value only because abstract human labour is objectified or materialized in it" and that the worker "creates surplus-value which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of something created out of nothing". Silverman and Alexander (2016) highlighted the financial rewards of ordinary people using capitalist tools in their personal spaces by working long hours.

The financial rewards from questionable websites have lifted whole regions economically with many enjoying the backing of roguish governments bent on exploiting the popular social media networks for political propaganda (Earle, 2017). Additionally, the automation of fake news production through the use of special computer programming has been cited as a reason for the growth in production and distribution of fake news. Citing scholars (Hwang et al., 2012; Messias et al., 2013; Ferrara et al., 2016), who have called attention to this phenomenon, Bessi and Ferrara (2016; and Shao et al. (2017) noted that algorithmically controlled social bot accounts are used to produce and distribute high volumes of fake or manipulated content. Sometimes this is carried out by governments "during elections or moments of distinct, and country-specific, political conversation or crisis" (Wooley, 2016).

In addition, bots can "inflate a topic's importance…by manipulating the currency of Twitter: likes and shares, follows and retweets" (Kupferschmidt, 2017). Twitter, some studies have found, is especially susceptible to abuse with as much as 50 million profiles suspected to be bots (Ferarra, 2017). Some have been found to send high volumes of "automated, election-related tweets" in the run up to the US general election (Stropper, 2017).

However, and regardless of the financial reward to ordinary people who use the capitalist tools to produce content, the ultimate winners are the corporations who own the platforms. Framing themselves as free tools that connect and empower people, corporations like Facebook, Twitter and Google which provide platforms that serve these purposes have grown rich and powerful in the process. Patelis (2013, p.118) captures this well in her critique of monopolistic tendencies of platforms like Facebook:

> the commercial nature, as well as the oligopoly structure of the social media market, is to an extent the unfortunate consequence of the way capitalist democracies have designed their media. In having been developed by corporate capitalism, social media

> have a congenitally double nature: on the one hand they are the loci of fulfilment of communications that are central to the functioning of democracy, indeed, for society as a whole; while on the other hand, they must realize profits.

As mentioned already, critical political economy is suitable in interrogating the way ownership of major Nigerian media organisations and new media platforms influence content production and distribution. For instance, there is a temptation to tag new media platforms as alternative media because they foster relatively more open access into and participation by ordinary people. However, the inquiry will focus on whether there is any real difference in the production process and to what extent ordinary people are allowed involvement in that process. It will also allow for a critical evaluation of how new media platforms like Sahara Reporters and Premium Times are being used for citizen journalism and the implications for political processes in Nigeria.

In addition, it will allow the researcher to critically examine the credentials of activist new media to providing anything that is fundamentally different to what traditional media offers. Among other shortcomings, Pereira (2009) also notes the fact that critical political economy often stresses the existence of dominant ideology; so, the theory is suitable to query the pretences of the activist media about their ideological differences when compared to traditional media. Quoting Garnham (1986), he says this leads to social subordination and cultural influence over audience's beliefs. In other words, hegemonic tendencies and the commitment to profit-making by the media organisations determines access and participation in the media space.

This, therefore, suggests that the application of political economy should be approached with caution. Alternative media as practitioners often see themselves as challenging the dominant and more commercial forms of media production and distribution (Fuchs, 2010). He distinguishes elite journalism, which focuses on producing content solely with profit in mind and the critical media characterised by critical form and content. On the surface, new media practitioners in Nigeria may appear to be opposed to the status quo. As they are involved in social movements and advocacy, they appear to fit into the alternative media description. However, Hamilton (2000) notes in his critique of this model that in their quest to become influential and powerful to effect change, they end up adopting the same capitalist business models of the media they seek to replace.

It is, therefore, reasonable to critically interrogate whether new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable, are viable channels as alternative media when they neither own and nor control the technologies being used for their operations. In addition can they be described as alternative media while they are trying to build profitable media businesses using the same capitalist models of the traditional media. If political economy helps address the contestation issues around the control of production and distribution in the mediated communication environment, it does not address those of access and representation, which stem from one of the critical questions of this study – do new media represent reliable alternatives to traditional ones? The very concept of alternative, it should be noted, suggests not only the availability of choice but also a challenge to the conventional.

**New Media As the Public Sphere**

As the previous section shows, critical political economy is useful in the critical analysis of the ownership and control of communication resources, as well as how these affect media content and the potential impact on people. Therefore, it is a suitable tool to answer some of the research questions like whether new media provide real alternatives for political communication or how the ecosystem is encouraging or hampering political discourse. Critical analysis of the ownership and control of platforms by corporations already suggests the balance of power is against people who are supposed to be empowered by new media. Equally, the commodification of user-generated content by the mainstay of new media questions the credentials of the digital-born newspapers as 'friends of the people'.

For the other main questions of how digital-born newspapers are being used for citizen journalism and whether or how to hardcode its useful features to political communication, Habermas' (1989) theory of the public sphere provides a useful tool of analysis. These questions relate to the normative role of the media as the marketplace of ideas and how well the media provide communicative places for the debate of issues and the formation of public opinion (McNair, 2000). This line of inquiry requires a critical examination of the issues of equal access, participation and representation in media spaces, for which the public sphere is well-suited. However, and as the example of Google’s actions in the Chinese market has shown, corporations are more likely to sacrifice users for their long-term profit. Vaidhyanathan (2011) describes how Google became enmeshed in controversy over attempts to censor content

and how it eventually let down users by closing part of its operations to satisfy the Chinese government but left others to continue exploring business opportunities.

The public sphere is ideal when considering this line of questioning because it suggests that for a media system to serve the interest of all people, it should ideally provide equal access to all viewpoints, whether they represent all classes, religions or races. Habermas (1989), who is credited as the source of this theory, argued that the structural transformation of the public sphere enabled individuals in society to meet in a communication environment to discuss matters of public interest to all. In other words, as the ideal public sphere described by Habermas served the purpose of providing access, autonomy and equality for participants (Habermas, 1989), his thesis provides a good theoretical foundation for most media analyses of the role of the media (Navasky, 1998; Agre, 1998).

Habermas' public sphere is the earliest and arguably most enduring analyses of the media and their role in the formation of public opinion. Habermas (1989, p.28) said the public sphere was conceived as the "sphere of private people come together as a public…to engage them in a debate over the general rules' governing relations". The public sphere was open to all citizens who debate issues of general interest without fear. He details how from the 17th and early 18th century, the rise of the Bourgeoisie encouraged the growth of such spaces of influence, where all viewpoints ought to be accommodated. He credited the public sphere with breaking the economic and social hold of the feudal system and creating new institutions of public authority. It was also credited as the basis for participatory democracy (Habermas, 1989). Fraser (1990) and Mouffe (2000), however, question Habemas' idealistic arena for some of its obvious shortcomings like the exclusion of women.

However, and in spite of criticisms, its reference and application as a normative test of undistorted communication remains legitimate. As Garnham (2007, p.206) reiterates, "the performance of the 'free' press, and public service broadcasting in particular, as well as various manifestations of political communication and political practice, could be held up to and judged against the liberal democratic ideals they so frequently invoked as their legitimation". McNair (2000, p.1) further highlights how crucial the media is in mediated politics, where most of the experience of people come "through their print and broadcast media of choice," with the media providing the space for the formation of well-informed electorate able to select those to represent them. Even if there is disagreement as to whether the "communal communicative

space in which private people come together as a public" exists, "all agree that such a space should exist, and that the media are at its core" (McNair, 2000, p.1).

Expounding on this influence, McNair reiterates the fact that analysing democracies means studying "how the media report and interpret political events and issues; of how they facilitate the efforts of politicians to persuade their electorates of the correctness of policies and programmes; of how they themselves (i.e., editorial staff, management and proprietors) influence the political process and shape public opinion" (2000, p.1). In other words, the ideal communicative environment ought to be independent and accessible to all for it to be useful in moderating discourse and shaping public opinion. Hartley (2002, p.191-192) succinctly captures it when he says the space is "most constructive when not influenced by commercial interests or state control. In its original conception, the public sphere must be insulated from the interests of such dominant powers if it is to be a corrective to them" (Hartley, 2002, 191-192).

A major criticism of the media is that it fails to model the ideal communicative space described by Habermas' public sphere. Livingstone and Hunt (1994, p.11), for instance, acknowledge the media's role in the political process, arguing that "the polity requires some mediated communication with the populace to gain consent" but go on to caution that, "this mediation is not neutral but affects how political processes are communicated".

If Habermas' ideal communicative space as conceived was problematic in analysing the media, the growth and increasing importance of new media makes it more so. According to Navasky (1998), the Habermasian public sphere referred to the press or what he called the Gutenberg medium. However, this has not diminished its association with normative inquiries into the role of mediated communication in the new media era. Navasky (1998), Agre (1998), Papacharissi (2002), and Dahlgren (2005) all highlight the similarities between internet-mediated communication and the English coffeehouses described by Habermas.

They insist that new media is the modern-day equivalent of the public sphere. While Habermas' public sphere, as represented by the coffeehouses, began to die at the close of the eighteenth century, the culture of debating issues of public importance that it influenced has survived in mass communication media and internet-mediated communication (Navasky, 1998; Agre,

1998). Dahlberg (2001), Valtysson (2012), and Papacharissi (2002) all agree that new media is the modern-day equivalent of the public sphere described by Habermas.

As previously stressed, key to understanding the changing behaviour of the media user is the ability of new media technologies to enable new possibilities in the way news is produced and distributed with many non-professionals embracing the paradigm of journalism by the 'people for the people' (Gillmor, 2006). Historically, technology has always been crucial to the development of communications media because it shapes the character of the channel of communication and, ultimately, the message (Ward, 2008 p.8). According to McQuail (2010, p.41), "sometimes technology of communication is applied to a pre-existing need or use," but at other times a particular technology precedes "any clear evidence of need". As communication is a human activity based on the spoken word and the need for social interactions, this unique feature has encouraged some to suggest that the media are human tools that enhance interactions beyond the constraints of space and time (Scammell & Semetko, 2018). So, the media are themselves seen as technologies which aid communication.

The realignment of the relationship between the media and the people is profound since the exclusive power of journalists to mediate political communication is lost due to new tools that allow the public to create and distribute content. Jenkins (2006, p.10) addresses the idea of the blurring of lines between media and the power of technology to strengthen free speech, a concept that was first mooted by Ithiel de Sola Pool. Pool (1983, p.5) was one of the first to make this connection when he said, "freedom is fostered when the means of communication are dispersed, decentralized, and easily available, as are printing presses or microcomputers".

A lot has been said about the commodification of user data, digital labour and how these disadvantage ordinary people (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013), but the growing influence of crowdsourced materials of all types like images and video suggests that media users are motivated by things other than money. The stream of data that has been variously referred to as user-generated content (UGC), citizen journalism and participatory journalism, all describe the content contributed by non-professional media users, who until now had limited room to provide feedback of any kind. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), one of the media giants that embraced the digital disruption and shifting power in Internet-mediated communication, describes UGC as "a wide variety of media content that is produced by our

audiences as opposed to content made by the BBC, independent production companies or individual contributors commissioned by BBC" (BBC, 2020).

In the convergent media era, journalists and news organisations are no longer the only sources of breaking news. Examples such as the 'plane in the Hudson' and the attack on Osama bin Laden's hideout prove that new media, and especially social media, have installed tech-savvy media users as sources. Brooks (2011), quoting Ellyn Angelotti of the Poynter Institute, agreed that nowadays, journalists often respond to news rather than breaking it. For ordinary citizens, access and participation in mediated political communication may be limited, but convergence has altered the media landscape and handed people relatively more control and access through alternative channels (McNair, 2011).

One of the fundamental changes to media and journalism is the enabling of alternative channels of political communication outside the hegemonic control of traditional media and in which ordinary citizens are active participants. As already mentioned, citizen journalism is credited with expanding the space for debate and helping propagate alternative viewpoints. However, what does it mean, and what are the features of the practice? Citizen journalism has been described in many ways, but perhaps one of the simplest is the one by Allan (2013, p.9), who sees it as "a type of first-person reportage in which ordinary individuals temporarily adopt the role of a journalist in order to participate in news making, often spontaneously during a time of crisis, accident, tragedy or disaster when they happen to be present on the scene". Glaser (2010, p.578) describes the practice as the idea of "people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment, or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others".

From the first personal blogs in the 1990s to the formation of social media giants like Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006), citizen creation of content from images, text and videos has advanced from citizens simply witnessing for the sole reason of connecting to social movements that are politically potent. The term, used to describe diverse operations on ordinary citizens performing acts of journalism, can be applied to anything from blogging to Indymedia and aggregation sites.

While many hail new media as energising media users and producing change, available evidence suggests that we take a more cautious approach. First, and despite all the positive uses

to which it can be deployed, there is no empirical evidence to support the notion that on their own, new media can produce democratic changes (Lovink, 2011; Meikle 2002). Second, and probably more important, its susceptibility to being used for production and distribution of disinformation and fake news significantly undermines its democratic credentials. Available evidence suggests that the new order is a threat to the culture of trust at the heart of journalism. As a study by Raghavan (2009) on the use of Twitter during the Mumbai terrorist attacks shows, new communication technologies come with serious drawbacks. That study suggests that while Twitter provided a vast trove of information, there was an equally very high number of unsubstantiated claims. In fact, data collected for this study showed that communication on Twitter during the siege was dominated by opinion and news not cited (Raghavan, 2009). Quoting Clay Shirky, another study on the impact of social media on mainstream journalism noted the tendency to trade speed for accuracy (Newman, 2009).

This was the case when a report on CNN's iReport about late Apple CEO, Steve Jobs, suffering a heart attack and being rushed to the hospital caused the company's shares to nosedive (McKenzie, 2010). If there are doubts about the potentials of new media and citizen journalists to produce political change, they face a much more significant question mark in the form of what is generally referred to as fake news. The term itself has assumed global relevance in recent years because it is often used by President Trump to discredit critical reports of his presidency and undermine democracy (CPJ, 2020; Sullivan, 2020). However, and as Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) argue, fake news as a concept cannot fully explain what is happening with information disorder. First, because it is open to political interpretations; and second, because it is a social construct, it is doubtful if it can be fake (McNair, 1998).

Information disorder, the muddying of free expression that has now been amplified by the new media technologies, is not new but potentially more damaging in the age when democracy itself in on the ropes. Ireton and Posetti (2018, p. 15), in a report for the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), highlight the dangers posed by new media technologies. 'Mobilising and manipulating information was a feature of history long before modern journalism established standards which define news as a genre based on particular rules of integrity,' they argue.

Early records date back to ancient Rome when Antony met Cleopatra, and his political enemy Octavian launched a smear campaign against him with "short, sharp slogans written upon coins

in the style of archaic Tweets." The perpetrator became the first Roman Emperor, and "fake news had allowed Octavian to hack the republican system once and for all' (Ireton & Posetti, 2018, p.15). They distinguish between misinformation, or "misleading information created or disseminated without manipulative or malicious intent" and disinformation, the "deliberate (often orchestrated) attempts to confuse or manipulate people through delivering dishonest information to them" (p.7). Wardle and Derakshan (2017, p.5) added a third variant, mal-information, which describes when "genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere".

Recent studies on fake news show it is fast becoming a widespread problem in Nigeria and other African countries. With the is undermining the credibility of new media in general (Wasserman, 2018; NOI, 2018). A survey by NOIPolls[36] found that the majority of Nigerians (67%) consider new media a significant breeding ground for fake news, while 93% believe fake news is a significant problem. The study cited by Wasserman (2018) found that more than 50% of Nigerians had encountered stories about politics and government that they thought was not entirely accurate, while close to 60% say they have encountered stories they thought was wholly made up.

The study also found that people had more trust in stories from global, local and national sources above those from new media. Trust being the foundation on which the media stands, the threat from new technology forms which allow easy production of disinformation and misinformation; or the amplification of information disorder must hurt not just journalism but also democracy, which benefits from credible public spheres. Ireton and Posetti, (2008, p.36) argue that misinformation and disinformation hamper people's understanding of issues, undermine "trust, informed dialogue, a shared sense of reality, mutual consent, and participation". In addition, they cite the increasing "polarisation and hyper-partisanship," that new media encourage; as well as allowing "manipulation by populist leaders, governments and fringe actors" (Ireton & Posetti, 2008, p.36).

[36] NOI Polls was established by Nigeria's two-time finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala to bridge a knowledge gap in Nigeria through the provision of timely and relevant information on public opinion on various social and economic issues, thus, give voice to ordinary citizens while empowering decision-makers in the private and public sectors for better performance and improved governance. NOIPolls works in technical partnership with Gallup to develop opinion research in Nigeria

Wasserman (2020) equally highlights some of the threats posed by ‘fake news’ to the democratic process, including narrowing the space for political communication rather than expanding it as well as creating a moral panic. New media is supposed to expand the space for political communication and, therefore, enhance political processes. However, misinformation and disinformation are counter-productive in at least three major ways. The emergence of echo chambers, which are the ‘corners’ of the digital space inhabited by people with common beliefs and ideologies, can only harm rather than contribute to either the quality of debates or the political process. Such patterns have emerged in Nigeria post-1999, with vocal supporters of the political party in power labelled ‘hailers’ while those in opposition are described as ‘wailers’.

A common trait of both groups is their use of new media channels to organise and canvass their partisan positions (Olaniyan, 2019; Oise-aghaede, 2019). Additionally, they provide a perfect breeding ground for moral panic, where the elite, including in this case political leaders and the media, rail against citizen journalists who are using new media to expose corruption in government. The appropriation of new media channels by partisan ‘hailers’ and ‘wailers’ in turn is weaponised by politicians who hinge their proposed laws to control the use of social media on the spread of fake news (Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2020).

The phenomenon, which Hall et al. (1978, p.16) detailed in the book ‘Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order’, begins when the likes of politicians and editors “universally stress 'sudden and dramatic' increases (in numbers involved or events) and 'novelty', above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain,” but which could potentially be exploited to maintain hegemonic controls.

Also, and as the case of Cambridge Analytical showed, manipulation of new media’s algorithm and automation for political purposes are real and can muddle the political process (Swaine and Bennetts, 2018). The firm’s attempt to influence Nigeria’s 2015 Presidential election (Cadwalladr 2018), and news that Russia is funding a troll factory based in Ghana which is targeting Nigeria with fake content (CNN, 2020) confirm the threats to the democratic process that would have been unthinkable before now. According to Ekdale and Tully (2019), Cambridge Analytica’s work was particularly shocking in its sinister attempt to sway elections by acquiring hacked medica records of then presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

In addition to deploying such roguish tactics, Cambridge Analytica also promoted graphic videos alleging that Buhari "would support the terrorist group Boko Haram, end women's rights, and punish all who speak against the regime" (Ekdale & Tully, 2019, p.29). Though it threatens the democratic process, politicians across party lines are learning to weaponise fake news. For example, they use old pictures to tarnish opponents as Presidential Aide Lauretta Onochie did on Twitter against Atiku Abubakar, who was then running against President Muhammadu Buhari. Another example is spreading misinformation and disinformation through the instant messaging application, WhatsApp (Busari, 2019; Hitchen, Hassan, Fisher & Cheeseman, 2019).

The production and distribution of disinformation like the one claiming that President Muhammadu Buhari was cloned, which first appeared on new media platforms, and which eventually made it into the mainstream media, not only significantly undermines the credibility of new media and citizen journalists, but equally threatens the democratic process. (Griffin, 2018). Fuchs (2020, p.261-262) details four ways in which fake news threatens democracy First, by "undermining of human communication's validity claims," as a result of which "it has become more difficult to discern what political communications, political communicators, and attentions given to political communication are factual or simulated". Second, and in addition, he argues that democracy is undermined when "powerful political interests that aim at manipulating political communication in the public sphere" go unchecked because social media platform owners are unwilling to act.

Third, he views the algorithm and big-data analytics of digital media as encouraging "one-dimensional, instrumental, highly polarised, and symbolically/communicatively violent politics". Stressing this point, he stated:

> The trouble of big data analytics is that it approaches and assesses a contradictory world with statistical and mathematical models that are blind to the complexity and dialectics of society and human behaviour. When algorithms displace human decisions and human behaviour, we end up in a highly instrumental world. Given that algorithms disregard ethics, morals, and sentiments, there is a danger that they are programmed to polarise political communication and foster symbolic and communicative violence (Fuchs, 2020, p.261).

Lastly, he argues that fake news encourages political aggression and violence because of its penchant to sensationalise and spread fast. He also argues that the penchant of false news to polarise and the difficulty to factcheck in real time, means "there is a danger that in the age of false social media news, political communication between political opponents breaks down and that spirals of intensifying political aggression and violence emerge," he adds (Fuchs, 2020, p.262). These arguments are similar to those by White (2017), that fake news is proliferating because digital media platforms and their business models tolerate and profit from it. As well as the one by Wasserman (2020), that fake news is often coloured by politics and weaponised for political benefits.

**Critiquing Access and Participation**

Access and participation in the media are significant tests as to whether the communicative space is inclusive or exclusive. Hartley, (2002), Livingstone and Hunt (1994), and Boeder (2005) all dealt with the transformation of the public sphere from a space of opinion to one where public opinion is formed. Through its transformation, the public sphere went from being a political space that accommodated everyone to one favouring commercialism and entertainment (Boeder, 2005). Referencing Habermas' Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit in his critical investigation of the public sphere, Boeder (2005, p.2) observes that "the emergence of the mass press is based on the commercialisation of the participation of the masses in the public sphere". That transformation blurred the lines between public interest and profit, and in which "editorial opinions recede behind information from press agencies and reports from correspondents" and the "world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only" (Habermas, 1989, p.169-170).

This is far from the ideal communicative space that Habermas (1989) described or the normative role of the media that McNair (2000) envisioned. Describing what an effective public sphere should be, McNair (2000, p.105) said, "a properly functioning public sphere requires mass access, not just to the consumption of political information through journalistic media of quality (however one defines that term) but to its production," and that, if the normative standards were applied, "then the public in a democracy should have opportunities not just to read about, or to watch and listen to the development of political debates as spectators, but to participate directly in them, through channels of access".

The Internet and other mediated forms of communication have been hailed for helping to democratise discourse in ways that traditional media do not. Hermida (2012, p.659), claims that journalists "determine the truth, accuracy or validity of news events" through a process of verification. However, adding that, "social media question the individualistic, top-down ideology of traditional journalism, subverting journalism's claim to a monopoly on the provision of everyday public knowledge" (Hermida, 2012, p.659). Internet-mediated communication has done this by making technology personal and removing gatekeeping, hitherto a major access control measure for traditional journalism. Regardless of the gains, a wide digital divide still keeps many out of the communicative space. Assessing the short history of the impact of the Internet on journalism and democracy, it is clear the technology hailed as tailor-made for freedom limits public access in at least three ways.

Trappel (2019, p.17), who reviewed the approaches to understanding inequality, distinguishes between three levels at which the media generally shuts out some people: first, the macro level (policy and technology); second, the meso level (business and profession); and third, the micro level (content and use). At the macro level, he lists protectionist policies as well as capacity and frequency (mobile) allocation for networks. At the meso level are the 'one per cent' economy, winner-takes-it-all economy, global monopolies, gender gaps, low-paying jobs, and unemployment. He adds that inequality manifests at the micro level in the form of digital divides, surveillance, algorithmic filtering, misinformation and fake news, big data, data protection, in transparent digital searches, news representation, as well as social scoring by social media.

Eubanks (2017) in her book 'Automating Inequality: How High Tech Tools Profile, Police and Punish the Poor' focuses attention on this aspect of inequality and how the poor are the hardest-hit. "Automated eligibility systems, ranking algorithms, and predictive risk models control which neighbourhoods get policed, which families attain needed resources, who is short-listed for employment, and who is investigated for fraud," she said (Eubanks, 2017, p.11). Algorithms promote inequality because, in organising the content on the web, search engines determine visibility but are easily influenced by money. Van Couvering (2004) dealt with the influence of search-specific advertising, differentiating between two types: paid performance (linked to a search term) and paid inclusion (a fee paid to the search engine to include the site in the search index). Explaining the intricately-designed process, she adds that the web has

grown to such an extent that search algorithms cannot cover all of it. This has paved the way for those with the funds to pay for greater visibility.

Algorithms do not only favour web content from those who have the funds to exploit computer programming, by implication they determine what users can access. This is reinforced by Lindgren (2017, p.201) who notes that, "the Internet and social media have structural properties which encourage different forms of uneven distribution — of visibility, of clicks, of likes, links, and other social resources".

Internet connection is another level where digital inequality is obvious. For all the advancement of the past decades and with increasing internet penetration, the policy of data pricing is often discriminatory and mostly shuts out the poor. This policy contradicts and appears to undermine the case for net neutrality and open access, the principles that ensure fair treatment of all users. Access and participation within these principles guarantee and support the policy of treating the Internet as a fundamental human right. In a January 2010 speech, Hilary Clinton, then the American Secretary of State, called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to adopt five new internet freedoms: of expression, of worship, from want, from fear, and to connect. Making her case, she said, "… the Internet is a network that magnifies the power and potential of all others. And that's why we believe it's critical that its users are assured certain basic freedoms. Freedom of expression is first among them. This freedom is no longer defined solely by whether citizens can go into the town square and criticize their government without fear of retribution" (Clinton, 2010). However, as Wu (2004) and Radu (2019) argue, service providers typically bundle services in commercial packages to leverage their offerings for a premium. Thus, creating discriminatory pricing that puts those who can afford to pay more on faster Internet routes.

In addition, much of the Internet's content is marketed as being available for free. The best example being social networking sites, where users can open accounts and set up profiles at their convenience on mobile devices or desktop computers. The likes of Facebook, Google, Twitter and others promote themselves as free tools, aiming to empower people to connect with others and create their own communicative spaces. However, as Dahlgren (2017, p.41) argues, users "are decidedly not in the drivers' seat [when it comes to social media use], but rather at the receiving end of carefully planned corporate strategies". Busch and Shepherd (2014, p.294), for instance, called attention to Twitter's positioning, noting that "an

examination of Twitter's rhetoric indicates how the site positions itself as a benevolent social service rather than a business".

The platforms positioning would be deemed as working perfectly given their phenomenal growth in the last sixteen years, reinforced by a carefully managed narrative that hides their exploitative business models. Of Twitter, Busch and Shepherd (2014, p.300) said the platform's "explicit framing of itself as a democratic, free speech platform aligns with mainstream news coverage, portraying the site as a technological platform upon which users are constituted as world citizens". Not only have people fallen for this sort of framing, according to Sholtz (2001), but online giants like Amazon have also profited on the strength of their ability to lower transaction costs.

However, he equally argues that people are inadvertently paying high social costs because of the amount of personal data they willingly giving away. These corporations have grown into behemoths from collecting and commodifying user-data as they give people some semblance of control within their personal communicative spaces. Regardless of what people feel, however, Dalghren (2017, p.41) is correct when he said: "we are decidedly not in the drivers' seat [when it comes to social media use], but rather at the receiving end of carefully planned corporate strategies".

In other words, the platforms exploit the illusion that people are in control. Believing that they own and are in control of their communication spaces, users continue to strengthen the platforms, which, in the name of personalisation and standardisation, require more personal data. This is a point that Patelis (2013, p.4) made vividly, "personalisation lies at the heart of friction–free capitalist myths. Customisation has been key to the development of online monopoly interfaces as the Internet industry standardises its commodities through personalisation".

Such an illusion is made more potent with the user made to believe power lies in being able to make the space a personal one. Patelis (2013, p.4) captures it well by noting that "It is, thus, represented in most aspects of online communication in order to mask the actual process of commodification in operation". In other words, "to customise means to standardise and vice versa, to give users an illusion of control, to involve the user in the standardisation process" (see p.4). For instance, how do standardised forms of platform architecture affect website

designs and news presentation, commenting and overall participation in processes? How can Sahara Reporters and the other new media platforms maintain their claim to be different from the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune when they all have similar controls on the way people engage with news content?

In addition, Africa's lagging telecommunication infrastructure means many remain offline and, therefore, suggests that internet-mediated communication, while it has expanded the space for political discourse, is still elitist (Banda, Mudhai & Tettey, 2009; Oso & Akanni, 2018). In their recent assessment of the potential of the digital public sphere in Nigeria, Oso and Akanni (2018), for instance, caution against being overly optimistic as "media access and consumption are regulated by the existing distribution of power and other social resources". Without a doubt, new media has expanded the space for debate, but many people are still excluded from the process. These shortcomings raise the obvious question of whether digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable represent real change, and, if so, how?

As mentioned earlier, hegemonic tendencies and the commitment to profit-making by media organisations determines access and participation in the media space. On the surface, it would appear that new media practitioners in Nigeria, like the owners of Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable, are opposed to the status quo, which is why they are involved in advocacy. To that extent, they fit the description of alternative media as defined by Fuchs (2010), Lievrouw (2011), and Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2007). However, Hamilton (2000) notes in his critique of this model that in their quest to become influential and powerful to effect change, they end up adopting the same capitalist business models of the media they seek to replace. Their dependence on advertising as a source of revenue ultimately forces them into the same kinds of compromises that hamper the print media and other traditional media from their normative role.

True, some new media platforms have favoured donor funding in order to avoid this challenge but in this regard, and from their dependence on donor funding, it is tempting to believe that they would avoid being compromised by advertising money in the way that Stiglitz (2017) Atal (2017), and the World Association of Newspapers (2014) describe. All three newspapers receive generous funding from foreign donors including the MacArthur Foundation, Omidyar Network, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, OSIWA, and the Ford Foundation. While these

donations appear to free them from elite influence, they still make money from displaying advertisement on their sites, which leaves open the possibility of compromise.

The mixed funding approach, which combines donor funding with advertising revenue, may therefore, not be enough to completely free them from elite influence. In addition, donor funding itself is fraught with problems including forcing the donors' agenda on the newspapers and harming their chances of achieving sustainability (WAN, 2011). “Even well-intentioned assistance efforts often have the unintended effect of distorting the media market, ultimately harming prospects for media sustainability,” the World Association of Newspapers cautioned in a report titled ‘Financially Viable Media in Emerging and Developing Markets’ (WAN, 2011, p.15).

It is, therefore, reasonable to critically interrogate whether new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are viable channels of alternative media when they neither own nor control the technologies being used for their operations and when they are trying to build profitable media businesses using the same capitalist models of traditional media. For instance, there are questions regarding how participatory the likes of Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are in comparison to the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune. While the perception may be in the affirmative, the data collected for this study, which will be presented in detail in Chapters 7 and 8, tell a different story. Also, inasmuch as the general belief is that new media expanded the communicative space, infrastructural inadequacies still mean that a lot of ordinary Nigerians are unable to participate in political communication.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have detailed the choice of the theoretical frameworks for the study, explaining why they are the most suitable. The choice of critical political economy and public sphere as tools of analysis have allowed me to address the issues of the contestation for control production and distribution in the mediated communication environment. The public sphere further, despite its shortcomings, helps to properly interrogate the questions of equal access, participation and representation in the media space. For instance, when held against the popular sentiment that new media has expanded the space for media participation and widened choices available; critical application allows questions to be asked about which class of people are able

to join online debates. It also allows for a critical assessment of the architecture of the platforms of the activist new media like Sahara Reporters to determine whether they differ in terms of the type of access they offer to their users. Combining the two approaches helps to unpack the central issue of the significance and impact of the emergence of digital-born newspapers in Nigeria and how their kind of journalism is impacting the democratic process. The next chapter, will detail the design of the research, including the selection of the samples, the data collection methods, the processes, and the adopted data analysis techniques.

# CHAPTER SIX
# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

This chapter explains in detail the design of the entire study, and why specific choices were made about the methods and the processes. It will also explain the processes followed from the collection, analysis and presentation of the data. The issue being researched is the observed growing trend of ordinary Nigerians using new media platforms for political communication. That shift, which is seeing an increasing number of people abandoning the print media, has gained momentum in the country's fourth republic. Furthermore, it is encouraging comparisons between the new, digital-born newspapers such as Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable and print media such as The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune.

All six newspapers were selected as case studies for this research designed to understand the nature and significance of the phenomenon in the context of Nigeria's electoral process. For a study such as this one, the decision was taken to use a mixed methods approach, which allows the researcher to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods. Accordingly, and in order to ensure the credibility and validity of the process, the research was also designed to collect and analyse three data sets – qualitative interviews, an online survey and content analysis. The following sections will detail the motivation for the research, the philosophical influences, the research approach, data collection and analysis methods used. A more detailed description of why and how primary and secondary data were combined to achieve the research objective is provided in the section on sampling.

**Research Design**: Research design, according to Creswell (2009), involves a series of decisions about the plan and procedure for organising a detailed study. He says the decision on a design involves the process and procedure of inquiry, methods of data collection, as well as analysis and interpretation. Flick (2011, p.65-68) says research design is "the plan for collecting and analysing evidence," and selecting the 'material' that enables researchers to answer the questions they set out to answer. According to Rowley (2002, p.18), research is "the logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of a study; it ensures coherence" and is like an action plan that clearly maps how the researcher intends to get from the question to the conclusion.

As the overall guiding philosophy of this research is pragmatism, the researcher has borrowed from the tradition. This tradition assumes that "all thought is mediated by power relations that are historically and socially constructed" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.10). They also suggest that among other goals, research shaped by the critical philosophy aims to critique and challenge the status quo as well as transform and empower. As noted earlier, this study was designed to: (i) critically examine the performance of the Nigerian media in the fourth republic; (ii) interrogate the models of new media organisations that are shaping political communication and disrupting the entire industry; (iii) compare their model to that of traditional media and, therefore, determine why relatively new, digital-born publications are gaining influence; (iv) determine the significance and impact of the shifting change in the media landscape on the Nigerian political process; and (v) consider whether there is any positive feature of the relatively new, digital-born newspapers that can be adopted by the traditional newspaper press for the overall benefit of the Nigerian democracy.

**Philosophical Influences**

The motivation for this research stems from this researcher's personal experiences as a journalist at some of Nigeria's national newspapers. It was clear from the researcher's personal experience that the newspapers had started to experience ethical and moral challenges for all the reasons already highlighted in previous chapters. The impact of the digital disruption has only accelerated the debilitating issues and the declining standards first observed by the researcher before he left his last editorial position in December 2005. Blaxter et al. (2010, p.14) made the connection between such personal experiences and research when they argued that "research is a social activity that can be powerfully affected by the researcher's own motivations and values," and is consistent with this study.

There is general agreement that all research has three major elements: philosophical, praxis and ethics, even though such consensus is missing when defining each of the substructures. Leavy's (2014) taxonomy (see Figure 6) is useful in properly grounding this study in the most appropriate philosophical tradition.

Table 6: Elements of Research (Leavy, 2014, p.2)

| **Philosophical** | **Paradigm**<br>**Ontology**<br>**Epistemology** |
|---|---|
| Praxis | Genre<br>Methods<br>Theory<br>Methodology |
| Ethics (Philosophical and the Praxis) | Ethics<br>Values<br>Reflexivity |

Where a paradigm is the "foundational perspective carrying a set of assumptions that guides the research process," Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that a research approach comprises three components, the philosophical worldviews, designs and the research methods. A worldview, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), is "a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" which influences the approach selected for use.

Consequently, the researcher was influenced at the ontological level by relativism and at the epistemological level by the pragmatism approach. Ontology, according to Levy (2017, pp11-12), is "a philosophical belief system about the nature of the social world" and "informs both our sense of the social world and, correspondingly, what we can learn about it and how we can do so". Epistemology, on the other hand, "is a philosophical belief system about how research proceeds and what counts as knowledge" (Levy, 2017, p.11-12). Spencer, Pryce and Walsh (2014, p.82) take this further, defining ontology as the "study of the nature of reality".

They define epistemology as being concerned with "how we gain knowledge of what exists and the relationship between the knower - in this case the researcher - and the world" (Spencer, Pryce & Walsh, 2014, p.82). Understood in this way, ontology can be said to allow the researcher to take available knowledge, make assumptions about this, analyse this knowledge and share the outcome. While epistemology provides the overall framework for the inquiry, especially with regards to a systematic approach to conducting research (Spencer, Pryce &Walsh, 2014).

Drawing on several definitions, they posit that the pragmatist approach is better-suited to mixed methods studies because the researcher is only concerned with what works, hence, the tendency to use all available approaches to understand the problem. Among other things, this approach is also suited to "mixed methods research in that inquirers draw liberally from both quantitative and qualitative assumptions when they engage in their research" that allow the researcher to freely choose "the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.51).

Regarding epistemology and how people access knowledge, or what Peirce (1955) calls 'fixing belief', there are four methods used by people to access knowledge: the method of science; tenacity; a priori; and authority. In his description of this method, Peirce (1955, p.18) says:

> Such is the method of science. Its fundamental hypothesis, restated in more familiar language, is this: There are real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those reals affect our senses according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as are our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really and truly are; and any man, if he have sufficient experience and he reason enough about it, will be led to the one true conclusion.

The new conception here involved is that of 'reality'. In other words, as argued by Merrigan and Huston (2009), who expounded on Peirce's taxonomy, the method of science unlike the others must be based on measurable standards. The choices made at the ontological level (relativism) and at the epistemological level (pragmatism) both align with the empirical nature of the study undertaken. Those choices take the view of Lazarsfeld (1982, p.58), that this type of research uses different methods of observation to gain an understanding of the prevailing reality. If social reality as a concept is still contested and the validity of scientifically designed studies are open to question, the integrity of the inquiry would then have to rest on how well the researcher manages the process.

To address the likelihood of bias that the researcher's positionality might have on responses, observations and interpretations, reflexivity is required. This involves a self-conscious awareness on the part of the researcher and his relationship with interview participants. This study worked with three data sets: qualitative interviews, an online survey and content analysis, with the face-to-face interviews providing the most challenging management on at least three levels, given the researcher's positionality.

First, having been a journalist whose last editorial position in 2005 was as Deputy Editor of a major national newspaper, as well as a corporate communication manager for a major Nigerian bank thirteen years prior, all the interview participants were well known to him with some of the professional relationships dating back 20 years. Mason-Bish (2019) rightly captures the arguments of other scholars, like Berger (2013), who see advantages in this kind of association, and for this researcher this was the case. The professional association made access to senior journalists relatively easy and at least one of them confessed that similar requests for interviews had been declined and referred to subordinates. All the interview participants were more willing to freely answer the questions and even volunteered privileged information 'off the record'.

Second, Mason-Bish (2019) also describes the complexities involved in elite interviews and how the researcher's positionality in relation to the interview participants shape the research process. While the researcher's positionality and professional associations allowed greater access to senior journalists, the obvious question at the ontological level is whether interviewing reporters at the lower levels of journalistic practice would have produced a different outcome. In making the decision to interview people at senior managerial levels, the researcher's positionality was fluid in the way that Mason-Bish (2019) describes such a relationship. Thus, allowing the participants to ignore their status but to rather speak forthrightly about their roles as senior managers or members of the executive management in their respective organisations.

Third, and perhaps most important, the researcher's positionality, as fits Chereni's (2014, p.3) profile of an insider, offered both advantages, which required reflexivity to prevent outright bias. Chereni (2014) drew a parallel between an insider and emic or the "viewpoint of a researcher who had gained a personal and first-hand experience of a cultural society' as well as an outsider or etic, which 'describes the perspective of a researcher who lacked the lived experience of the culture and society he or she sought to study".

The researcher's personal newsroom experiences as well as professional relationship during his time as a corporate communication manager for a financial institution had afforded him a privileged view of journalism and some of the ethical issues. However, that did not hinder the

process because the interview questions focused more on their managerial roles rather than their personal conduct.

**Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection methods adopted for this study are consistent with the overall objective of the study and each instrument was selected because of its effectiveness in helping answer the research questions. This study was designed with triangulation as a major influence on the data sources. Described by Denzin (1978, p.15; 28) as the use of "multiple methods in the analysis of the same empirical events," triangulation is useful to the extent that "each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality". Therefore, the decision was taken in line with the mixed methods approach, to use both primary and secondary data for the research. Salkind (2010, p.1095) describes primary data sources as "an original data source…collected first-hand by the researcher for a specific research purpose or project". It can be collected through instruments such as self-administered surveys, interviews, and field observation, among other techniques. Of this kind of data source, he suggests it provides the "purest form of data" because it is collected directly by the researcher and, therefore, unfiltered (Salkind, 2010, p.1096). He goes further to posit that secondary data sources, in contrast, are data sources that exist already but "is being used either for a purpose for which it was not originally intended and/or by someone other than the researcher who collected the original data" (Salkind, 2010, p.1096). This study, therefore, has combined the mixed primary and secondary data sources of interviews, survey and content analysis as methods of data collection.

The Choice of Case Studies:

This study has, therefore, adopted case studies as the preferred method for the study of the observed phenomenon because they were judged as adequate in addressing the inquiry into new media, citizen journalism and how they are being used to influence politics and governance in Nigeria. The Guardian, The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are the cases studied for this research.

The six media organisations have been selected using purposive, or what Mason (2002) calls, theoretical sampling with the focus to study newspapers that represent the print media and digital-born newspapers. They have also been selected because of their relevance to the

research question and the analytical framework. Rowley (2002, p.16-17), in her review of case studies as a research method, says it is useful in comparing a "limited number of organisations" or for "contemporary events when the relevant behaviour cannot be manipulated". She adds that in spite of its shortcomings, it still remains a widely accepted form "because they may offer insights that might not be achieved with other approaches" (Rowley, 2002, p.16-17). Going by her description, the method is considered effective for the kind of comparison undertaken on the six organisations. The choice of three traditional newspapers and three digital-born newspapers also enabled the study to properly address the other issues of how and why new media became so influential, and what aspects of their operations can be adopted by traditional media.

As a method of research, case studies have been criticised for: (i) lacking the rigour of other methods; (ii) making generalisations more difficult; (iii) taking too long and producing largely unreadable documents; (iv) being misused by those who attempt to use it for 'randomised field experiments'; and (v) being easily confused with non-research case studies (Yin, 2018, p.50-54). These perceived shortcomings were all taken into consideration in the final decision to use the case study as a method for this research. For instance, while Yin (2018) calls attention to the tendency of researchers to be sloppy by not following systematic procedures, care has been taken to avoid sloppiness by strict adherence to processes and ethics. The idea of using three data sources was to ensure that inferences and conclusions arise from unequivocal data. According to Yin, one possible reason why generalisations are difficult to make in case study research is the fact that most studies focus on a single case.

This study focused on six news organisations in Nigeria, which are the samples for the in-depth examination of the phenomenon of activist new media disrupting journalism and impacting the political process was studied in-depth, but as Yin suggests (see 2018, p.2), even generalisations from single scientific experiments have been equally questioned. To redress this in analysing the data, the goal was to expand and use the theories to take general inferences and arrive at conclusions rather than making statistical generalisations. Also, this study has avoided the pitfall of case studies extending for too long and producing largely unreadable documents. This is because it is not an ethnographic study, which, by nature, tend to take time. Extra care has also been taken during the data analysis stage to distil the interview into meaningful formats. To address the confusion with the other non-research forms of case studies such as the one

used as teaching tools, this study has adhered to strict methods and procedures as Yin suggests (2018, p.2).

The obvious advantages cited were all taken into consideration in the design of this study as well as in the selection of the six news organisations. So, a study such as this one where the intention is to critically examine and compare the performances of six newspapers since 1999, would be best accomplished using multiple case studies as the research method. Creswell (2007) says phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of an experience and uses several individuals that have shared experiences as units of analysis. Other scholars, like Given (2008), and Edmunds and Kennedy (2017) highlight the tradition's application to lived experiences. Given (2008, p.614) maintains that phenomenology is the "study of lived or experiential meaning and attempts to describe and interpret these meanings in the ways that they emerge and are shaped by consciousness, language, our cognitive and noncognitive sensibilities, and by our preunderstandings and presuppositions". Edmunds and Kennedy (2017) argue that phenomenology is valuable to the extent that it "prioritizes and investigates how the human being experiences the world". Researchers, according to Edmunds and Kennedy (2017, p. 168), "use the phenomenological approach when they are interested in exploring the meaning, composition, and core of the lived experience of specific phenomena". They go on to highlight the adaptability of the case studies method to phenomenology, suggesting that "the case study design is also often used with the phenomenological perspective' because 'this design lends itself well to the exploration of meaning of a lived experience of some phenomenon" (Edmunds & Kennedy, 2017, p.169-170).

Detailing the applicability of phenomenology, they opine that the approach is best used when: (i) studying people's experiences; (ii) studying how people make meanings in their lives; (iii) studying relationships between what happened and how people have come to understand these events; (iv) exploring how people experience the essence of a particular phenomenon; and (vi) examining the commonalities across individuals (Edmunds & Kennedy, 2017, p.170). Wertz et al. (2011, p.52), who traced the tradition's psychological roots, notes that phenomenology had been used to describe "any work in research, theory, or practice that emphasizes first-person experience" and argues that phenomenology focuses on lived experiences. In this case, the experience to be studied is activist new media, and the significance and impact of such journalistic practices on media business and the Nigerian political processes. The units of analysis are the editors and media executives of the selected media organisations to be studied.

Salkind (2010, p.116), differentiates between an intrinsic case study, in which "the case is self-selected due to the inquirer's interest in the particular entity" and the instrumental case study, which focuses on "understanding of an issue or phenomenon beyond the case itself". Therefore, is an instrumental case study research, with the objective of broadly interrogating citizen journalism by looking at the issue through specific newspapers. Salkind (2010) and Yin (2014) also identified two separate approaches to case study design, the single-case design and the multiple case design.

The multiple case study approach was preferred because it allows the study of the six organisations and what the common experience of the increasing adoption of new media for political communication means. According to Yin (2014, p.106), who mentions the holistic and embedded variants of the single-case design, the format is useful and can be adopted in five situations. These are: (i) to represent the critical test of a significant theory; (ii) where the case represents an extreme case or an unusual case; (iii) where the case represents a common case and the objective is to present the circumstances/conditions of an everyday case (iv) if it is revelatory, as in when a phenomenon is previously inaccessible to science inquiry; and (iv) and longitudinal as in when the researcher has "access to a situation previously inaccessible to empirical study" (Yin, 2014, p.106).

On the other hand, as Yin (2014) suggests, the multiple-case design should mirror multiple experiments with either similar or contrasting results.

> The ability to conduct 6 or 10 case studies, arranged effectively within a multiple-case design, is analogous to the ability to conduct 6 to 10 experiments on related topics; a few cases (2 or 3) would be literal replications, whereas a few other cases (4 to 6) might be designed to pursue two different patterns of theoretical replications. If all the cases turn out as predicted, these 6 to 10 cases, in the aggregate, would have provided compelling support for the initial set of propositions (Yin, 2014, p.108-109).

**Qualitative Interviews**

Seidman (2006, p. 8-9) describes interviews as a "a basic mode of inquiry," used as a data collection method when the researcher is interested in "understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience". With roots in human conversation

for what Brinkmann (2013, p.6) calls "knowledge-producing purposes," qualitative interviewing has emerged as an effective data collection tool favoured in human sciences and other areas of scholarship. An interview then, is a question and answers session with selected participants. As a research technique, it allows for the collection of data that otherwise would be impossible to get (Berger, 2016). Berger (2016) also states that an interview allows the researcher to find out about 'people's ideas, thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and what motivates them,' (p. 191) and is, therefore, suitable for this kind of study.

Lindlof and Taylor (2011. p.173), in their assessment of qualitative interviews, say they are 'particularly suited to understanding the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews.' Creswell (2009) on his part lists three advantages of an interview as an instrument of data collection, namely: (i) it is useful when participants cannot be directly observed; (ii) when they can provide historical information; and (iii) because it allows the researcher to control the line of questioning. Highlighting the benefit in using the qualitative interview as a research method, Rubin and Rubin (2012, p.3) say it allows the researcher to speak with people who have insights into the issue being investigated. They argue that through "interviews, researchers explore in detail the experience, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.3).

They go further to identify four categories of qualitative interviews: focus groups, Internet interviews, casual conversations and in-passing clarifications, as well as semi-structured and unstructured interviews. All of these differ based on "the role of the interviewer, the number of people interviewed at the same time, whether the interviews are conducted face to face or at a distance, the extent to which they are planed, and how well acquainted the interviewer and interviewee are with one another" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.29). They note, however, that semi-structured and unstructured interviews are at the core of qualitative interviews.

Both forms, they argue, are "scheduled, usually extended conversation between researcher and interviewee," with the researcher being able to exert relatively more control in the semi-structures format to allow him to "focus more narrowly on the planned items that speak to the research question" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.31). The format allows the researcher to prepare some questions in advance but with the ability to ask follow-up questions where necessary. Roulston (2010, p.14-15) describes the former as "tightly scripted interviews in which interviewers pose closed questions worded in particular ways in specific sequences," and the

latter as referring to "a prepared interview guide that includes a number of questions … usually open-ended," which allows the researcher to "follows up with probes seeking further detail and description about what has been said". She stresses that the researcher could choose between open-ended questions and closed questions, but that "many methodological texts advise qualitative interviewers to ask open, rather than closed questions because closed questions have the possibility of generating short one-word answers corresponding with yes/no or factual information implied by the question" (Roulston, 2010, p.11). Open-ended questions, she argues, "provide broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer," while closed-ended questions "are those in which the implied response is restricted in some way" (Roulston, 2010, p.11).

Drawing on the typologies provided by Roulston (2010), Rubin and Rubin (2012), and Salkind (2010), this study has chosen qualitative interviews as a primary data source and semi-structured interviews as the format. The researcher prepared and used a set of nineteen open-ended questions (see Appendix 1), which were then used in separate interview sessions with twelve editors and publishers of the six selected newspapers. Those interview sessions were conducted between October 2019 and January 2020 in Johannesburg, South Africa, and in Lagos, Ibadan, Nigeria. The interviews sessions were conducted in a way that allowed the respondents to express themselves and, therefore, provide as much information as possible (Flick, 2011; Berger, 2016). All twelve participants were asked the same questions during their interviews sessions that lasted between 40 and 120 minutes.

**Survey**

This study used the survey as the second primary date source, which was designed to collect data directly from media users across Nigeria. Berger (2016) and Leeuw, Hox and Dillman (2008) define survey as a research strategy used to systematically collect information about a group of people that is representative of a larger group. Flick (2011), on the other hand, notes that most surveys use questionnaires as a format of collecting data. According to him, questionnaires and interview situations are usually designed in the same ways because questionnaires aim to collect comparative answers from participants. Surveys, according to Fowler (2014, p.1-2) are useful in collecting "numerous facts about the behaviours and situations of people that can be obtained only by asking a sample of people about themselves". They generally have the following characteristics: (i) the purpose is to produce statistics, that

is, quantitative or numerical descriptions about aspects of the study population; (ii) the main way of collecting information is by asking people questions, their answers then becoming the data to be analysed; and (iii) usually information is collected from only a fraction of the population, that is, a sample, rather than from every member of the population.

For Lavrakas (2008, p.860), a survey as a scientific and systematic research method is used to empirically and scientifically study and provide information about people and social phenomena. Rea and Parker (2014) highlight some of the applications of survey research to include, collecting descriptive information and facts about the respondents; getting information about their behaviour; as well as their opinion and attitude about issues. All of which allow for general assumptions to be made about the population from which the sample is taken. They detailed six survey categories, mail-out, web-based, telephone, in-person interviews, and intercept, which have all been noted for their advantages and disadvantages. This study was designed to critically assess the significance and impact of citizen journalism on the media industry and the Nigerian political process. Therefore, the choices made with regards to data collection methods considered their suitability to help in answering the research questions. The survey was selected to collect empirical insight into media usage, preferences and to accurately assess the performance of the media.

This data collection method was selected to help address the research question of whether media users consider new media as able to provide viable alternatives to traditional media as channels of political communication. For this, a questionnaire aimed at randomly selected Nigerian new media users was designed and distributed using web-based software (see Appendix 2). The obvious drawback in the choice is that only those with web access could participate in a survey of this nature and as with the choices made in selecting the news organisations to be sampled; the online distribution approach was used because it was the most convenient. Distributing the questionnaire across all of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones was one measure taken to make of for the obvious shortcoming. The researcher also took note of the peculiar nature of studying newspapers in a country where readership of print editions is embarrassingly low as to as to make any readership survey unrepresentative.

The researcher also considered competing software that would have allowed for unsupervised administration of the questionnaire which included Survey Monkey and Qualtrics. While both applications offered an effective means of unsupervised distribution as well as the added

advantage of existing web-panels, they were too expensive[37] and, therefore, disregarded as options. Instead, the questionnaires were designed using Google's free tool, Google Forms, which was then distributed using a custom-link using the researchers own social media accounts including Twitter and Facebook. Web-based surveys, such as the one undertaken, are increasingly becoming popular because of the obvious advantages. Among the advantages are those highlighted by Rea and Parker (2014) such as convenience, cost effectiveness, as well as confidentiality and security.

Regardless of the obvious advantages, they also note some of the drawbacks such as limiting participation to only those with web access. This, therefore, precludes some who would otherwise have qualified to participate, and the potential compromise of the data because of the absence of interviewer involvement means unclear questions cannot be explained, meaning respondents may not follow instructions. The potential disadvantages were all factored in, and care been taken to ensure that they do not compromise the data so as to render it useless. With regards to the likely omission of questions because they were unclear and the researcher being absent to explain them, the survey questions were short and simple. Hence, most of the excluded responses had to do with choosing wrong dates under the date of birth rather than those who failed to answer certain questions.

**Content Analysis**

Content analysis as a secondary data source has to do with analysing all texts including published reports, books, journals, web pages and other forms of documentation, in which "words, sentences, grammatical structures, tenses, clauses, ratios (of say, nouns to verbs), or even themes" are the units of analysis (Prior, 2014, p.361). Since its emergence at the beginning of the 20th century as a research tool, content analysis has provided a scientific approach for studying and analysing newspapers (Krippendorff, 2004). Krippendorf (2004) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use," which "provides new insights, increases a researcher's understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions" (p. 18).

37 Survey Monkey offered to distribute the questionnaire to their existing panels for fees ranging from 6 to 10 USD for each respondent while Qualtrics suggested budgeting 20,000 to 50,000 USD for individual projects of this scale. Both offers were made in January 2020 in scheduled calls from their marketing representatives.

The numerous definitions of content analysis, he notes, are based on three assumptions; that the content be inherent in a text; that content is a property of the source of a text; and that content emerges in "the process of a researcher analysing a text relative to a particular context" (Krippendorff, 2004, p.19). However, he aligns with the third approach to define content analysis; and details six features of texts to support this approach. This includes the fact that texts being meaningful only to specific contexts, those meanings must be shared to be viable, and that no text has only a single meaning. Other features, he argues, are the fact that texts have no reader-independent qualities, their meanings speak to something outside, and are meaningful only to specific context, discourses and purposes. Neuendorf (2017) describes content analysis as the "systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" and that this "includes both human-coded analyses and computer-aided text analysis (CATA)" which can be applied to among other things, "face-to-face human interactions; the analysis of character portrayals in media venues ranging from novels to online videos; the computer-driven analysis of word usage in news media and political speeches, advertising, and blogs; the examination of interactive content such as video gaming and social media exchanges; and so much more" (Neuendorf, 2017, p.19). Her classification of content analyses as applied to media studies is helpful in the proper grounding of the method in this research.

Neuendorf's (2017) taxonomy includes: (i) rhetorical analysis, where the idea is to reconstruct characteristics of text or image or both; (ii) narrative analysis, where the intension is to understand relationships between a text and social reality; (iii) discourse analysis, where the focus is on the characteristics of manifest language and word use, typically to determine media representations; (iv) Structuralist or Semiotic Analysis, in which the researcher focuses on the deep meanings of messages, in order to discover underlying meanings; and (v) Interpretative Analysis, where the observation of messages and the coding of those messages allows the researcher to formulate theories through among others, theoretical sampling and analytical categories. It also includes (vi) Conversation Analysis, which focuses on naturally occurring conversations; (vii) Critical Analysis, which used for media messages and focuses on identifying power relations; (viii) Normative Analysis, in which the intention is social change; and (ix) Computers and Qualitative Message Analysis, which allows computer applications like NVivo to be used for the analysis of complex message content. Wright (in Berger, 2016, p.272) adds that as a research technique, content analysis is for the "systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories".

Recognising the impact and shifting media consumption as a result of digital disruption, Karlsson and Sjøvaag (2016) highlighted the limitations of available definitions which, if it were to ignore the most recent changes, would see content analysis as "a method that works very well quantifying texts printed on paper but loses its usefulness the further away from that scenario that it drifts" (p.2). However, as they correctly argue, assuming that content produced and distributed across different platforms including online and offline have these qualities is flawed. They argued, therefore, that the ontological "difference in production, distribution and consumption modes put new demands on researchers and their tools". (Karlsson & Sjøvaag, 2015, p.3). As this study is an attempt to compare the performance of three digital-born newspapers with three traditional, legacy newspapers, their taxonomy (see Table 7) is useful for clearly aligning the traditional techniques of analysing newspaper text to new approaches for the analysis of what they called content.

Table 7: Approaches to Content Analysis (Karlsson & Sjøvaag: 2015, p.3)

Overview of different approaches to content analysis of online news and their traits in relation to core conceptual aspects

| | **Established content analysis** | **Liquid content analysis** | **Big data analysis** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mode of analysis | Quantitative with qualitative elements | Quantitative with qualitative elements | Quantitative |
| Variable design | Deductive | Primarily inductive | Inductive/ deductive |
| Scope/sampling size | Hundreds to thousands of news items | Tens of news items | Millions |
| Sampling procedure | Random | Purpose and somewhat inductive | "Census" |
| Unit of analysis | News item | "Floating" digital objects | Data structures |
| Recording/ storage | Archiving crucial | Not necessary | Yes and no |
| Generalizability | Intermediary | Deep/limited | Shallow/ encompassing |
| Key agent | Human | Human and computer | Computer |
| Analysis aim | Descriptive | Explanatory | Descriptive/ predictive |

Krippendorff's (2004, p.88) position that "qualitative researchers search for multiple interpretations by considering diverse voices (readers), alternative perspectives (from different ideological positions), oppositional readings (critiques), or varied uses of the texts examined (by different groups)" was useful and instructive in the design of this research. The quantitative

method of content analysis was adopted to help address the major question of trust, access, and participation in the selected newspapers.

The researcher's focus is on the coverage of major political stories by the six selected news organisations, the idea being to critically examine the pattern of coverage of major political news stories between 2012 and 2019. The aim is to determine the dominant voices and tonality in each of the selected reports. The year 2012 is significant because of the events of OccupyNigeria, the largest civil unrest in Nigeria's recent political history, as well as the decision one year prior by then-presidential aspirant Goodluck Jonathan to create a Facebook page for his political campaign (Olaniyan, 2004; Hamilton & Daramola, 2011; Webster, 2010). Jonathan's action appeared to have opened a new chapter, whereby political communication through new media becomes a critical part of the democratic process. The idea is to examine the pattern of coverage of political stories by the six selected newspapers, what the pattern suggests of their attitude to accommodating all viewpoints, as well as possible ideological slants.

**Population And Sampling**

With sampling, researchers go through the process of selecting a part of a population to observe or study as a way of getting an understanding and making generalisations about the entire population (Thompson, 2012; Stokes, 2013). The process of selection allows the researcher to study what is considered a representative, if small, sample of a larger group. That way, using data from the representative group, the researcher is able to answer questions and make assumptions about the larger population from which the sample size is taken. Creswell and Poth (2018), Yin (2016), Lavrakas (2008), Thompson (2012) and Mason (2002) stressed the demand on qualitative researchers to make several decisions when selecting samples for their study including broadly: whom or what to select; the sampling technique to adopt; and the sampling size.

Mason (2002, p.53) details a series of questions the researcher must consider before selecting samples. These include: (i) What am I interested in? (ii) Where is it 'located' and, therefore, from which potential sources can I generate knowledge of it? (iii) What do I expect these sources to be able to 'tell' me? (iv) How well does the use of these data sources match my ontological perspective on what constitutes the social world, and my epistemological

perspective on how knowledge about that world can be produced? (v) What are the practicalities of using these data sources? (vi) What are the ethics of using these data sources?

As mentioned earlier, this study was designed to collect data at three levels (i) interviews with selected editors and senior journalists in the six media organisations used as case studies (ii) questionnaires administered nationwide, which were designed to identify media preferences and patterns of changes in the era of new media; and (iii) content analysis, which was designed to critically examine how the six newspapers covered selected political stories over a period of six years and what their approaches say of access and representation. Given the overall goal of this study, which is to determine how the phenomenon of citizen journalism is impacting the Nigerian media industry and the political process, the researcher had to make decisions on a number of critical issues. These include: (i) which newspaper to select as case studies; (ii) which senior staff of the selected newspapers to interview; (iii) which specific stories to consider for the content analysis; and (iv) who to select as participants in the survey. Fricker (2017), as well as Teddlie and Yu (2007), distinguish between probability and non-probability sampling (or purposive sampling) procedures that are commonly used in both the social and behavioural sciences.

Probability, according to Teddlie and Yu (2007, p.77), is used when the aim is to achieve what they call representativeness, or "the degree to which the sample accurately represents the entire population" is the best suited to contribute the best insights into the research questions. Fricker (2017, p.166) expands on the distinguishing features of both categories, suggesting that probability sampling involves selection of respondents using "some sort of probabilistic mechanism, and where the probability with which every member of the frame population could have been selected into the sample is known," while in non-probability sampling, the researcher "selects the sample using some probabilistic mechanism and the individuals in the population have no control over this process".

This technique, also called convenience sampling, is used when "either the probability that every unit or respondent included in the sample cannot be determined or it is left up to each individual to choose to participate in the survey" (Fricker, 2017, p.166). The purposive approach, Mason (2002) argues, allows the researcher relatively more flexibility to work with theory and sampling activities. Regardless of Mason's (2002) position, others warn that the technique is not a blanket approval to ignore process. Silverman (2013), as well as Denzin and

Lincoln (2018), stress this point when they argued that purposive sampling must be used with clear parameters in selecting groups and individuals. This is so that the researcher would most likely find occurrences of the issue being investigated.

Purposive sampling, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), is purposeful and intentional, to the extent that it allows the researcher to select the units of analysis depending on the research questions. In making the decision on what to select as samples for the three data sets, as well as the sample size, the researcher has been guided by these considerations and decided to mix methods. Purposive sampling, which, according to Yin (2016, p. 93), narrows the choices to "those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data - in essence, information rich," as well as those that would guarantee the maximum diversity possible for the study were used for both the qualitative interview and content analysis. Additionally, the non-probability sampling approach of random sampling was used for the survey.

**The Choice of the Six Newspapers**

The six newspapers used as samples represent a mix of traditional and new media and were selected to achieve a blend of ownership styles and, therefore, diverse ideological outlooks. Their selection as samples as already detailed in the preceding segment on population and sampling was made using the purposive sampling technique. This method, also called the convenience sampling, was preferred as it allowed the study to focus on some of Nigeria's news organisations which best allow a rigorous engagement with the phenomenon. The researcher is aware of the usual dichotomy mostly noticeable in the analysis of Nigerian media along North-South regional divides, but the selected samples have national presence both in coverage and distribution to make them representative enough for this study. Additionally, those who stress the North-South dichotomy miss the salience of the emerging phenomenon that is the focus of this study. For instance, Sahara Reporters operates from a headquarters in New York and would not fit the description of those news organisations consigned to regional ownership. Also, Premium Times, operates from its headquarters in Abuja, the Nigerian capital as do Daily Trust and Leadership, both of which are categorised as Northern news organisations. The three newspapers, The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune, have been selected because they are the oldest surviving privately-owned newspapers in Nigeria and because they represent different media traditions. In terms of editorial policy and reportage, The Guardian is relatively more conservative, for example, preferring toned-down headlines.

The Punch is a bit more aggressive, while Nigerian Tribune is in-between. The online newspapers, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable, were selected as the sample because of their leadership position with regards to breaking exclusive stories, large followership across new media, advocacy and their commitment to incorporate user generated content. As their profiles show, all the selected newspapers are suitable for selection as case studies.

**The Guardian** is one of Nigeria's quality newspapers. Established as an independent newspaper in 1983, for "the purpose of presenting balanced coverage of events, and of promoting the best interests of Nigeria," The Guardian prides itself as owing no "allegiance to no political party, ethnic community, religious or other interest group" (The Guardian, 2020b). The paper was established by businessman Alex Ibru and says in a profile on its website that its "primary commitment is to the integrity and sovereignty of the Federation of Nigeria, and beyond that to the unity and sovereignty of Africa" (The Guardian, 2020b). The profile provides a hint of its ideological position, saying:

> The Guardian is a liberal newspaper, committed to the best traditions and ideals of republican democracy. It believes that it is the responsibility of the state not only to protect and defend the citizen, but also to create the conditions, political, social, economic and cultural, in which all citizens may achieve their highest potential as human beings. It is committed to the principle of individual freedom but believes that all citizens have duties as well as rights (The Guardian, 2020b).

Expounding on its ideology, the paper maintains that it "does not, in principle, object to the ideology of free enterprise, since this would be inconsistent with its commitment to individual liberty and freedom. But it believes that the state must intervene judiciously in the economic life of the nation, in order to minimise the adverse effects of free enterprise and ensure that less privileged citizens have reasonable and fair access to the basic necessities of life" (The Guardian, 2020b). Its editorial policy is grounded on the principles of "justice, probity in public life, equal access to the nation's resources, and equal protection under the laws of Nigeria for all citizens," to which it says it is committed. The newspaper says its logo is inspired by the ancient Egyptian symbol for Conscience; while the motto, 'Conscience, Nurtured by Truth,' is inspired by Uthman Dan Fodio's famous remark "Conscience is an open wound; only truth can heal it" (The Guardian, 2020b).

**The Punch** was established in 1970 by the late Olu Aboderin and began publication a year later with the Happy Home, a glossy, family-oriented magazine. The newspaper says it was established "to give our country a unique Sunday paper which combines the best in serious and popular journalism," with a blend of information and entertainment (The Punch, 2020). The Punch, a daily tabloid, was added in 1976, with the tag line 'the lively paper for lively minds'. According to the organisation, it was started to "address most of the shortcomings and inadequacies of the established Nigerian newspapers and to be swingingly elegant as well as socially concerned and seriously responsible" (The Punch).

Known for its aggressive and independent style of reporting, the newspaper has been shut down by the government on many occasions and many of its journalists have experienced harassment and detention. In late 2019, the newspaper took a stand against what it decried as the Nigerian government's penchant for disobeying the courts and announced its decision to refer to the president by his military title. The decision, announced in a front-page comment, attracted a swift reaction from the Northern-based Daily Trust, which challenged The Punch's decision on the basis that it had crossed the line from journalism to activism. The newspaper, still owned and controlled by the Aboderin family which has always portrayed itself through its editorial policies to be progressive, is selected for its central role in most of Nigeria's hegemonic struggles.

**Nigerian Tribune** is published by African Newspapers of Nigeria (ANN) Plc. The newspaper was established by the late politician and former Premier of the old Nigeria's Western Region government, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The establishment of the newspaper in 1949 allowed Awolowo and his Action Group to push their ideologies. However, over the year the Nigerian Tribune has "evolved to be the top in competitive Nigeria's news media business" (Nigerian Tribune, 2020). The newspaper says its editorial policy is driven by a commitment to continue to "provide an independent perspective with a commitment to credible dissemination of editorial information" (Nigerian Tribune, 2020). Still controlled by the Awolowo family, the newspaper continues to thrive and is still regarded for its political coverage. As the oldest surviving privately-owned newspaper in Nigeria, the Nigerian Tribune is included as a case study for its historical value in the Nigerian media.

**Sahara Reporters** is a digital-born, ground-breaking news website that encourages citizen journalists to report ongoing corruption and government malfeasance in Africa. Using photos,

text and video dynamically, the site informs, and prompts concerned African citizens and activists globally to act, denouncing officially-sanctioned corruption, the material impoverishment of its citizenry, defilement of the environment, and the callous disregard of the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution. As the oldest of the three online platforms selected as case studies for this research, Sahara Reporters was established in 2006 by Omoyele Sowore, a former student activist who made no pretences about his intention to use the platform for advocacy. Its payoff line, 'report yourself', is clear in both intention and conception. The publication clearly defines itself as a news website that "encourages citizen journalists to report ongoing corruption and government malfeasance in Africa" (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Profiled by the likes of Cable News Network (CNN), New York Times and Daily Beast, Sahara Reporters has been described as 'Africa's Wikileaks' for its muckraking (Kperogi, 2016).

**Premium Times** in many respects operates in similar ways as Sahara Reporters and draws heavily on user-generated content. Founded in 2011 by journalists who had worked for the failed Next newspaper including Dapo Olorunyomi, who had also worked with The News magazine, the newspaper is a partner in the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). Such a partnership allowed the paper to collaborate in the publication of the Paradise Papers report, allowing it to publish a story that otherwise might not have been reported. The story involved the avoidance of tax payments totalling £11 million by Godwin Emefiele, the former Group Managing Director of Zenith Bank and now Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), when leadership of the bank bought a private jet (Premium Times, 2017). The publication of that story and the attendant outcry resulted in the banking group offering to refund the money (Ezeamalu, 2017). The newspaper says it was established with a vision to "help strengthen Nigeria's democracy, advance the socio-economic wellbeing and rights of the people, promote and enrich their cultural practices, and advocate for best practices, good governance, transparency and human rights, in line with the values expected of a modern democratic state" (Premium Times, 2020a). On that vision, the newspaper says: "Proprietors of the organisation believe that of all the institutions of a modern democracy, the media matter in large measure. It can help forge new communities, pursue political and social agenda in support of a better society, and help build visions of hope and resistance. Sadly, the media can also lead in negative directions: dividing people and truncating hope and vision" (Premium Times, 2020a). Recognising the role of the media and the fact that they could be used for both good and bad, the newspaper says it is committed "to offer our country the type

of media that will advocate for the people and nudge our nation on the path of development and social reengineering" (Premium Times, 2020a).

**The Cable** was founded in 2014 by one of Nigeria's most experienced journalist and former editor of This Day newspaper, Simon Kolawole. Set up to run in a similar way to both Sahara Reporters and Premium Times, The Cable has also established itself as a credible platform for critical reporting. The newspaper says its mission is "to deliver knowledge-driven journalism in the pursuit of Nigeria's progress" (The Cable, 2020b). TheCable.ng was launched on April 29, 2014, to drive the vision through online journalism and its owners says the aim is to be the most respected online newspaper out of Africa. Of its editorial policy, the newspaper says it is driven by "independence; impartiality, integrity, defence of the public interest; respect for diversity" (The Cable, 2020b).

**The Choice of Interviewees**

As mentioned previously, the sampling approach used in selecting participants for the qualitative interview was purposive. Twelve interviewees were selected based on their respective roles in the news organisations they work for and their potential to help answer the research questions. As with the choices made in the sampling of the news organisations, the only criterion was that those to be interviewed would be top editorial managers in the respective organisations, with no consideration for which part of the country they come from. This study is a critical re-examination of the normative role of the media, and one which is critically assessing the performance of the Nigerian media in the fourth republic. These twelve participants have been selected based on purposive and convenience sampling as they are all senior editors and the corporate equivalent of executive management in their various organisations. In those roles, they are involved in both policy-making and day-to-day management and, therefore, best fit for the purpose of the study (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999). Bearing this in mind, the researcher decided to interview three of the most senior editors from each of the traditional newspapers selected: The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune. The editors-in-chief and publishers of Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable were also interviewed. The choice was to interview any of the most senior editors of each of the print media. For the digital-born newspapers with relatively smaller operations compared with the print media, their publishers were selected as participants. Each of the twelve senior editors

have at least 12 years of experience in the media and most of them have more than 20 years practising as journalists. The 12 journalists interviewed were:

Table 8: Selected editors/publishers for qualitative interviews (Olaniyan, 2020)

| S/N | NAME | POSITION HELD | NEWSPAPER |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Debo Adesina | Editor-In-Chief | The Guardian |
| 2. | Nike Sotade | Editor, Saturday | The Guardian |
| 3. | Alabi Williams | Editor, Sunday | The Guardian |
| 4. | Joseph Adeyeye | Executive Director, Digital Operations & Publications | The Punch |
| 5. | Demola Oni | Editor | The Punch |
| 6. | Sola Ayo-Adenrele | Project Lead, Punch Vertical | The Punch |
| 7. | Edward Dickson | Editor-In-Chief | Nigerian Tribune |
| 8. | Lasisi Olagunju | Editor, Saturday | Nigerian Tribune |
| 9. | Shina Oladeinde | Editor, Sunday | Nigerian Tribune |
| 10. | Omoyele Sowore | Publisher | Sahara Reporters |
| 11. | Dapo Olorunyomi | Publisher | Premium Times |
| 12. | Simon Kolawole | Publisher | The Cable |

The editors and publishers were selected because of their experience in journalism and for their executive management roles withing their respective organisations. This means they have been involved in managing the impact of the digital shift in their organisation. Accordingly, they were all considered suitable to help the researcher in answering the research questions: (i) How are new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable being used for citizen journalism and as channels of political communication? (ii) Are there lessons that traditional media owners can learn from new media practitioners? (iii) How can the useful features of new media be hardcoded to make traditional media more effective and therefore improve governance in Nigeria?

Additionally, given their respective experiences in the media business, they could address the issues of the media's role in a democracy and how citizen journalism is impacting this and the democratic process. Selecting these interviewees allowed the researcher to tap into over 120 years of collective professional experience in trying to answer the other research questions: (i) Do new media represent realistic alternatives to traditional media like newspapers in providing space for political debates? (ii) How are elements of the ecosystem of new media encouraging or hampering political discourse, and impacting the political process? (iii) What are the implications of the easy entry and exit into the new media space for citizen journalism, political

discourse and the political process in Nigeria and across the world? (iv) What policies exist to counteract the production and distribution of disinformation and misinformation through new media and how effective are they? All the participants were asked the same set of 19 open-ended questions covering every aspect of the research inquiry (see Appendix 6).

**The Choice of Survey Participants**

Convenience, Fricker's (2017, p.166) argues, is a key factor in the design of web surveys and this was carefully considered in selecting the participants for this data set. Unlike probability sampling techniques like purposive sampling, the questionnaire "may simply be posted on a website where it is left up to those browsing through the site to decide to participate in the survey ('opt in') or not" (Fricker, 2017, p.166). Once the decision was taken to use non-probability as the general approach to select participants, the next question was on the specific method that would be suitable for a web-based survey. Fricker's (2017) typology details the types of online surveys and the sampling methods associated with them, which served as a guide for designing this data set. Guided by his taxonomy (see Table 9), the researcher opted for the unrestricted self-selected survey method, which allows the questionnaire to be "posted on a website so that anyone browsing through may choose to take the survey, or they may be promoted via website banners or other online advertisements, or they may be publicized in traditional print and broadcast media" (Fricker, 2017, p.170).

Table 9: Sampling guide for Web-based surveys (Fricker, 2017, p.167)

| *Sampling method* | *Web* | *Email* |
|---|---|---|
| *Probability-based* | | |
| Surveys using a list-based sampling frame | ✓ | ✓ |
| Surveys using non-list-based random sampling | ✓ | ✓ |
| Intercept (pop-up) surveys | ✓ | |
| Mixed-mode surveys with online option | ✓ | ✓ |
| Pre-recruited panel surveys | ✓ | ✓ |
| *Non-probability* | | |
| Entertainment polls | ✓ | |
| Unrestricted self-selected surveys | ✓ | |
| Surveys using 'harvested' email lists (and data) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Opt-in panels (volunteer or paid) | ✓ | |

Accordingly, the questionnaire was designed by the researcher using Google's freely-available online survey service Google Forms (see Appendix 3) and hosted on the platform. As Google

Forms allows for special links to be created for forms being hosted on it, a custom-link was then generated for the survey, which was then sent out on the researcher's Facebook, Twitter accounts, and other online communities in which the researcher had a presence. The target was to get 100 responses each from the six geo-political zones: South-West, South-South, South-West, North-Central, North-West and North-East. The survey design followed the principles of variance, standard error, and cost as highlighted by Lavrakas (2008) and Thompson (2012).

Accordingly, using those principles, a sample size of less than 400 would have been enough to produce a confidence level of 95% and a margin error of 5%, hence, the decision to use a designated sample size of 600. In order to do this, the link was also shared through promoted posts targeting the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The form was open for over five months, from February 10, 2020, to July 31, 2020, when the last response was electronically timestamped. Altogether, 852 responses were received, out of which 688 were analysed.

The others, as detailed in the data presentation, were discarded because they failed to meet the age criteria for taking part. As Fricker (2017) notes, the choice of approach was a convenient and pragmatic one, as there was no way to pre-determine selection on the basis of any set parameters based on demographics. By its very nature, this survey also precludes the participation of at least two sets of people: those who don't have Internet access, and those who lack the technical know-how to use the web-based application that hosted the questionnaire. Just as Fricker (2017, p.170) notes, "regardless of how they are promoted (or not), the key characteristics of these types of surveys are that there are no restrictions on who can participate, and it is up to the individual to choose to participate (opt in)".

**The Selection of Stories for Content Analysis**

The selection of the stories for content analysis was also based on purposive sampling to select stories considered 'major'[38] by the researcher. These were political stories published by the newspapers between 2012 and 2019, with one story selected for each year of analysis. The criteria used for the selection were: (i) it must be about politics, issues with direct impact on the country's politics, or about political fallouts; (ii) it must be a national story, meaning it is something about and with potential impact on the entire country; and (iii) it must be a major

38 Major stories for this study are stories of (i) national significance; (ii) that have been published on page 1 of the print editions of the big newspapers; thus, considering Harcup and O'Neil's (2001) categorisation of news values.

story, meaning it must be something that was published by all the newspapers, where it got prominent treatment either in print or online. Using this set of criteria, an initial search yielded at least three stories that could potentially be used. Most of the stories met the first two conditions but not the last. In the end, getting a story that was published by all six newspapers on or around the same day was difficult. From the initial list of three stories for each year, the following stories were then selected as the sample for each year covered by the study on the basis of the pre-set criteria (see Table 10). The same stories were then selected across the six newspapers used as case studies.

Table 10: Selected stories for each year for content analysis (Olaniyan, 2020)

| S/N | YEAR | STORY | DATE OF PUBLICATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 2012 | Soldiers take over Lagos roads | January 16, 2012 |
| 2. | 2013 | APC rejects National Conference | October 23, 2013 |
| 3. | 2014 | Jonathan Writes National Assembly for extension of emergency rule | May 16, 2014 |
| 4. | 2015 | Presidential Election: Jonathan concedes defeat | May 31, 2015 |
| 5. | 2016 | I won't devalue Naira – Buhari | February 20, 2016 |
| 6. | 2017 | Court issues order to unfreeze Patient Jonathan's accounts | April 6, 2017 |
| 7. | 2018 | Saraki dumps APC | July 31, 2018 |
| 8 | 2019 | Supreme court upholds seizure of Patience Jonathan's $8.4m | March 8, 2019 |

Altogether, 41 stories were selected using this criterion, including five each in 2012, 2013 and 2017; four from 2014 and 2015; and six each from 2016, 2018 and 2019 (see Table 11). Only five samples were selected for the first three years because The Cable had not started publishing at the time, and, therefore, had no entries for consideration.

Table 11: Total number of stories analysed for each year (Olaniyan, 2020)

| S/N | YEAR | STORY | TOTAL/YEAR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 2012 | Jonathan crushes subsidy protests with soldiers | 5 |
| 2. | 2013 | APC rejects National Conference | 5 |
| 3. | 2014 | Jonathan Writes National Assembly for extension of emergency rule | 4 |
| 4. | 2015 | Presidential Election: Jonathan concedes defeat | 4 |
| 5. | 2016 | I won't devalue Naira – Buhari | 6 |
| 6. | 2017 | Court issues order to unfreeze Patient Jonathan's accounts | 5 |
| 7. | 2018 | Saraki dumps APC | 6 |
| 8. | 2019 | Supreme court upholds seizure of Patience Jonathan's $8.4m | 6 |

A more detailed discussion of the stories from each of the selected newspapers will be presented in the next chapter. In line with the pragmatic approach to this research, the researcher selected stories that covered the same events and topics even if in line with editorial independence and consistent with house styles, they appeared under different headlines and or were published on different days. For the eight years covered by the study, 41 stories which met the criteria were selected from the six newspapers for analysis. As Table 11 shows, 2012 and 2013 had five stories because The Cable had not started publishing; 2014 had four because in addition to The Cable, Sahara Reporters did not publish the story at all. For 2015, there were four stories analysed because The Punch and Nigerian Tribune did not publish the story; while for 2017, there were just five stories analysed because The Punch did not publish the selected story. 2016, 2018 and 2019 all had six stories analysed.

The selected stories were analysed using NVivo software. In addition, the headlines and first two paragraphs were analysed to critically examine the pattern of coverage. The idea was to determine: (i) whether the new, digital-born newspapers differ from the traditional, print media in their approach; (ii) if there are any differences, whether these speak to ideological differences; and (iii) if differences could help explain the growing influence of the new, digital-born newspapers. The researcher was interested in the dominant voices and tonality in each of the selected stories.

**Validity And Reliability**

Validity and reliability are viewed differently by qualitative and quantitative researchers (Creswell, 2009, Golafshani, 2003). However, Creswell (2009) notes that the concepts allow researchers to plan for accuracy and credibility of their findings. Quantitative researchers define validity and reliability as a test of accuracy and replicability, while qualitative researchers use validity to test consistency, trustworthiness and credibility of their procedures. Where validity refers to the "degree to which a test measures what it claims or purports to be measuring" (Brown, 1996, p.213); reliability refers to what Seliger and Shohamy (1989) say is the consistency and accuracy imposed on the process of data collection. There are many ways to ensure that qualitative inquiry passes the credibility tests, but this researcher has used two of the validity procedures that are within his immediate control (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The validity procedures within a qualitative lens and paradigm by Creswell and Miller (2000) detail

nine such procedures under three paradigms: postpositivist or systematic; constructivist; and critical (see Table 12).

Table 12: Validity procedures within qualitative lens and paradigm assumptions (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 126)

| Paradigm assumption/Lens | Postpositivist or Systematic Paradigm | Constructivist Paradigm | Critical Paradigm |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lens of the Researcher | Triangulation | Disconfirming evidence | Researcher reflexivity |
| Lens of Study Participants | Member checking | Prolonged engagement in the field | Collaboration |
| Lens of People External to the Study (Reviewers, Readers) | The audit trail | Thick, rich description | Peer debriefing |

**Triangulation**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the researcher has used triangulation (postpositivist or systematic) and reflexivity (critical paradigm). Care was taken in the study to ensure validity and credibility by using triangulation with the three data sources. These datasets, as noted earlier, are (i) qualitative interviews with the editors, media executives of three major newspapers as well as the editors-in-chief of the three online publications; (ii) content analysis of selected publications in the six media organisations being studied; and (iii) questionnaire administered to 600 people across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. Just as Jick (1979, p.604) posits, the "effectiveness of triangulation rests on the premise that the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another". Thus, this researcher has adopted the measure to use three data sources to enhance the validity and reliability of the research.

**Reflexivity**

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), reflexivity allows the researcher to disclose their assumptions, beliefs and biases that are likely to shape their interpretation. It also allows the researcher to pay attention to "how power and bias come to bear during all phases of the research" (Leavy, 2014, p.5). While this study has complied with the institutional ethical standards, the researcher's personal understanding of the Nigerian media industry and

professional relationships with the interviewees, have been beneficial rather than detrimental to the research process. Reflexivity has a limit to how far it can and should be applied to the social sciences because, as Traianou (2014, p.73), for instance, argues, “questioning all assumptions leads to an inability to engage in any form of action”.

Regardless of the view of Creswell and Miller (2000) that self-disclosing the assumptions, beliefs and biases that potentially shaped the study is another level of validating the outcome, the researcher has endeavoured to reveal his ‘insider’ status through the research process. The authors suggest that researchers incorporate reflexivity into the process by, among other things, creating separate sections; and providing an epilogue or using interpretive commentary throughout the discussion of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.127). All of which have been done by this researcher. As declared in the introductory chapter and the section on this researcher's positionality, the motivation for the study stemmed from my personal experiences dating back to time spent as a journalist. Those personal experiences suggest that the media was failing in its normative role and needed to course-correct if it was to be central to Nigeria's aspiration for functional democracy

**Data Collection Procedure And Ethical Considerations**

This research has been conducted in conformity with approved ethical standards, as approved by the University’s Human Research Ethics (Non-Medical) Committee. In fulfilment of the University’s requirement for ethics approval, the researcher applied to the Human Research Ethics (Non-Medical) Committee and got approval to proceed through a clearance certificate (H19/05/25) issued on May 25, 2019. In collecting data for this research, all participants for the qualitative as well as the web-based survey were duly informed of the intention of the study, their rights regarding taking part in the research, as well as other ethical issues about the use of collected data and the maintenance of anonymity (see Appendices 4 and 5). By their nature, primary data sources like qualitative interviews, surveys and newspapers are fraught with both ethical and operational problems which had to be considered during data collection. However, care was taken in operationalising the data collection to ensure the utmost regard to the best practices in research ethics. In addition, all ethical considerations of confidentiality and anonymity was adhered to during and after data collection.

**Data Analysis And Procedure**

Collecting data without an effective data analysis plan can mar even the most carefully designed research, which is why this section explains the data analysis methods used for this study. Qualitative data analysis, according to Flick (2014, p.5), allows the researcher to do three things: (i) classify and interpret data to make statements about "implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it"; (ii) discover and describe issues in the field or structures and processes in routines and practices; and (iii) to arrive at generalisable statements by comparing various materials or various texts or several cases. Creswell (2007) also defines data analysis as the preparation and organisation of data for analysis. Data analysis involves reducing the data into themes through coding, compressing the codes, and presenting the data in meaningful ways. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) provide a more detailed description of the process as including data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing/verification, all of which run concurrently.

**Processing Of Interview Data**

Processing over 12 hours of audio recordings from the semi-structured interviews involved what Marshall and Rossman (2010, p.207) described as a process of "bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data" to reduce the mass of textual data into a more manageable and understandable format. For the interview data, this process began with manually transcribing the recorded sessions word-for-word to achieve what Bazeley (2013, p.73) says should be textual description that is "true to the conversation as possible, yet pragmatic in dealing with the data".

This was followed by proofreading to be sure the transcripts reflect the questions and answers, taking into account the need to be true to the exact conversational nature of the questions, and the emotions and repetitions contained in the participants' responses (Bazeley, 2013). The decision was then made to use the interpretive data analysis approach to make meaning from raw data such as the transcribed text, which alone would make no sense to anyone but the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.157). The interpretive approach contrasts with the social anthropology and the collaborative research approaches they described and is the most suitable for this kind of study. Elucidating on the form, Jankowski and Wester (1991, p.52) say the interpretive approach is the "analysis interpretation, through *verstehen* or empathetic understanding, of the meaning that people give to their actions".

**Processing of Content Analysis Data**

Of the 41 stories collected for content analysis, 12 were unavailable in soft copies and had to be converted from print through the process of typesetting and proofreading. The 12 stories treated this way were ones selected from 2012 (The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune); 2013 (The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune); 2014 (The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune); 2015 (The Punch and Nigerian Tribune) and 2016 (Nigerian Tribune). These were added to the 29 stories harvested from the websites of the respective newspapers. The analysis was conducted both manually and by using the data analysis tool, NVivo.

**Processing of Survey Data**

The responses for the questionnaire published on Google Forms is usually downloadable in a comma-separated values (.csv) file, which allowed for the easy clean-up of the data. At this stage, all the responses with dates of birth later than 2002 were removed before the file was then exported into a Microsoft Excel file for easy analysis. As the responses were received and logged into the .csv according to the dates they were received, the next stage in organising the data was to manually organise them into the six geo-political zones in order to be sure that target of 100 minimum responses from each zone was met. As with the content analysis, the data from the online survey was analysed both manually and using NVivo.

**Data Analysis Choices**

The data management process adopted allowed the researcher to organise large amounts of text into formats that are fitting for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) used for this study. This was the most efficient way to process the data from two data sets of qualitative interviews and content analysis. The overarching goal of the study was to interrogate the phenomenon of citizen journalism and its significance as well as impact on the Nigerian political process. Therefore, the qualitative approach of thematic analysis was used for the interviews and the content analysis. Here, as in the coding and analysis of the qualitative interviews, the same themes that are the focus of the study will be considered when coding. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) describe thematic analysis as a method for "identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data". I have chosen this approach because, when carried out appropriately, it can "produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.97). The process allows the researcher

to sort and sift through large volumes of texts to "identify relationships, differences, patterns, distinctions and themes between sub-groups" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.9). Themes, in this case were "something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82).

For the first data set, the qualitative interviews, the thematic issues in focus were (i) citizen journalism and participatory journalism; (ii) media activism/advocacy; (iii) alternative media; (iv) media capture; (v) donor funding; (vi) access into the media; (vii) representation in the media; (viii) digital disruption; (ix) new media ecosystem; (x) misinformation and disinformation; (xi) easy entry/exit into new media; (xii) citizen journalism and political process; (xiii) watchdog journalism; (xiv) regulation of new media; and (xv) public trust in the media. These themes were then used to code the interview data using the NVivo 12 computer software package produced by QSR International. To ensure further clarity and to properly answer the research questions, these 15 themes have been clustered into five thematic groups:

1. State of the Nigerian media
    - Digital disruption
    - Public trust in the media
    - Watchdog journalism
    - New media ecosystem
2. New media and political discourse
    - Alternative media
    - Citizen/participatory journalism
    - Media activism/advocacy
3. Elite domination of the media
    - Media capture
    - Donor funding
4. Traditional media and political discourse
    - Access into the media
    - Representation in the media
5. New media impact on the political process
    - Regulation of new media
    - Easy entry/exit from new media

- Misinformation and disinformation
- Citizen media and democratic process

The second data set, the content analysis of newspaper stories, went through a similar process of organising the text into meaningful parts using two different techniques. The stories were analysed using summative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify three approaches to content analysis: the conventional, directed and summative. They describe summative content analysis as involving identifying themes by looking at keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context. They stress the fact that this approach goes beyond just counting (quantitative) to include latent content analysis or interpretation. This approach suited the proposed study because the pre-identified themes of trust, access, bias, representation, and participation are central to answering the research questions of how new media and citizen journalists are creating new channels of political communication and impacting the political process as a result.

Since the goal of analysing the stories was to determine the issues of access and participation in the selected newspapers, the researcher decided to critically analyse the tonality in the selected newspapers stories by looking at the (i) sentiments; (ii) the voices or sources in the respective stories; and (iii) the space devoted to each story. To analyse each story, the researcher developed and used a code book and coding form (see Appendices 7 and 8). The code book detailed the guideline for coding the stories and listed the criteria for analysis. Krippendorff (2004, p.88) suggests that in using content analysis, qualitative researchers are looking for multiple interpretations by "considering diverse voices (readers), alternative perspectives (from different ideological positions), oppositional readings (critiques), or varied uses of the texts examined (by different groups)".

Each story was analysed using a five-point criteria: author type (whether they were written by in-house reporter or wire copies); story type (whether they were politics or others with national political impact); source type (to determine the dominant voices in the stories); tonality (whether the stories were positive, negative or neutral); and space (measured the number of paragraphs a newspaper devoted to a story). To achieve the goal of analysing the ideological slant of the newspaper, each of the stories were manually coded using the coding form on all

points but the sentiments. The sentiment analysis was done using NVivo's feature that allows texts to be so analysed.

The third data set, the responses from the web-based survey, were automatically analysed by Google Forms, which made interpretation easier of the entire national data. The data was analysed using a simple descriptive method. However, as the researcher wanted a second level of analysis at the geo-political level, Microsoft Excel and NVivo were also used.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have detailed the design and management of the research process as well as why specific steps were taken. I have also detailed why qualitative interviews, content analysis and online surveys were selected as data collection instruments and equally explained why they have been used in combination. This chapter has also explained the limitations and challenges encountered and how they were all dealt with to ensure the integrity of the data and the entire research process. The research is grounded on pragmatic philosophy that is consistent with studies of this nature. Therefore, mix methods were the most appropriate combination so that they can achieve all the research objectives. This explains why the mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. The data collection methods used also reflect these principles, with the interviews and content analysis offered the opportunity to collect qualitative data while the online survey allowed me to collect quantitative data. The data analysis, which are presented in the next chapters, are designed to narrate the observed phenomenon.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# DIGITAL DISRUPTION, CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND IMPACT ON POLITICAL PROCESS

## Introduction

This study was designed to critically analyse the growing influence of the new, digital-born newspapers by collecting direct data on user preferences through an online survey. The 30 questions in the online survey and the questions posed to the senior journalists at the qualitative interviews were relevant to answering the following research questions: to what extent new media platforms like Sahara Reporters enhance access into and participation in the political discourse? how new media are helping to expand the range of citizen's choices in the Nigerian media space? Accordingly, the first decision was to see how the themes arising from the interviews relate to and address the research questions. The data from the qualitative interviews were distilled and grouped into themes to allow a meaningful interpretation. As Rheinhardt et al. (2018) suggest, the challenge for the researcher was in taking the codes from NVivo and making them speak to the research questions in the most meaningful way. As detailed in the previous chapter, the 15 themes were identified and used for coding on NVivo which were been clustered around five main groups (see Figure 2).

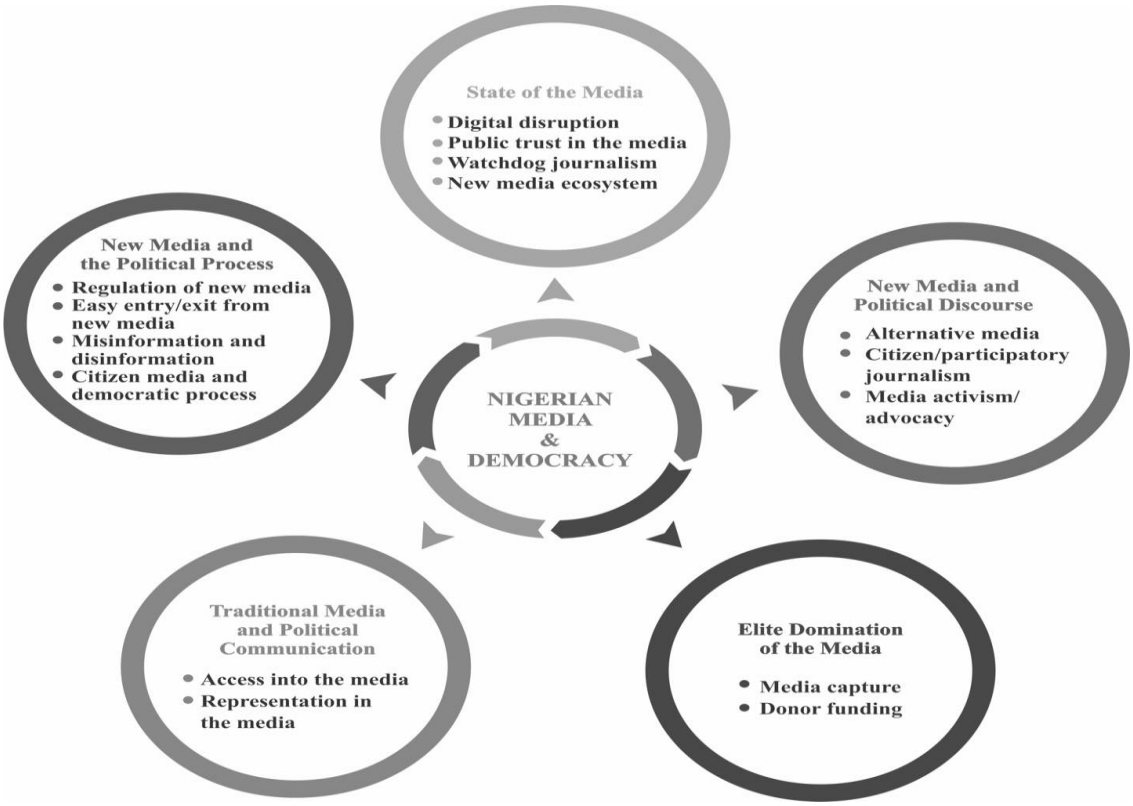



Figure 1: Thematic clusters for qualitative data analysis (Olaniyan, 2020)

This chapter will discuss the findings from two data sets: the qualitative interviews and the online survey (see Appendices for raw data presentation) as they relate to the issues of digital disruption, citizen journalism and how these have impacted the political discourse. This chapter will also critically examine what, if any, impact there has been on the Nigerian political process post-1999 as a result of the obvious and increasing adoption of new media as channels of political communication. The study was designed to collect three data sets such that findings from one set could be validated and reinforced by data from the other sources. For instance, the online survey primarily sought to collect data directly from media users to see correlations in how and why people use media to either validate or critically examine what the senior journalists say. The findings from the two data sets are presented in the thematic clusters that were derived from the qualitative interviews.

**Digital disruption**

The Nigerian media faces probably its biggest challenge yet in the form of digital disruption. In addition to the economic and political changes that have impacted journalism practice in recent years, convergence and its affordances are changing the public understanding of the role of the journalist and who qualifies to be so addressed. Bourne (2018), Olaniyan and Akpojivi (2021), Olukotun (2018b), Oso and Akanni (2018), and Kperogi (2016) have described the changing face of Nigerian journalism as a result of new technologies. The qualitative interviews conducted for this study showed that digital disruption is impacting the industry at two broad levels: the business and the journalistic sides, the practical effect of which could be either positive or negative.

Beyond the industry, the responses suggest that these changes are altering politics even if the impact on the democratic processes are slow. Debo Adesina, the Editor-In-Chief at The Guardian, believes that digital disruption has been destructive, hitting revenue badly. “As for the impact, the truth of the matter is that new technology has been very destructive. Because of that, advert intake is also down,” he said (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos). Most of the senior journalists agree with Adesina that new media was affecting copy sales of print editions of newspapers and, as a result, advertising revenue. Newspaper advertising sales usually depend on circulation so that the higher the circulation, the more a newspaper can potentially charge per page of advertising (Ferguson, 1983).

Dropping circulation means advertisers are less willing to spend money without the guarantee of reaching many people. Instead, they prefer to use announcements in online publications as well as relatively more effective banner advertisements. It's a sentiment that is shared by the Editor-In-Chief at Nigerian Tribune, who argued in similar vein: "I must say that the new age media has really affected revenue … if you look at the average media house today, they lose so much in terms of copy sales" (Interview, Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). There is a general agreement that the newspaper press is especially vulnerable and has been badly hit by the increasing public adoption of new media as competing channels of communication (Sparks et al., 2016; Newman, 2009).

Sparks et al. (2016), in their comparative study of the Chinese and the American media markets link the decline in circulation and advertising to digital disruption and its attendant problems. They argued:

> Three factors have combined together to make the situation extremely difficult: newspapers are losing their unique role of providing detailed news and information, their advertisers are deserting them for online competitors while newspapers have not been able to retain their market share in the Internet environment, those audiences that remain loyal to newspapers and follow their online offering are very reluctant to pay for particular titles when there are free alternatives (Sparks et al., 2016, p.201).

As others have pointed out, digital disruption not only transforms journalism but equally weakens the economic foundations of news publishing (Currah, 2009). Though, Currah's analysis focused on the United Kingdom media market, the Publisher, Premium Times, agrees with that assessment as a true reflection of the Nigerian media market. He maintains that "what digital did was to crumble the existing infrastructure with regards to news report, the traditional mode of financing is through advertising and circulation, today, digital advertising has sucked in the traditional mode of advertising almost in 90%, the digital platforms and technology companies have taken up a whole lot of advertising" (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg).

Though circulation figures are a closely-guarded secret in Nigeria, there is reason to believe that readership has been declining as digital disruption takes root. A 2009 survey by the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN), for instance, found total circulation of major

Nigerian newspapers well below 300,000 copies per day (Ekwuruju, 2009). Though it was disputed by the industry at the time, it remains the only attempt to independently ascertain newspaper circulation in the country as there are no audited figures available for any newspaper to date. However, The Guardian claims on its website to have one million readers. While The Punch does not publicly disclose its circulation figures, it claims to be the 'most widely read newspaper'.

Regardless of the circulation figures claimed by the respective media organisations, data from the online survey clearly shows that people are not buying newspapers. Data from the survey conducted supports this position as in response to the question on how they get print editions of newspapers to read (if they don't buy them), 174 or 26.3% of the 662 respondents said they get them from other sources. One hundred and sixty-five (165) or 24.9% said they get them from friends; 155 or 23.4% from family; 109 or 16.5% from offices, and 59 or 8.9% from newsstands (see Figures 2 and 3).

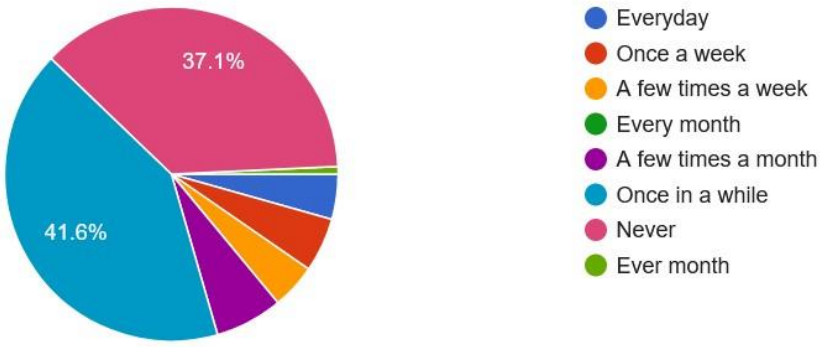



Figure 2: How often do you buy newspapers? (Olaniyan, 2020)

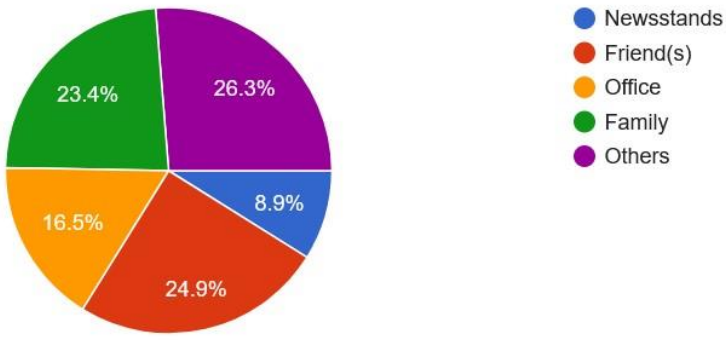



Figure 3: How do you get newspapers (print) to read? (Olaniyan, 2020)

With increasingly smaller numbers of people buying newspapers and advertisers withdrawing their patronage of print because of falling circulation as alleged by Dapo Olorunyomi of the Premium Times, the fears over revenue losses are not misplaced. This has wide implications for the ability of the media to perform its role as free, independent producers of news. The impact on revenue is potentially damaging because it affects the media's ability to perform its normative role as watchdog. This danger has been highlighted by others including Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020), who found that poor or non-existent budget was hampering investigative reporting. Other impediments they cited are peer pressure and self-censorship, ownership structures, and sociological constraints. They argued that these constraints had severely limited the media's ability to perform its normative role, forcing investigative reporting onto 'bended knees'. "Investigative journalism in Nigeria is on bended knees…because of some socio-cultural, economic, and professional elements" (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2020, p114). They add:

> Interviewees agreed that ownership structure, which negates journalistic autonomy and poor remuneration which exposes journalists to corrupt and unethical practices are the most important variables that decrease the ability of journalists to engage in investigative reporting. Additionally, fraternity, ethnic affiliation, and issues of capacity combine to whittle down the ability of the press to execute its social responsibility role (Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2020, p.114).

As the next chapter will detail, this is ultimately hindering newspapers, as advertisers often get preferential editorial treatment.

On the positive side though, and perhaps offering a glimpse into the future of Nigerian journalism, is the fact that the digital disruption is forcing changes in the way newspapers are managed. Daniels (2013), in a 'State of the Newsroom' report, highlights how the digital disruption was forcing traditional and digital media to jostle for space in the South African media market and this appears to mirror the current media landscape in Nigeria. While traditional print media may be losing on the revenue side, digital disruption means more choices for media users who can access more news content from multiple sources even without digital subscriptions.

The digital disruption has expanded the options available and led to intense competition for readers and advertising revenue. Nike Sotade, Editor of The Guardian on Saturday

acknowledges that traditional media is battling new media, and that to survive, print media is transitioning online (Interview Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos). The transitioning referenced by Sotade began much earlier in 1999 when the Post Express became the first Nigerian newspaper to migrate online. The establishment of online newspapers by Nigerians in the Diaspora followed in the mid-1990s and the migration of other newspapers soon afterwards (Kperogi, 2016). However, the expansion of the digital space has failed to translate into more revenue because, while advertisers may be spending more money online, competition is stiff.

The Executive Director of Publications at The Punch admits that "the Naira, Kobo, the Dollars and cents that are being taken away from the legacy publishers like The Punch, The Guardian and the others, all of that money, revenue is going to publishers on the digital side" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). The digital side he mentioned is a space inhabited by digital-born newspapers likes Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable, which I would refer to as direct competitors to the more-established media organisations such as The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune.

That space also includes blogs like www.lindaikejisblog.com and instablog9ja, which stand out more for aggregation of content from multiple sources rather than any original news production. Regardless of their perception within the industry as feeding off the proprietary content of others, they represent another level of competition for print media and other online players. Sola Ayo-Adenrele, Project Lead at Punch Vertical, agrees that the blogs are encroaching into the space hitherto dominated by the traditional media. As she puts it, "We also have issues because before now, everybody came to the regular media to do their publicity … also, the competition from online blogs is there … they aggregate people's stories and earn serious money at every other person's expense" (Interview, Sola Ayo-Adenrele, 2019, Lagos). Her concern aligns with the conclusion reached in a study by Jeon and Esfahani (2014, p.107) which found three ways by which news aggregators affect profits of newspapers on the Internet.

First, the authors found that since the Internet "creates advertising congestion by creating so many advertising opportunities, it can reduce the value of advertising through online newspapers" (Jeon & Esfahani, 2014, p.107). Second, they found that "as the aggregator's algorithm to find high-quality articles becomes noisier, it increases the business-stealing effect relative to the readership-expansion effect"; and, lastly, they found that the presence of the

aggregator itself strengthens competition among newspapers such that erecting a pay wall becomes harder (Jeon & Esfahani, 2014, p.107). The drop in circulation figures predates the digital disruption and is similar to worldwide trends of a general declining interest in news that is hitting newspapers the highest (Donsbach, 2010). In the case of Nigeria, falling circulation may also likely have been driven by other reasons including rising cover prices that made newspapers too expensive for most people (Gicheru, 2014; Busari, 2015). However, it is now fuelling the exodus of an increasing number of advertisers from traditional media to online platforms.

As advertising is driven by aggregate numbers, shrinking circulation figures means that, in the words of Dickson (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan), "it makes sense for a typical advertiser to go online, he has the advantage of mileage over even newspapers … I doubt if all the newspapers in Nigeria put together circulate more than a hundred thousand copies per day". Dickson's position is supported by the Editor of the Saturday Tribune, who argued that media users and advertisers "want to reach as many as possible and they know there is a decline in circulation figures everywhere so digital media it is" (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan). Their position aligns with that of Picard (2009), who argued that the higher the circulation of a newspaper, the more it can charge for advertising. Their argument hinges on the logic that advertisers are willing to pay more in order to reach more people. However, the curious case of Nigerian newspapers where advertising rates have been increasing as circulation drops hides other issues. In order to convince advertisers that their rates are based on this long-standing advertising pricing principle, many newspapers have either refused to disclose their audited circulation figures or where they do so, exaggerate it.

Simon Kolawole, the Publisher of The Cable, in his blunt assessment, notes the penchant of print owners to exaggerate circulation figures to win over advertisers, and the fact that "the digital nature of the new media makes measurement scientific," allowing more control because "you can track the pages,…control what you spend,…measure the impact of what you spend, no matter how you define the impact" (Interview Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). This assertion highlights the data-driven marketing communication capabilities of the new media environment, where advertisers can target those they want to reach and confirm almost to the letter, how many of them they are able to reach with their advertising spend (Lee & Cho, 2020). This was a control that advertisers never had because in the absence of an audit bureau of circulation, advertisers depended on unaudited circulation figures provided by newspaper

houses. However, it is not just the more effective advertising offered by new media platforms that is putting the print media under pressure.

Rather, according to Omoyele Sowore, the Publisher of Sahara Reporters, the more interactive and democratic nature of the online platforms means "news, advertisement and engagement became seamless," meaning that people were no longer "waiting for a story that has already been written four hours ago and sent to them in print and that means less and less advertisers came to the old practitioners" (Interview Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype). Oladeinde, who edits Nigerian Tribune on Sunday, echoed Sowore's sentiments on the relatively more robust application of new technologies by online platforms. The new, digital-born newspapers initiated and "also run online TVs that are current, platforms that are so flexible they can introduce anything…people try to economise with the little they have, what suffers most is the traditional media…we have also lost a lot in terms of revenue" (Interview Shina Oladeinde, 2019, Ibadan). The fears expressed by senior journalists may not be misplaced considering the outcome of the online survey conducted for this research, which largely showed that media consumption is indeed moving online.

This trend is in tandem with other studies that have identified the reasons why people read newspapers. Flavian and Gurrea (2006, p.327), for instance, suggest that people read newspapers for three reasons: search for specific information (SSI); search for updated news (SUN); and Leisure- Entertainment (LEIS). Expanding their argument, they suggest that online newsreaders prefer digital formats for the first two reasons because (i) the Internet makes it easy to search for specific news; and (ii) the immediacy of online news allows news readers to keep abreast of updates. When it comes to where people turn to for their news, an overwhelming majority of 565 or 82.5% of the respondents said online newspapers was their preferred source while 372 or 54.3% said they got their news from television. One hundred and ninety-six or 28.6% said they got their news from radio while 103 or 15% said they got their news from print editions of newspapers (see Figure 4).

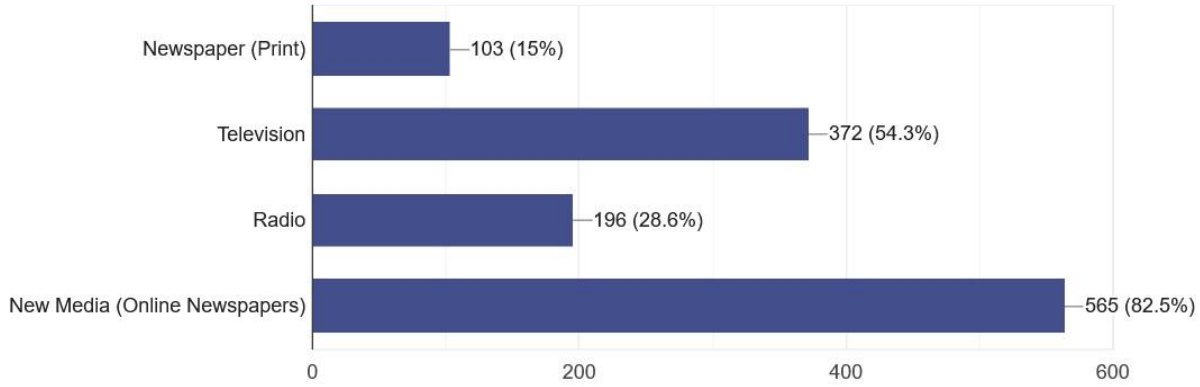



Figure 4: Sources of news (Olaniyan, 2020)

Additionally, the survey showed that print editions of newspapers are no longer attractive as an increasing number of people are spending time online, which represents both a challenge and a threat (see Figure 5). Equally important, and buttressing Flavián and Gurrea's (2006) argument, more than 70% of the people surveyed said they spend more than three hours online, most of whom if we were to go by the available data, did so on their smartphones (see Figures 6). The survey data showed, for instance, that 630 respondents or 91.6% recorded from the six geo-political regions owned a smartphone as opposed to 405 or 60.3% who say they owned a television set (see Figure 6). The data also showed that 252 or 36.6% owned a radio set; 159 or 23.1% owned a tablet and 207 or 30.1% owned another mobile device. Further analysis of the data showed more people (192) owned a smartphone but no other device including radio/television

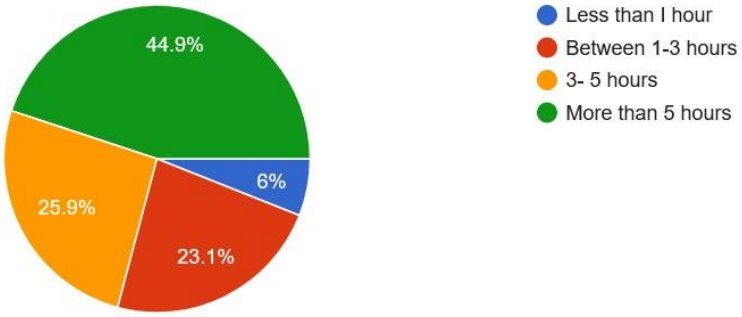



Figure 5: Hours spent on the Internet (Olaniyan, 2020)

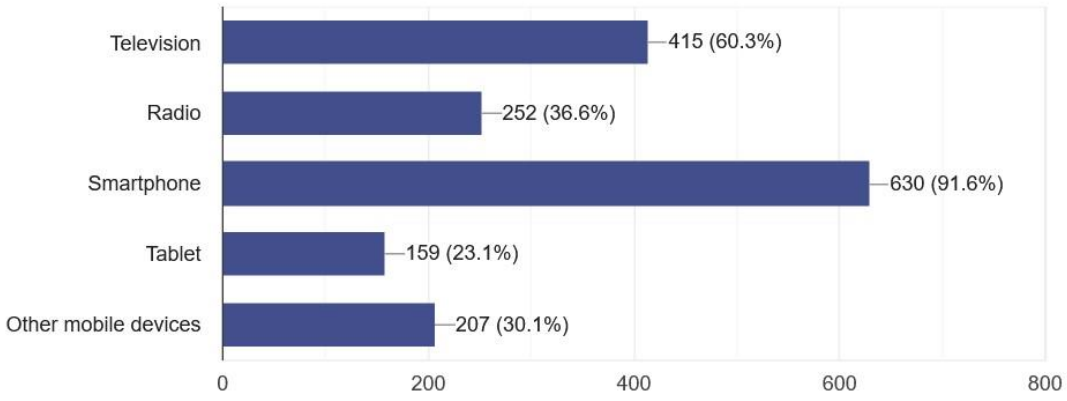



Figure 6: Ownership of media devices through which people get their news (Olaniyan, 2020)

In their argument as to why people prefer online news, Flavian and Gurrea (2006, p. 327) argue that the ability to engage with online content attracts people who are cut off by the non-interactive nature of print editions of newspapers. There is reason to believe that the convenience of engaging with media content in the way they describe offers hope as well as a challenge. For instance, only 10% of the people surveyed said they never share stories from online news platforms; 15% said they never comment; and about three in five people have contributed stories or photographs to online publications (see Figures 7 and 8).

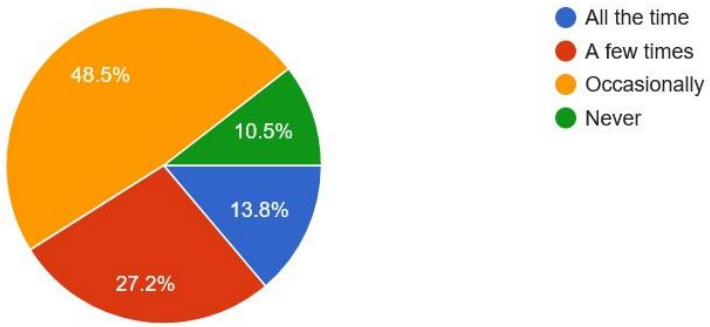



Figure 7: Sharing of news from online publications (Olaniyan, 2020)

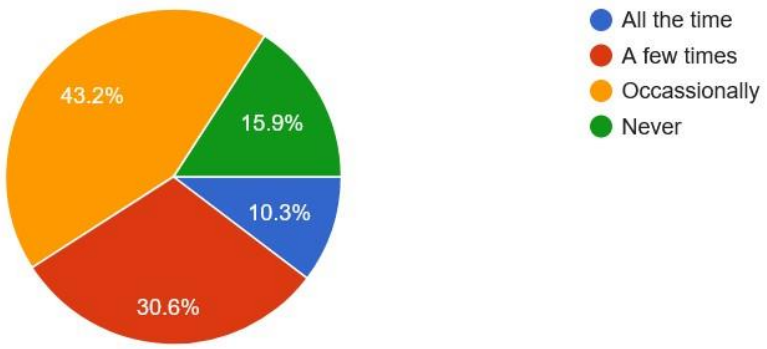



Figure 8: Commenting on news items published in online newspapers (Olaniyan, 2020)

Therefore, media organisations that can strategically optimise their online and mobile offerings are more likely to remain competitive. The challenge is in how to enable public participation in ways that allow contributions without diluting the essence of what the Editor-In-Chief of the Guardian referred to as 'validation and credibility'. On the challenge of providing news offerings in a digital era that has empowered users, he said, "what they just need is validation, credibility…whether you are a TV station, radio station or online newspaper, you need to give a content that is unique to the same audience that has already got the variance of the same news" (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos). His allusion to 'validation and credibility' refer to the changing role of journalists already observed by others who suggest that journalists are increasingly being called upon to do more than merely reporting. Instead, they are being asked to "help audiences sift through and interpret ever-increasing tides of information" (Johnson, 2012, p.222). The suggestion acknowledges the removal of the gatekeeping function from the exclusive purview of professional journalists and the influence of non-professionals involved in the collection and distribution of news that is picked up and passed along. Regardless, and as The Guardian's Editor-in-Chief notes, professional journalists are still required to evaluate information collected by non-professionals to determine whether they would be allowed through the more professional and more formal channels (Johnson, 2012).

**New media ecosystem**

The unique features of new media such as its digital nature, interactivity, hypertexuality, virtual nature, networked communities, and simulation allow it to be differentiated from traditional media (Lister et al., 2009). Those characteristics enable what Jenkins (2006) describes as the convergent culture that is at the heart of the changes in the production and consumption of

media content. These unique features, including the fast-changing environment, as well as the loose structure involving more operators, have been described metaphorically as the ecosystem (Kostovska, Raats, Donders & Ballo, 2021). The concept, the authors note, has also been associated with the disruptions caused by innovations, as well as the active involvement of people in the communication process.

However, they equally acknowledge that the concept has been used to describe the idea of stakeholders who are involved in the "industrial and creative production and circulation of culture," as well as connectivity and connection amongst stakeholders (Kostovska et al., 2021, p.12). For this study, the concept is used to describe the unique features associated with new media that differentiate it from traditional media. These include the virtual nature, networked communities, convergence, loose structure and the participation of many active participants. One of the most obvious differences in the ecosystems of new and traditional media is that the unique features of the former empower and enable ordinary people to participate in the communicative process both as producers and consumers.

The participatory feature is one of the reasons many hailed new media as enhancing and deepening the space for debate. However, as O'Sullivan (2012) notes, whether the participation translates into real interactivity is open to question. "Yes/no news polls and unanswered reader comments, often overwhelming in number, do not constitute true interactivity," he points out (O'Sullivan, 2012, p.43). Another feature of new media is the relatively lower entry barrier (Carson, 2019), which hitherto served as forms of self-regulation to traditional media. This difference, as well as the promises and threats were widely acknowledged by the senior journalists interviewed for this research.

According to The Project Lead of Punch Vertical, new media's ecosystem indeed lowers the entry barrier. "Once you register your domain, you are free to publish, unlike the traditional where you have your dignity to protect, they do not have anything to protect, they plagiarise," she said (Interview, Sola Ayo-Adenrele, 2019, Lagos). Her observation echoes Carson's (2019) argument that "before the internet, it was much more expensive to distribute information, building up trust took years, and there were much simpler definitions of what constituted news and media, making regulation or self-regulation easier," and that new technologies are now allowing "anyone to create and disseminate information".

Dwelling on the issue of lower barriers, the Editor of The Guardian on Sunday also stressed the fact that traditional media like print (newspapers) are limited by the kinds of 'restrictions' cited by Carson (2019). "We operate from a physical space, and we are mindful of it…you have to be physically present to answer some queries and you are mindful of legal cases and also mindful of cost…we have more than 3,000 people and we do not have funding from government…what the online media does, does not need much to run," he said (Interview, Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos). The inhibiting cost was also cited by his colleague, the Editor at The Guardian on Saturday, as a major difference between traditional and new media and one reason why print media is restricted. "The major difference is that they don't have to set up a press, they don't have to invite distributions vans…not highly capital intensive," she said (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos).

The fact that there is neither need for elaborate structures for starting and operating new media platforms nor formal restrictions could be considered both positive or negative. According to the Editor-In-Chief of the Nigerian Tribune, with new media, "the problem they usually have is that of the structure, it is built just around one person, it is built just around a particular idea, if the idea does not last a distance, if the personality does not last a distance, it just fizzles out" (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). This, he added, means "believability still resides with the traditional media". These arguments about the need for some level of control on who can operate in the media, though convincing, sound like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. It also buttresses the criticisms that traditional media is struggling to come to terms with the loss of its 'top-down' power over the flow of news. The new media environment that replaced the top-down news production processes has altered the way in which news is generated and distributed. New media technologies have encouraged the rise of more partisan outlets and made user-generated news an important addition channel with serious implications for the perception about the credibility of news information (Hartsell, Metzger & Flanagin, 2012).

This is in no way limited to the Western nations, as the moral panic associated with online communications and their potential effect on democracy are already evident in Africa. Wasserman (2020), for instance, alludes to the tendency for new media users to avoid sources where they can be exposed to alternative viewpoints. In addition, he highlights the problem of confirmation bias, whereby new media users only seek information that affirms what they already believe. The fragmentation of sources may represent diversity in what media users can

access; but, among other shortcomings, critics have highlighted the potential decreased professionalism, news subjectivity and bias, as well as the fear that the fragmentation and selective exposure the new environment enhances, will ultimately be detrimental to politics (see Hartsell, Metzger & Flanagin, 2012; p.239).

Flaxman, Goel and Rao (2013) note this in their study of online news consumption patterns, which confirms that ideological segregations exist online and are indicated by preferences for what people read. Kelly (2010, p.94) captures the changing information ecosystem by highlighting how (i) the clusters of bloggers and other citizen journalists with similar interests provide an informal structure and shape the flow of information as a result; (ii) the entire information network now includes newcomers operating along the old ones knit together by hyperlinked multimedia into a common fabric of public discourse; and (iii) the fact that 'journalistic institutions' remain key players in the new information ecosystem.

One effect of the lower barriers is the loose control on process within new media organisations, a factor often cited as a liability. Donsbach (2010), who identifies five competencies of journalism, argues that there ought to be strict codes to professionally identify who is a journalist. The five competencies he identified include the professional, which mean that "journalists are aware of their general societal role and have clearly defined norms that guide their behaviour on the job" (Donsbach, 2010, p.46). According to him, the changing role of the journalists require them to (i) have general competence by possessing a keen awareness of relevant history, current affairs and analytical thinking; (ii) have subject competences by possessing the necessary expertise in the specific subjects about which they report; (iii) have process competences by possessing scientifically based knowledge about the communication process; (iv) have journalistic skills; and (v) have the necessary professional values by conducting themselves within the norms of professional ethics (Donsbach, 2010, p.46). These basic competences, many believe, are essential to ensure that the media is able to fulfil its normative role of informing the public in ways that allow people to make informed political choices

Expounding on this suggestion that journalists need certain levels of competences, the Editor of the Sunday Tribune said "in the traditional media, you have a firm grip on staff, they know the dos and don'ts, they know the lines not to be crossed, you cannot wilfully write malicious reports without proof, documentary proof…I do not think that happens in the new

media…because you want to attract traffic in new media, which determines the money made" (Interview, Shina Oladeinde, 2019, Ibadan). The relatively lower level of entry for operating in new media and the weak processes are reasons why traditional media still holds relative edge in terms of quality of news. One of those who believes that print media remains the most credible is the Editor-in-Chief at The Guardian, who goes further to argue that as news users are now empowered, they desire validation and credibility in the content they are being served.

His sentiments appear to be supported by the data from the online survey (see Figure 9), which showed that online newspapers have a credibility gap with only 41 or 6% of all responses saying they have never had cause to disbelieve online news. By contrast, 420 or 61.3% said they have had cause to doubt news from online sources a few times, 191 or 27.9% said they have doubted online stories occasionally, and 33 or 4.8% said they do so all the time.

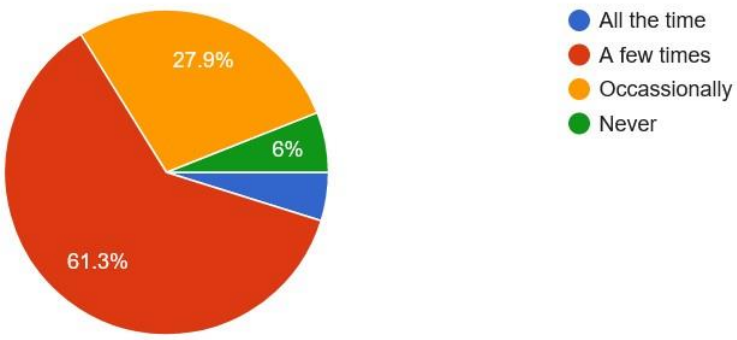



Figure 9: Doubts about stories published online (Olaniyan, 2020)

The new technology that enables new media encourages citizen journalists to sacrifice accuracy for speed, and the relatively lower entry barrier means many lack the competences that Donsbach (2010) described. Additionally, many of the operators are one-man start-ups lacking the necessary investment for news investigations and new collection. For instance, in spite of the proliferation of news sites and blogs in Nigeria, many are mere news aggregators, copying and pasting what has been published by more established newspapers. While some studies have suggested that news aggregators such as Google and Yahoo might benefit traditional news sites, that might be true to the extent that they often redirect users to the platforms hosting the original stories (Lee & Chyi, 2015). However, Lindaikejiblog.com often does not even credit the original news sites and has been embroiled in controversy about stealing content from other sites in the past (Muomah, 2014).

The Guardian's Editor-in-Chief pointed out that, "the consumer is so empowered now…what they just need is validation, credibility" (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos). This aligns with the arguments that traditional and new media are only separated by the way they master how to use technology to produce and distribute good journalistic works. The Publisher of the Premium Times, one of those who makes this argument, says "the new online media are more deft in the use of digital for distribution of information and revenue creation…the fundamental difference is in the three principles of content, how we find sources and relay news" (Interview, Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). Adeyeye, The Punch newspaper's Executive Director agrees that things are changing but that the core of media business remains the same. "There's business, there's tech and then content…a lot has changed in that area" (Interview, Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). His argument suggests that the new media technologies in themselves do not guarantee success but must be used to deliver good content in a way that allows the operators to make money from the entire process. While the technology is cheap enough to allow easy entry by just about anyone, the lack of resources affects the ability of most to gather original content that can sustain a profitable media business.

Additionally, many of the operators lack the business skills to make money from the still emerging online publishing model. According to The Punch newspaper's Executive Director, one of the most noticeable changes is in the speed of news delivery, regarded as a useful feature of new media and one that is ultimately beneficial to the print media. As he explains it, "because of the fast pace of the new cycle now…it's optimized everybody to be more competitive and that's resulted from the disruption that these digital publishers brought…they get a story now they push it out now and it has in a way has forced traditional legacy media houses to be more proactive than reactive and of course to be very competitive also" (Interview, Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). For traditional media organisations which commit to re-thinking their operations in light of the digital disruptions, there is reason to believe they can thrive in the new ecosystem.

This kind of restructuring, according to Anderson, Bell and Shirky (2015, p.13), "will mean rethinking every organizational aspect of news production - increased openness to partnerships; increased reliance on publicly available data; increased use of individuals, crowds and machines to produce raw material; even increased reliance on machines to produce some of the output". Their assessment of post-industrial journalism and how to adapt to digital disruption also argues that there are new ways to practice good journalism.

As previously mentioned, the new media ecosystem allows more active participation and engagement with news stories. While traditional media organisations including the print media have established and maintain a prominent online presence, there is an admission that the new media platforms are more adept at using technology for newsgathering and dissemination. Knowing that the relatively more open ecosystem of new media is a double-edged sword, the challenge would be how the print and other traditional media can embrace the features without losing the more rigorous checks that enhance the quality of their content. As Anderson, Bell and Shirky (2015, p.14) argue, the media could emerge stronger from the digital disruption by "taking advantage of new forms of collaboration, new analytic tools and sources of data, and new ways of communicating what matters to the public".

Gatekeeping has helped print media over the years, both to control the flow of information and to ensure some reasonable quality. Does this feature associated with a more hierarchical news model still have a place in the new media era? What does it mean for trust in the media? These questions will be addressed in detail in the next chapter, which focuses on access, alternative media and trust issues. However, if the expansion of the media space, diversity of opinion and, ultimately, the enrichment of the democratic process are considered, it would seem that the advantages of allowing 'unfettered' entry into new media far outweighs the negatives. Participation in politics is enhanced when people have the opportunity to participate in the media, which is limited in traditional ecosystem (Dahlgren, 2013).

Dahlgren argues that the new media ecosystem has transformed public participation in the media. This suggests that regardless of the negatives, new media and citizen journalism represent an 'important democratic step'. He adds that with the advent of the web and its affordances, the political can manifest itself in the media, within online networks focused on network issues (Dahlgren, 2013, p.22). The next section examines the issue of easy entry into and exit from new media, and how the expanded space for political communication is impacting the media and the political process.

The new media ecosystem operates in sharp contrast to the relatively more regulated environment that the industry is used to. Thus, calls for professionalising journalism might be seen as limiting free speech and press freedom. News platforms like Sahara Reporters, who operate outside of the journalists' union, have set the pace in reporting on corruption in government and even in the media. Without the non-institutional news platforms and the non-

professional journalist, Nigeria will endure narrow narratives that have disillusioned readers as the country struggles to deliver democratic dividends.

**Easy entry/exit from new media**

As mentioned in the previous section, new media has a relatively lower entry barrier that allows operators, including non-professional journalists, to perform acts of journalism. The relatively lower entry barrier ensures easy entry into and exit from the segment. Believed to have removed the restrictions maintained by traditional media, the less stringent entry requirements hailed by the likes of Gillmor (2004) and Rosen (2012) are fraught with problems for obvious reasons. Some of the criticisms directed at the feature, especially by professional journalists and media scholars, border on abuse, and the potential threat to the information order as a result. The Editor of The Punch is one of those who believe that the feature is open to abuse. According to him, "It is like having a disjointed media," he said of what is a proliferation of online newspapers and blogs (Interview, Demola Oni, 2019, Lagos). What Oni calls a 'disjointed media' or the fragmentation of the media into segments including digital-born media (like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable), blogs (like lindaikejisblog.com and bellanaija.com), news aggregators (like pulse.ng), and the countless social media activists could very well be interpreted by others as diversity.

In this new environment, the entrants have formed networks of influence outside the traditional media and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), removing the structure that once served to control entry and practice. Their participation in the communicative space mirrors the changing concept of journalism which now includes other non-professionals who also contribute to and represent their own interests. Thus, performing some of the functions hitherto reserved for and controlled by media institutions (Hermida, 2011a).

The Publisher of Sahara Reporters differed on the question marks over who is a journalist and insisted that citizen journalists espouse the democratic ideal of participation of all people. According to Sowore, while interrogating democracy and the importance of the citizen journalist, it is important to ask "What is democracy? A process that allows for the participation of more people…citizen journalism can cover the whole country for you with their laptop without leaving their office…so, it is for them to understand that this is real mass media, this is democratization of news reporting and it's good for democracy" (Interview, Omoyele

Sowore, 2019, Skype). His argument underscores the importance of participating in politics by having access to participate through the media, which Dalghren (2014) considers an important democratic step.

Democratisation of the media in the sense that Sowore and Dahlgren (2013) use it suggests the change that allows "greater levels of equality in collective decision-making over the operations of the media" that ultimately eliminates the inadequate representation for marginalised groups (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, p.101). Regardless of positive assessments of new media and citizen journalism, many believe that journalism's sole purpose is to ensure processing and distribution of news in a responsible way; meaning that any deviation could reasonably be described as an aberration. Donsbach (2010, p.39), for example, believes that journalism "is a professional service whose unique selling proposition is the validation of assertions about reality with a high degree of responsibility". His three traditions of journalism (see Table 13) provide a historically sound basis for assessing all acts of journalism and nullifies any claim of them serving the public when the goals are either self-actualisation or the economic interest of the owners.

Table 13: Model of the three traditions of journalism (Donsbach 2010, p.41)

| | *Subjective Tradition*<br>Pursuing individual goals | *Public Service Tradition*<br>Supplying valid information | *Commercial Tradition*<br>Give the people what they want |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Goal** | Self-actualization | Adaption of individual to reality and functioning of society | Economic interest of owners |
| **Dominant Relationship** | Journalist-Authorities | Medium-Society | Media-Markets/ Shareholders |
| **Prototypes** | John Milton | Joseph Pulitzer | Rupert Murdoch |
| **Dominant Value** | Subjectivity/ Freedom of expression | Objectivity/Plurality | Economic success/ shareholder value |
| **Dominant Content** | Opinions before facts | Facts before opinions | Whatever sells |
| **Journalist's Role** | Individual writer | Professional | Employee |

Using Donsbach's (2010) taxonomy, some would argue that Sahara Reporters and others like it fall under the subjective tradition, where the goal is self-actualisation, and the dominant value is subjectivity and a claim to freedom of expression. Both of which are antithetical to what journalism should be.

Sandbrook (2012, p.15) makes a similar argument about journalism taking different approaches in the convergence era as "ill-understood by the public and often overly understood by self-interest". Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010, p.39-40), for instance, mention four predominant models of journalism in the new era. First, journalism of verification, a traditional model that puts the highest value on accuracy and context. Second, journalism of Assertion, a newer model that puts the highest value on immediacy and volume and in so doing tends to become a passive conduit of information. Third, journalism of affirmation, a new political media that builds loyalty less on accuracy, completeness, or verification than on affirming the beliefs of its audiences. It tends to cherry-pick information that serves that purpose and interest-group journalism, which includes targeted web sites or pieces of work, often investigative, that are usually funded by special interests rather than media institutions and designed to look like news. This model suggests the new ecosystem has worsened the choices that journalists and their organisations have had to make over breadth and depth. This kind of system allows journalists and their organisations to choose how they operate, with the more established media organisations like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune the more likely to focus on depth over breath.

Anderson, Bell and Shirky (2015, p.96) capture the essence of this new environment by suggesting that it provides space for (i) rapidly produced, short pieces of breaking news; (ii) quickly produced analysis of moderate length (the first draft of history); (iii) detailed analysis by insiders for insiders; and (iv) impressionistic, long-form looks at the world far away from daily confusion of breaking news. The implication is that the public understanding of journalism and who is a journalist has changed due to the affordances of new media that now allows non-professionals to participate in mediated communication.

However, Sowore's point of view about citizen journalism appears to be popular with practitioners, who have set up two separate associations to manage the growth in the number

of online news publishers. The acrimony surrounding the formation of both the Online Publishers Association of Nigeria (OPAN) in 2010 and the Guild of Corporate Online Publishers (GOCOP) is suggestive of the practitioners' attempts to formalise their craft and the emerging, unwieldy segment (Proshare, 2016). There is also the Guild of Professional Bloggers of Nigeria (GPBN), as well as numerous others who do not belong to these associations, further strengthening the arguments that the entry levels into participating in the media have been lowered may not be too far off the mark.

Using the models identified by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010), their kind of journalism are better understood and their much-criticised shortcomings, therefore, better appreciated. Simon Kolawole, the Publisher of The Cable focused on the lower quality of journalism when he said, "with new media, every citizen is potentially a publisher and news creator…they don't understand anything about fact check, they don't understand anything about balance…so what that has created is that it has become so liberalized that non-professionals are taking over or are major players and the platforms are now being used for mischief" (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). His critique may have been aimed at Bloggers and news aggregators but based on Donsbach's (2010) taxonomy, it appears that there is only a thin line separating the digital-born newspapers from the others in a crowded space.

The Editor of The Guardian on Saturday is another of the senior journalists who equally believes that there was a far more serious threat posed by the easy entry into and exit from the new media space and that "it should be checked" (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos). The threats refer to misinformation and disinformation, which would be discussed in more detail further in this chapter. Despite the shortcomings, others like Sowore, view the easy entry into and exit from the new media space as opportunities for what they argue is the democratisation of the media space in ways that allow more participation by ordinary Nigerians (Interview, Omoyele Sowore 2019, Skype). The Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch, however, differs, arguing that "for our political process it is both good and bad" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos).

Like Donsbach (2010), he appears to align with the argument that journalism must be guided by strict codes. He argues, "in my view, you cannot be described as a journalist if you did not

subscribe to the rules on fairness and balance and objectivity" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). How ordinary people have sidestepped those codes to challenge the dominance of traditional media in the production and distribution of news is one of the main lines of inquiry in this study. The next section will look at how new media has been used for citizen journalism post-1999 and how this has impacted the media and Nigeria's political processes.

**Citizen/participatory journalism**

One of the areas in which there is consensus of opinion is in the more participatory nature of journalism practice by the new, digital-born newspapers. However, the exact nature of the impact remains a contested area depending on whose lens the issue is viewed from. New media has transformed hitherto passive new users into more engaging ones. This notion of a type of journalism that empowers "citizens who can control content by writing, publishing, and delivering to the audiences or other citizens without any constraints" as Nah and Chung (2020, p.xiii) highlight, captures the essence of citizen journalism and explains its increasing popularity in post-1999 Nigeria.

The Editor of The Punch acknowledged as much when he said, "everybody can become his own channel of information" (Interview, Demola Oni, 2019, Lagos). It is an assertion supported by the Sahara Reporters' publisher, who also argued that "everybody became newspaper editors on Facebook, on Instagram, on several social media platforms that were available, and it started building up…citizen journalism is very emotional, and this is the best time for it" (Interview, Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype). The Internet and new media enable those that have previously been marginalised in mainstream media to "express their views" (Nah & Chung, 2020, p.113).

In Nigeria, ordinary people have used these new technologies to become involved in conversations about governance. They have done this through efforts like fact-checking, but especially citizen-witnessing that pushes news unpublished in the mainstream media space (Akoh & Jagun, 2012; Outing, 2015). While The Cable's publisher supports this idea, he admitted that "It is something you can do all by yourself and what you just need is to pay for a web developer and then you pay for service" (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). While new media has allowed those in the new media space to create what The Punch newspaper's Executive Director called "spheres of influence," especially with respect to political communication, there are questions marks on the overall contribution to the quality of

democracy in Nigeria (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). The ‘ease of use’ is a major reason for the wide adoption of new media and the transformation of ordinary people into active participants.

The foundation for that participatory element in journalism is in easy-to-use technologies that allow sometimes non-professionals to adapt existing channels or create new infrastructure to push their alternative views (Allan & Hintz, 2020). This feature has been utilised by citizen journalists like Sowore (Interview, Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype) and bloggers like lindaikejisblog.com and bellanaija.com, helping them to grow communities of online followers and in the process social capital. Their emergence as influential media personalities may have created alternative channels outside traditional media but their contributions to the quality of journalism is under scrutiny.

In sync with the views expressed by many of the senior journalists interviewed, the online survey also showed that people believe they have more chances of being heard on the news platforms owned by non-institutional online newspapers like Sahara Reporters (see Figures 13 - 15). The online survey showed that Nigerians are active media users especially online with close to 90% of them saying they share news from online newspaper at one time or the other. Almost half of them or 333 (48.5%) of the respondents said they share stories occasionally. One hundred and eighty-seven or 27.2% said they share stories a few times, while 95 or 13.8% said they do it all the time. Only 72 or 10.5% said they never share stories from online newspapers (see Figure 10).

When it comes to commenting on online newspapers platforms, analysis of the results showed only slight differences to sharing of news online as only one in seven people said they never make comment on news stories they read online. Two hundred and ninety-seven or 43.2% of the respondents said they comment on news occasionally, 210 or 30.6% do so a few times and 71 or 10.3% said they do so all the time. One hundred and nine or 15.9% said they never comment on stories online (see Figure 11). Further analysis of the results showed that when it comes to contributing content to online platforms, more than a third of Nigerians say they never do so. Asked how often they contribute news items and photographs to online newspapers, 263 of the respondents or 38.3% said they never did, while 225 or 32.8% said they did so occasionally. One hundred and fifty-seven or 22.9% said they contribute content a few times and only 42 or 6.1% said they contribute all the time (see Figure 12). Public participation

because of the affordances of new media may be relatively higher than what is possible in print media; but the data collected must be viewed in terms of the limitations of access to the Internet and the quality of connections, both of which can affect decisions to engage with online news. In addition, as Reich (2011) underscores, comments are usually from a small fraction of the people who visit news sites.

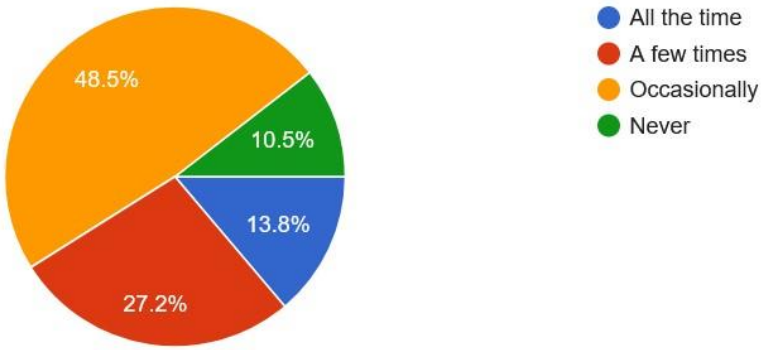



Figure 10: Sharing of stories from online news platforms (Olaniyan, 2020)

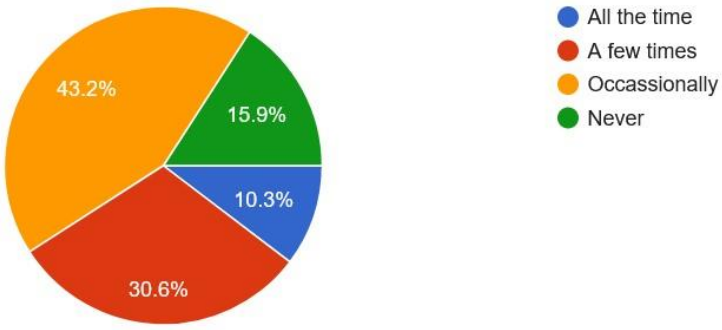



Figure 1: Commenting on news published online (Olaniyan, 2020)

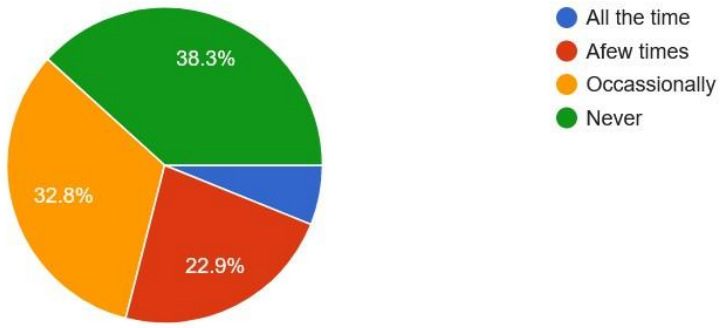



Figure 2: Contributions of stories and photographs to online platforms (Olaniyan 2020)

While people believe they have a better chance of being heard on non-institutional platforms, it is unclear whether this is as a result of their more accommodating editorial policies; the relatively more robust architecture of their platforms; or the more rigorous editorial standards of the online editions of print media. As the discussions on access and participation in the next chapter will show, it may be that the belief that digital-born newspapers offer more access and are more participatory is overhyped. Kperogi (2016) is one of those who have alluded to the superior online platforms established by the new, digital-born newspapers as one reason why they quickly gained traction. However, there are two reasons to approach this inference with caution.

As Salawu (2011) and Goode (2009) have suggested, the term 'citizen journalism' may not be limited to those like Sahara Reporters, which were set up to provide an alternative channel. Both Premium Times and The Cable, for instance, are run by professional journalists who had mastered their craft in print media. Furthermore Salawu (2011) rightly notes the use of the Page 3[39], specially created by The Punch newspaper for what qualifies as citizen journalism. Additionally, as Oso and Akanni (2018) argued, all the print media organisations have an equally robust online presence that allows them to do much the same thing as the new, digital-born newspapers.

What then sets their online presence apart from those of the print media organisations like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune? There are suggestions that print media

[39] The Punch, one of Nigeria's major newspaper, was publishing selected contributions from the public on the Page 3 of its print edition. The newspaper's call to readers was for them to make their own headlines by sending in what they considered the main news of the day in not more than 100 words.

organisations lack the capacity and know-how and, therefore, need to take "a second look at our personnel architecture, if the personnel architecture is not right, we cannot go to the next level which is the area of training…having done that, recruit the right people" (Interview, Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan).

There are people within the traditional media space who believe that their online editions are not competitive enough. The Editor of The Guardian on Saturday and the Editor of Saturday Tribune believe print media owners need to do more to make their platforms more competitive. "What we should do is do what others are doing online. The traditional media should invest more in digital section. Every media house should do more. Have your online TV and radio, so when other media houses do that, they will properly consolidate," the Saturday Tribune Editor stressed (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan). Those sentiments were shared by his counterpart at The Guardian on Saturday who also believes that print media organisations should aim to provide "strong online presence, not on news alone, on TV, radio so that you are pushing quality on all those fronts using those technology" (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos).

Those differences, espoused through Sahara Reporters' unconventional approach, have helped the digital-born newspapers to grow their online communities as described in Chapter 3. Of that approach, its publisher, Sowore (Interview Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype) said, "we don't want to be in the state house, we want to get information from people who witness them not necessarily official…what has become the death knell of citizen journalism is the fact that most successful citizen journalist wants to become professionals…they want to become conventional, they want to go back to the same thing that they are moving people away from". He insists, however, that the model "has become so successful that it can self-sustained, but it just requires a lot of sacrifice".

The unconventional approach hyped by Sowore has been criticised by some, including Aiseng and Akpojivi (2019, p.29), who note that the publication's orientation bordered on "one-sided opinion and person-orientated," rather than being 'objective' and 'problem-orientated.' The shortcomings highlighted suggest that there ought to be closer scrutiny of these platforms by media users. In general, it might be necessary to demand the same journalistic quality from them as the public expects of more established newspapers like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune.

**Media activism and advocacy**

The issue of journalists doubling as advocates is a keenly contested one. The question is whether, like Ingram (2018) argues, advocates producing what otherwise would qualify as excellent pieces of journalism is good or bad. The reference to an in-depth story by activists at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) exposing 'Amazon's marketing of a controversial facial recognition software product to US law enforcement,' may strengthen the argument for advocacy in journalism. However, as Zúñiga and Hinsley (2012, p.935) found in their study about what makes good journalism, there is a divergence in what the 'good' in good journalism means. For instance, while journalists believe they have done a good job by upholding fairness and ensuring accountability, the public places a premium on journalists "getting information to the public quickly and getting stories covered that should be covered" (Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2012, p.935). With their overwhelming support for advocacy in one form or the other, Nigerian journalists appear to measure how good they are by how much they use their platform for advocacy or what Fisher (2016, p. 712) defines as "pleading another's cause or arguing in support of an idea, event or a person".

Nigerian Tribune's Editor-in-Chief argues that "media engagement is about crusading; it is about activism…activism is the part of the life of media engagement. There is not going to be media engagement without activism because when you play the role of a watchdog you are playing the role of an activist…those who want better society" (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). His statement raises the question of exactly when a journalist crosses the thin line from being a watchdog to being an activist? However, journalists like Ayo-Adenrele of The Punch believe that journalism crosses the line into advocacy when objectivity is lost. "You don't have to be personally involved, you advise and criticise…the media cannot come in and cannot just take a position, and they need to be objective," she said (Interview, Sola Ayo-Adenrele, 2019, Lagos). For the Editor of the Saturday Tribune, journalism crosses the line when opinion is allowed to seep into newswriting. He argues that "when journalist brings his opinion to news writing, it becomes something, a journalist will cross the line when there is no difference between news and his opinion as his person" (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan).

Once journalism crosses the line, the language and choice of words betray the misstep according to the Publisher of The Cable, who stated that "the language you used; the presentation will define if you are into advocacy or news reporting" (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). Such editorial influence shows in the choice of where to display a news item, the length of the particular story, the choice of words in the headline, and sometimes the choice of photographs that illustrate a news item. All of which together represent statement bias, coverage bias and gatekeeping bias as highlighted by Ojebuyi and Salawu (2019). Others, including Donsbach (2010), and Aiseng and Akpojivi (2019), provided some indication as to how to spot when that line is crossed. Donbach (2010) cites the dominant values and dominant content as signals to look out for. Journalism done in the public interest ought to be objective, placing facts before opinion. Aiseng and Akpojivi (2019) focus on the choice of words as providing indication of 'spectacle' and 'sensationalism' as against 'in-depth' and investigative reporting. The implication is that anything beyond the in-depth, investigative reporting would appear to be crossing the line from good journalism to activism.

Others, like the Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch, rejected the Western approach to journalism because it is unsuitable to the Nigerian environment. His reason being that the failure of governance requires a relatively more aggressive and unconventional approach to reporting (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). By the Western approach, he meant the more restrained mainstream journalism that is guided by strict codes rather than the generally more-opinionated journalism for which Nigeria is known. While there may not be any evidence to suggest that the Western approach may be unsuitable to the Nigerian environment, in the same way that some scholars like Nyamnjoh (2004) have questioned the importation of liberal democracy into Africa; the early influence of politicians in the development of the media in the country may explain the opinionated nature of journalistic practice.

Adeyeye goes on to say that he was "inclined to think or see that a journalist should also be sensitive to what's going on around him…you cannot be sensitive without being an activist in some form" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). By the uniquely Nigerian environment, he meant the governance issues against which many believe it was fair and normal for journalists to advocate. Just when and how that thin line dividing advocacy and journalism is crossed appears to require interpretations that only the journalists and their organisations have the sole prerogative to make. This strengthens arguments about the unwieldy power of

journalists and the traditional media, which in the hands of new, digital-born newspapers appear to be open to abuse as well.

Some senior figures in the industry, like the Premium Times' Publisher, while cautious, shrug off those criticisms. They argue that journalism is a call to public good and that "it is impossible to think of a journalist as one only devoted to accurate communication" (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). However, much like Aiseng and Akpojivi (2019), he frowns at undercover and activist-journalists who use journalistic tools but sacrifice verification for "journalism of the spectacle" (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). These sentiments suggesting that journalism should refrain from crossing the line differ from those expressed by others who argue that there are good reasons for doing so. The Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch, for instance, maintained that the line can be crossed when "activism will help to accomplish the objective or aim that journalism is meant to accomplish" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). Sowore goes further to argue that the line is non-existent because "journalists are always responding to events as they are happening instantly," and insisted that a journalist "could be an activist in the times of war and oppressions" (Interview, Omoyele Sowore 2019, Skype).

Support for advocacy in one form or another appears to reflect Fisher's (2016, p.723) assertion that, "elements of advocacy are present in all works of journalism, whether intentional or not". Her advocacy continuum, compiled from scouring literature on the subject, ranges from: (i) macro-factors, including the political, economic climate and social climate; (ii) organisational factors, including partisanship and commercial interests of the proprietor, financial resources of the journalism organisation, as well as editorial orientation of the journalism organization; and (iii) journalistic production factors, including story format, selection and angle, information and selection of sources, and strength of comments selected for inclusion in the story.

For newspapers like Sahara Reporters, which have broken into the crowded media space, the publication of leaked documents is a major mainstay and strengthens the paper's claims to being the vanguard of holding the elite to account (Aiseng & Akpojivi, 2019). However, such unethical practices expose the media to manipulation. Shires (2020), who highlights the dangers of hack and leak operations in the new media environment, especially to damage

political opponents, is one of those calling attention to the dangers in publishing leaks. The argument is that it may be calculated to use the media against political opponents.

As detailed in Chapter 3, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable have also used donor-funding to run advocacy projects spanning anti-corruption, governance and policy monitoring. The three were selected for this study for fitting the description of the alternative and activist media by Lievrouw (2011), and because of the way their platforms operate. However, those features that differentiate them from the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and the Nigerian Tribune remain controversial because they test the boundaries of ethics in journalism. In separate interviews with Omoyele, the Publisher of Sahara Reporters; Olorunyomi, the Publisher of Premium Times; and Kolawole, the publisher of The Cable, there appears to be consensus in their embrace of advocacy journalism because they were unhappy with the quality of journalism in the country, especially post-1999. Aside from Sowore who had been involved in activism, Olorunyomi and Kolawole had been editors in established print media and their decision to venture into online newspaper publication underscores their dissatisfaction with the traditional channels of communication. Given their preference to avoid the traditional advertising-funded model, it would appear that their dissatisfaction with the general quality of journalism is being expressed in their non-conventional approach.

**Misinformation and disinformation**

The easy entry and exit of practitioners into the new media space is blamed for the growing incidence of misinformation and disinformation. As explained in Chapter 5, misinformation or "misleading information created or disseminated without manipulative or malicious intent" and disinformation, the "deliberate (often orchestrated) attempts to confuse or manipulate people through delivering dishonest information to them" are twin problems in the information disorder that have been amplified by the new world order (Ireton and Posetti 2018, p.7). As Carson (2019) argued, the boundaries that prevented misinformation and disinformation have been broken by the diffusion of new technologies that make publishers of everyone.

It is a sentiment that is shared by many of the senior journalists in the Nigerian media. The Guardian's Editor-In-Chief viewed the problem as damaging and difficult to control. "It is real and very disgraceful…what has happened with the development in the world is a double-sword…the fake news has gained ground and so widespread like wildfire that you can't even

put it out anymore. To that extent there is a problem," he said (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos). To the Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch, the trend is worrisome and required the cooperation of the entire society to curtail. "It's a problem that the society would have to deal with…when you're talking about misinformation and disinformation, especially in areas where those who have a sizable space to sell influence are not well trained to spot these things, their platforms could then be used by those who push out these things … to accomplish ends that may resulting to loss of lives and all of that," he warned (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). Their acknowledgement that misinformation and disinformation is a big problem is supported by results from the online survey, which shows that people are concerned about the twin threats to the democratic process (see Figure 13).

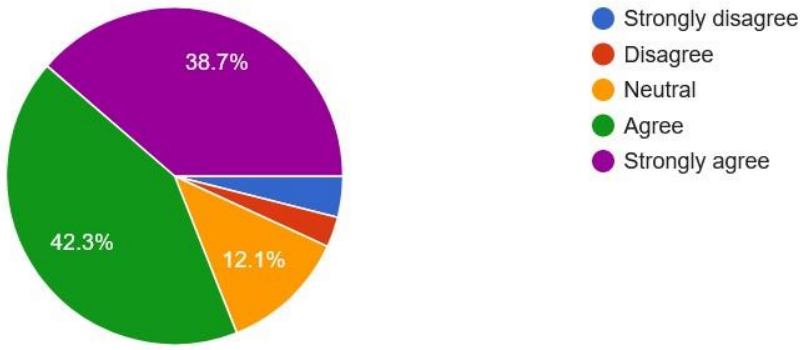



Figure 13: People's concern about whether 'fake' news endangers the Nigerian democratic process (Olaniyan, 2020)

Regarding the danger posed by misinformation and disinformation to Nigeria's democracy, an overwhelming majority of the respondents or 81% agreed that the twin problems were a real threat. Two hundred and ninety or 42.3% said they agreed, while another 265 or 38.7% said they strongly agreed. Eighty-three or 12.1% said they were unsure; 20 or 2.9% said they disagreed, while 27 or 3.9% said they strongly disagreed. If there is widespread agreement on the threats posed by misinformation and disinformation, there is divergence on who should be blamed. Some of the senior journalists like Sowore of Sahara Reporters and Olorunyomi of Premium Times believe that the government rather than new media practitioners was to blame for the trend.

According to Olorunyomi (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg) “there is more disinformation than misinformation, disinformation comes more from Government, use of deception to hurt democracy…misinformation that goes around is because people cannot link up to the first source of information itself which maybe wilful disinformation”. He added that “the reality of disinformation and it is in all levels, media, citizenship, government and so on…It has affected Nigerian media a lot even though the media is not the worst culprit”.

In his own assessment, Sowore was more direct in his attack on the authorities, blaming the government for the misuse and distortion of the information flow for political gains. “I have done my research in trying to find out who tells most lies who gives the most fake news in Nigeria…It turns out that it comes out from broadcast platforms, Nigeria television authorities, Radio Nigeria,” he argued (Interview, Omoyele Sowore 2019, Skype). He added, “the truth is that when a news is fake, the real way to deal with it is to present a non-fake news but the government is not interested but they are never interested in providing true information…because they want to control because it has always been the concern of the government to control information…immediately they notice that there is another player in the block their focus turns from disseminating information to emaciating information”.

His position is supported by the Editor of the Saturday Tribune and his counterpart who edits The Guardian on Sunday, both of whom admonished the government on the issue of information management. “Government should be more open in the running of our affairs. If you think you can run our affairs without informing us, some people will set up machineries and manufacture fake news,” Nigeria Tribune’s Saturday Editor warned (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan). “Government gives reason for people to speculate…in a dysfunctional system, this is what you get,” his counterpart at The Guardian on Sunday corroborated the argument (Interview, Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos). This argument aligns with the view of Ackland and Gwynn (2021), who stressed the ideological and financial motivation for producing disinformation and misinformation news, and political polarisation as the primary reasons why people share ‘fake’ news.

Ward (2020 a, b) also highlights the tendency of intolerant political groups to compound the ‘fake’ news problem by using new media to undermine the political process. As noted already, and as acknowledged by the senior journalists, misinformation and disinformation erode trust

in the media. However, Kolawole is one of those who sees a positive impact. He adds, “It is very, very serious and that is why the traditional media and the serious new media…that is their cutting edge in the ability to fact check, ability to point out that this is fake” (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos).

Those sentiments are at odds with the results from the online survey which suggest that people view new media platforms as largely being responsible for the growing incidence of misinformation and disinformation in the country (see Figures 14 and 15).

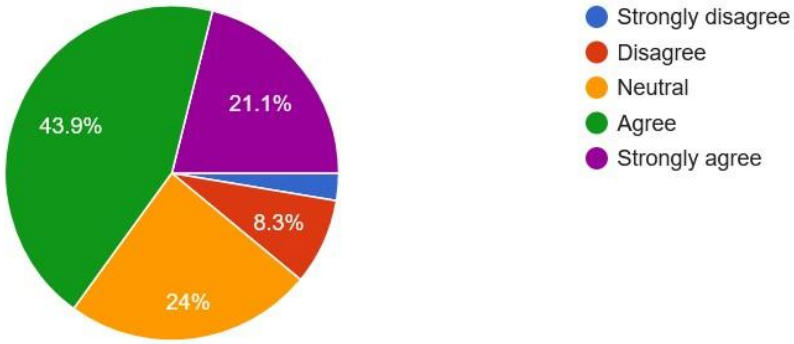



Figure 14: Online publications are responsible for ‘fake’ news (Olaniyan, 2020)

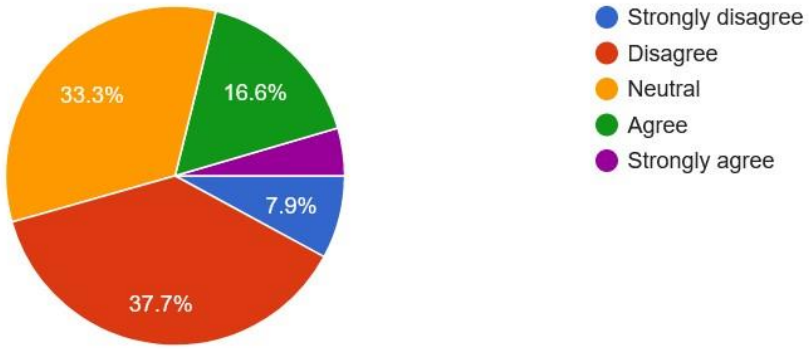



Figure 15: Traditional (Print Newspapers, Radio & Television) are responsible for ‘fake’ news (Olaniyan, 2020)

As the results show, a clear majority or 65% of the respondents agreed that online publications are responsible for the growing incidences of misinformation and disinformation. Of this, 300

or 43.9% said they agreed; 144 or 21.1% said they strongly agreed; while 164 or 24% said they were unsure. Fifty-seven or 8.3% said they disagreed and 18 or 2.6% said they strongly disagreed. By contrast, only about a fifth of all the respondents or 21.1% said they agreed that traditional media (radio, television and print newspapers) were responsible for growing incidences of misinformation and disinformation; while almost half (45.6%) said they believed that traditional media was not responsible. Of the total, 227 or 33.3% said they were unsure; 113 or 16.6% said they agreed; while 31 or 4.5% said they strongly disagreed. Two hundred and fifty-seven or 37.7% said they disagreed; while 54 or 7.9% said they strongly disagreed.

The results clearly show people's awareness of the threats that misinformation and disinformation pose to the Nigerian democracy and believe that the same technologies that help to expand the discursive space are also undermining the process. As detailed in Chapter 4, Wasserman (2020), Ireton and Posetti (2018), as well as Wardle and Derakshan (2017) all acknowledged the potential of unchecked information disorder to democracy. This includes narrowing rather than expanding the space for discourse and they might not be far off the mark. The phenomenal growth in the number of practitioners in the new media space may be good for diversity but, as the next section will examine in detail, it would seem that the Nigerian democratic process has yet to benefit in any meaningful way. The fears about the dangers of misinformation and disinformation are not misplaced given the normative role the media plays in democracies.

For journalism to serve democracy well, it must "provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 21). Kovack and Rosenstiel (2014) go on to list nine principles to ensure that journalists are able to do this: (i) journalism's first obligation is to the truth; (ii) its first loyalty is to citizens; (iii) its essence is a discipline of verification; (iv) its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover; (v) it must serve as an independent monitor of power; (vi) it must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; (vii) it must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant; (viii) it must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion; and (ix) its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience. If news produced by most of the new media platforms were to be assessed using these principles, it would be difficult to describe most of what they have been doing as journalism.

Among other things, the ease of use, relatively low barrier of entry into the new media space, and the ability to participate in the same way as the print media are the main reasons why ordinary people are using new media for political communication. This, despite the acknowledgement that it is responsible for the increasing problem of disinformation and misinformation. However, and as the data collected from the online survey indicates, the likes of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune appear to be more trusted as sources than the digital-born newspapers. All six newspapers selected for this study have incorporated fact-checking into their operations but the perception among media users, as seen in the survey data, suggests that the effort by the newspapers has so far fallen short of what is required to counteract disinformation and misinformation.

**Citizen journalism and the democratic process**

One of the areas in which those limitations are visible is in the quality of discourse on new media platforms. Evidence abounds in liberal democracies of civic disengagement from the political process. This is driven in most parts by disenchantment and distrust in politics and the media while new media is hailed as heralding a new era of engagement and interconnectivity (Bessant, 2014). Bessant's (2014) observation aligns with the views of many of the senior journalists interviewed. There is an admission within the industry that new media and citizen journalism have allowed more people to join the conversation but that it was yet to translate into any political gains. The Guardian's Editor-In-Chief admitted that the proliferation in online platforms "contributes to the debates," and that "If anybody has an opinion now, everybody has a channel of expression" (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos). Banda (2010), using the classification by the US based National Association of Citizen Journalists, makes the distinction between accidental journalists, advocacy journalists and citizen journalists. However, their collective efforts - taken to mean the non-institutional news on the Internet - do not appear to be influencing political engagement.

It appears that the novelty of more people participating in such conversations because new media has removed gatekeeping is encouraging contributions by ordinary people but as yet is failing to translate to more participation during general elections. Voter turnout in the last two electoral cycles, for instance, was between 30% and 35% according to Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) (Premium Times, 2021). The increasing participation in

conversations on new media channels was highlighted by the Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch as a positive development. “The conversation and communications that we are having now is not entirely new…what we are having as a conversation on new media…what we have before in bus stops, living rooms and all of that…but technology has enabled us to take the conversation to the new media and have more people” (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos).

It is difficult to explain the interest in political news and the preference for new media channels as main sources of those news when there appears to be no correlation to what happens during elections. Result from the online survey, for instance, clearly showed that political news is the most-read, and new media (online newspapers) are the main sources of political news (see Figures 16 and 17).

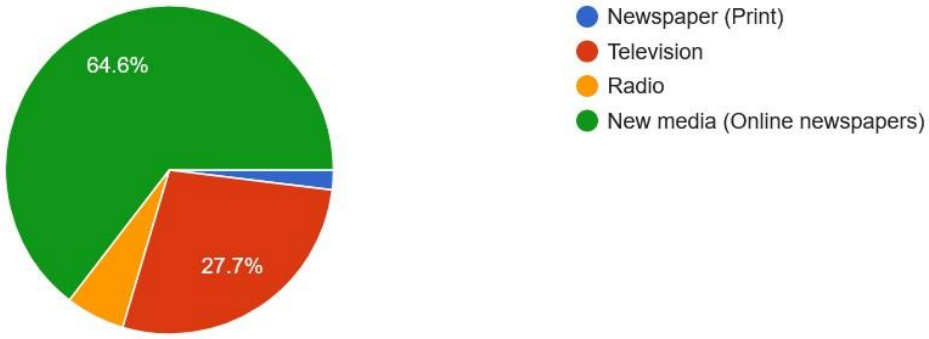



Figure 16: Sources of political news (Olaniyan, 2020)

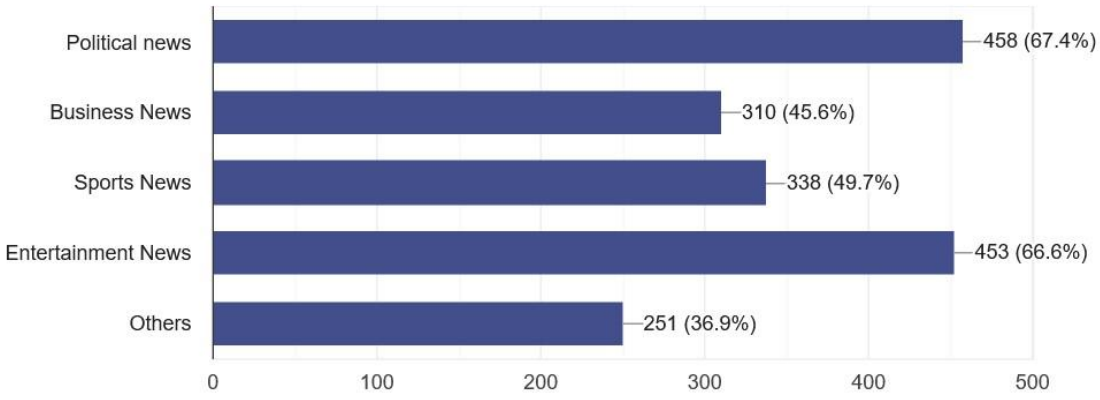



Figure17: Preferred news read online (Olaniyan, 2020)

Analysis of the data showed that more people have a preference for political news and 456 of the respondents or 67.4% said they had used the media to get political news. Entertainment news was the next most preferred reason why people use the media, with 453 or 66.6% of respondents saying it was the reason for their using the media in the last one month. Sports news (338 respondents or 49.9%) and Business news (310 respondents or 45.6%) were also of interest. Asked to list their sources of political news in order of preference, 132 or 64.6% of the respondents said they got their political news mainly from new media. Television got 185 or 27.7%; radio 39 or 5.8%; and newspaper (print) 13 or 1.9%. The findings are in sync with the trend in other nations, like the United States where in 2008, 60% of all adults said they got their political news from the Internet; up from just 22% in 1996 (Smith, 2009).

However, other studies have indicated that there are regional differences in news consumption. The responses on participation - sharing of stories and commenting – already suggest that most Nigerian media users are actively engaged in ongoing conversations. On why those conversations have failed to translate into political capital, there were suggestions that Nigerian democracy itself was faultily set up and discouraging participation. In addition, the quality of discourse on many platforms was too sub-standard to mobilise ordinary people. In general, the quality of commenting on online news platforms is shaped by such things as "the content of the story, the format of presentation, participation by journalists in commenting platforms, and organizational commenting policies" (Ksiazek, 2016; p.652). Zúñiga, Molyneux and Zheng (2014) have also shown that political sentiment expressed in commenting and sharing of online usually translate into better political participation. As such, the lack of people involvement in the Nigerian political process might not be unconnected with the general distrust in the Nigerian political system.

Nigerian Tribune's Editor-in-Chief opines that "our engagement all these while had also been wrong…primordial interest, religious interest, different kind of sentiments, different kinds of interest…so, for us we hardly have a consensus…you see when you have those kinds of engagements what you have is a society of barbarians where anarchy reigns," (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). His colleague and Editor of the Sunday Tribune in his own assessment argued that he believed that the new media platforms were being "wrongly used". He added that "what they have been able to do so far is to employ the manipulative aspect and to get people to participate; they explore the propaganda aspect because social media spreads faster than wildfire…we are not better" (Interview, Shina Oladeinde, 2019, Ibadan).

Additionally, he noted, "many graduates fail interview tests such as writing a simple essay and when you have a barely literate society, the result is that they will not be able to make informed decisions" (Interview, Shina Oladeinde, 2019, Ibadan). Among those who believe that Nigerian democracy was discouraging people participation, Dickson equally argued that country "cannot have it better because the cumulative effect of our engagement online is what we have today regarding our democracy. We cannot call ours democracy…all the ingredient of democracy cannot be found in our own clime" (Interview Edward Dickson, Ibadan, 2019). The Editor of The Guardian on Saturday said she believed that Nigerians' distrust for the political class was one reason why the conversations on new media platforms are not reflected in electoral participation. "The issue is that the attitude of the average Nigerian voter over their distrust for politician…they don't trust politicians, so that distrust is still there. What will this person offer me? He will just talk, and they don't do anything, so that apathy is still there…and people don't trust their leaders … it is not reflecting in our democracy," she stated (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos).

Their stark assessment may not be off the mark because the INEC Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu, in his own analysis of the low turnout in the last two election cycles said it was due to "inadequate voter and civic education, ineffective voter mobilisation, the fear of violence during elections, unfulfilled promises by elected officials and low public trust in state institutions" (Premium Times, 2021). Onapajo and Babalola (2020) argue that longstanding governance issues are still keeping people away from active participation in the Nigerian political process. Citing the 2019 general election as an example, they highlight those longstanding issues to include weak democratic culture, weak and non-neutral state institutions, low public trust, cleavage-based voting, and election violence. Adigun (2020) equally traces the low voter turnout in the 2019 general election to electoral violence, voter intimidations, ballot fraud, socioeconomic factors, and choice of candidates by political parties and their level of popularity.

What these findings suggest is that unless the problems highlighted by various studies are redressed, the political process will not reflect the improved environment for participation by ordinary people in political communication. One way in which new media appears to be impacting the political process is in the critical scrutiny of politicians. "Technology has opened a lot of locked gates; people can question those in government and expose them," Olagunju

who edits the Saturday Tribune argued (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan). The public scrutiny of politicians was also hailed by the Publisher of Premium Times when he argued, "yes, it has influenced things…the purpose of media is to provide mechanism for accountability" (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). Sotade also agreed, noting that "some leaders are being held to account because if you misbehave and people show your picture online, your video is saved online, if the catch you, then you face the consequences" (Interview Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos).

The Publisher of Sahara Reporters, who dabbled in politics when he contested the 2019 Presidential Election, went further than the others in his assessment. "I think that is why we can't over-rely on digital media as a source of means of interaction and engagement that it does not translate into physical boots on the ground…I realize that early except you move political animals on to the ground, that is what I have done in my own case, I have transitioned but I won't say I have transitioned because this is what I always do," he explained (Interview, Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype). The dismal performance of Sowore's political party and that of Fela Durotoye, another young Nigerian with a high-profile online presence, appear to buttress the argument about the limited impact of new media on the political process. This is a point that the Publisher of The Cable made succinctly, "how much role did online media play? I will guess they have some influence; I don't know how big the influence is, but I don't think it is significant enough. Going by the last election as online personality, Fela Durotoye, online personality has 1 million followers on Twitter, Sahara Reporter had 2 million followers on Facebook, but their vote eventually did not go beyond 50,000 or less" (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos).

However, as Calhoun (1992, p.2) argues, the quality of discourse and participation are crucial to the public sphere envisioned by Habermas. He goes on to suggest that "participation in argument is a means of education capable of overcoming the debilities that make some arguers inferior (and thus it is a very different matter from ascribed statuses that permanently exclude some people)". This means that it is possible for a few relatively more enlightened people to dominate the online discussions, build highly visible online presence but still fail to mobilise people on the street. The abysmal performance of two young Nigerians with visible online presence in the 2019 general election only strengthens this view that influencers might dominate discourse but that in itself does not necessarily improve the quality of democracy. For example, The Not Too Young To Run Initiative had influencers who used new media

including social networking sites (SNS) to canvass for a replacement of the old leadership. However, the fact that their appeal did not translate into electoral gains appears to support Calhoun's (1992) arguments about a few people dominating communication but leaving the majority out of the process.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has critically interrogated how new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are being used for citizen journalism and as channels of political communication. The chapter also examined how the ecosystem of new media enhances or hampers political communication, as well as the impact that this is having on the political process. The analysis has combined two data sets, the qualitative interview and the online survey in addressing the issues of digital disruption, citizen journalism, media advocacy, new media ecosystem and how they impact political discourse and the political process. The interviewees and participants in the online survey were unanimous in their understanding of how new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, and The Cable have become hubs for citizen journalism and activist media. In the process, there is an admission that they have altered political communication.

The main issues that were highlighted are digital disruption, the new media ecosystem and how this expands the space for debates by enabling citizen journalism and journalists as activists; but equally muddies the media space through misinformation and disinformation. The impact of new media has been both positive and negative, going by the responses from the interviewees. Among the positive impacts of the digital disruption, there is general agreement that new media has democratised communication in the media space, with the vertical model of the traditional media now replaced by a more participatory, horizontal model. In addition, they admit that new media is better equipped to deliver news as it happens and, therefore, challenging traditional media for the attention and patronage of news users and advertisers.

The new, digital-born newspapers are credited for their more creative use of technology, their lean operations and aggression in holding government to account. Their ecosystem is giving traditional print media stiff competition not just for readers but also for revenue and has contributed to falling advertising and circulation sales figures. Traditional print media has responded by aggressively developing their own online presence, but the consensus is that they

are playing catch-up in a game that the new, digital-born newspapers have long mastered. These findings align with Fenton's (2010) argument about how new media is impacting politics through the expansion of the space for debates; the speed of news delivery; diversity of sources; participatory; and civic interventions. While the interviewees agreed that the digital disruption of the media business is forcing traditional media to re-think their businesses and operations, they disagreed on the easy entry into and exit from the new media space. However, this ecosystem, which gives them as edge over traditional print media, is also open to abuse because it removes most of the checks and tends to sacrifice quality for speed.

That aspect of the ecosystem of new media showed divergence in what the industry and media users make of the issue. Half of the interviewees believe the lower entry requirements into the new media space is beneficial, enhancing the quality of journalism and deepening democracy. While the other half believe that the practice is damaging. Of the half who argue that the practice offers no benefit at all, four (66%) maintained that it was a threat to the media because it could ultimately water down the impact of journalism and negatively impact the democratic process. One of the grounds for which they consider the lower entry barrier into new media a threat is because it encourages misinformation and disinformation, both considered as directly undermining public trust in the media.

Participants in the online survey believe mostly that the digital-born newspapers are to blame for the growing incidence of misinformation and disinformation. All the interviewees agreed that misinformation and disinformation threaten journalism, but they differed in their assessment of exactly how the ecosystem of the new media contributes to the problem. Fenton's (2010, p.7) observation about the "the negative appraisal of new media" as being "summed up by the description – speed it up and spread it thin," may very well apply to the Nigerian environment where data suggests that more people are involved in conversations but that there is no impact on the quality of democracy.

For instance, the responses showed a general belief that the new tools have (i) removed all checks for verification; (ii) empowered people with no training but with sizeable online influence; (iii) are favoured by jobless people who see an opportunity to make money; (iv) made it easier for practitioners to use questionable digital solutions to drive traffic; (v) offered ordinary people angry with governance failures a tool for advocacy; (vi) been exploited by government for propaganda; and (vii) played into the hands of activists on both sides of the

country's divisive politics. What emerges from the responses is that new media has vastly improved access into the media space, thereby, allowing ordinary people a voice in political discourse, However, this has so far failed to translate into either participation in the political process or a positive impact on the quality of democracy.

All the interviewees agreed that while new media has opened up access into the communicative space, (i) there is still a widespread voter apathy as evidenced in voter turnout in general elections of 2015 and 2019; (ii) electoral laws have failed to match the recent improvements in the communicative space; and (iii) the noticeable improvements in political discourse driven by the elite, rather than ordinary people with more commitment to make their votes count.

On the significance and impact of the emerging phenomenon of citizen journalism, there is a general agreement that the new, digital-born news platforms have transformed ordinary Nigerians from just news users into publishers and editors in their own rights. Thus, making information more easily accessible and giving the people more control over how they engage with content. The interviewees also agreed that this shift that has allowed many more people to become involved in political communication and has also eliminated the controls that traditional media had on the news process. This, they agreed, has two implications: (i) there are new spheres of influence around the more prominent platforms and 'influencers' who have created a large online followership; and (ii) the growing influence of ordinary Nigerians, who place no premium on fact-checking, is also affecting credibility.

One of the more noticeable uses for the new media tools is for advocacy, where ordinary Nigerians are becoming more involved in monitoring of and demanding accountability from the government. Interestingly, most of those interviewed insist that this was not an exclusive preserve of the citizen journalist. They maintained that advocacy cannot be divorced from journalism and that it was necessary for the media to be sensitive to its environment and act for public good because the professional code demands it. However, while it is acceptable that people can push back against government's intolerance using new tools, there was overwhelming support for journalists to use their positions and platforms for advocacy when circumstances demand. When those occasions arise, most of the interviewees agreed journalists and the media should be: (i) critical but not adversarial; (ii) take positions but don't lose their independence; (iii) confront government but be restrained; and (iv) stand with the people and for justice.

With regards to the issue of when a journalist or media organization crosses the ethical line, opinion is divided on this ethical issue both with regards to whether a journalist or a media organisation can cross from reporting into advocacy and exactly what it would take for that line to be crossed. While the majority of the interviewees agreed that there is a line that should not be crossed, they differ on their definition of what it takes to do so. Among others, they suggest that a journalist or a media organization would be crossing the line when: (i) they stop being objective; (ii) when they become confrontational; (iii) when they leave out facts and don't verify; (iv) when they cross from being passionate to being impartial; (v) when they consistently descend into advocacy; (vi) when opinion and news are not separated; (vii) when using words that can incite violence; (viii) when they fail to see anything good in the government; and (ix) when the language used is suggestive of advocacy.

For those who insist that journalism and advocacy are two sides of the same coin, the journalist and the media organisation would be performing their roles for as long as their actions: (i) aim to keep the government in check; (ii) help to accomplish the ends; and (iii) are responding to occasions when there is bad governance. The next chapter will critically examine the questions of access into the media, and whether the new media platforms like Sahara Reporters and others are viable alternatives to traditional media. It will also examine questions of building public trust in the media to enhance its capacity to positively impact the Nigerian political process.

# CHAPTER EIGHT
# ACCESS, ALTERNATIVE MEDIA AND PUBLIC TRUST

## Introduction

The last chapter is a critical examination of some of the themes that were identified from the three data sets collected during the research. Those themes encapsulate the issues that have impacted the media post-1999 and which ought to be addressed if the fourth estate of the realm is to perform its normative role more effectively. The previous chapter focused on some of those new issues including: (i) whether new media platforms like Sahara Reporters are enhancing access into and participation in the political discourse; (ii) whether elements of the ecosystem of new media are helping to expand the discursive space in the fourth republic

As the chapter detailed, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable and other digital-born newspapers have disrupted the media environment with their relatively more aggressive reporting style. Furthermore, they are the vanguard of a new order of more active citizen engagement in news reporting that borders on advocacy. To his extent, there are suggestions that the new digital-born newspapers not only compete with traditional media but are building alternative channels of political communication. However, some of their methods, such as publishing leaked documents, remain controversial and lead to questions about the quality of journalism being produced. While there is evidence to support the argument that this disruption of the media has opened up the communicative space, there is no noticeable impact on the political process.

Having addressed the issues of how new media platforms are being used for citizen journalism and their impact on the political process, this chapter will address the other issues of: whether new media help to expand the range of citizen's choices in the Nigerian media space? whether new media practices diminish or strengthen Nigerian media's credential to enhance the democratic process and deepen democracy?

The focus will be on interrogating the claims by the digital-born newspapers to providing alternative channels for people who struggle to find space in The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune. Accordingly, this chapter will critically examine the remaining themes arising from the analysis of the three data sets. One of the fundamental tests of whether the media is performing its normative role is to check how easily ordinary people, including marginalised groups, can access the media. Hence, this chapter will critically examine the

contestations around media capture, which presupposes that the Nigerian elite continue to maintain a tight control on the narrative in the communicative space.

Closely related to the thorny issue of media capture is access into the media, which determines the ability of everyone, including marginalised groups, to participate in political communication. While the expansion of the communicative space through the affordances of new media appears to have empowered ordinary people and marginalised groups, the perception that the new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are more accommodating of ordinary voices will be interrogated in this chapter. In casting themselves as platforms for more diverse views, the new digital-born newspapers have sought to present alternative channels to the traditional print media. However, the question of how much of an alternative they represent will be addressed. The new media platforms are the first in the Nigerian media industry to embrace donor funding as a counterweight to the traditional advertising model of funding. However, and to the extent that donor funding is fraught with problems, the potential dangers will be highlighted in this chapter.

One of the strongest arguments in support of donor funding is that it strengthens the ability of independent media to function as watchdogs. However, this chapter will examine the state of investigative journalism and the impact of new media and citizen journalism on what is a critical determinant of a vibrant media. Among other issues, the question of public trust in the Nigerian media is at the core of the critical examination of the performance of the fourth estate post-1999. This chapter will examine how new media, which has expanded the communicative space, is also undermining public trust. In addition, this chapter will argue that the attempts to regulate new media, as desirous as it might seem, remains a hotly-debated issue because many media practitioners and ordinary Nigerians view the government's intention with suspicion.

To do this, it is imperative to critically examine the ability by different groups to easily access alternative platforms to determine whether the claims of the new digital-born newspapers have any basis. Some of the criticisms against traditional media is that access is being hampered by media capture, which many of the senior journalists interviewed for the study agreed is a problem in the media industry.

Most of the discussion and analysis of the Nigerian media has understandably focused on the contributions of the printed press to the nationalist struggle and the campaign against the

military rule, the most recent of which only terminated in 1999 (Akpojivi, 2018; Olukotun, 2002; Adebamwi, 2011). However, the vibrancy noted by most scholars often hides the noticeable shortcomings from the nationalist era, but which have refused to disappear. For instance, among the issues that have been identified, Maringues (2001), Bourne (2018), as well as Oso, Odunlami, and Adaja, (2011) highlighted the fact that the early newspaper owners were politicians who used the publications to expand their own political agenda. Akpojivi (2018), Mackay (1964) and Hachten (1971) went further to detail how radio and television were established from 1932 and from 1953 began to be similarly used for political purposes by the Nigerian governments at the centre as well as the regions.

Bourne (2018), Adebanwi (2004) and Diamond (1983) called attention to the ethnic influence in journalism that became noticeable from 1941 when an election into the legislative council seat held by Dr. K. A. Abayomi set off a crisis within his party which eventually snowballed into a press war. Others, like Uko (2004), have argued that the media was part of the problem during the struggle against military rule, supporting coupists, thereby, losing the moral high ground. Other criticisms have centred on the media's failure to effectively discharge its duties partly owing to the harsh economic environment and in spite of the enactment of enabling laws like the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (Ogbondah, 2018; Idowu, 2018; Onyenankeya & Salawu, 2020; Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2021). The data collected for this study shows that in addition to all these issues, which still bedevil media practice in the country, there are new and more pressing issues confronting Nigerian journalism

**Media capture**

The elite influence and dominance of the communicative space has been dealt with in Chapter 3 which referenced Stiglitz's (2017) taxonomy of media capture. That chapter examined media capture in the context of the domination of elite discourse in the communicative space because elites have the social and political capital to participate. Commercial influence, ownership, government control and regulatory policies all represent avenues for the indirect control of the media, and, for this study, media capture is based on this understanding of the elite influence. Reuter and Zitzewitz (2005), who analysed advertising influence in the financial media in the United States, found evidence of bias in favour of advertisers. These findings are consistent with data from the qualitative interviews conducted for this study.

The overwhelming view is that advertising is a strong tool used by the both the political and business elite to influence the media. The senior journalists interviewed agree that government advertisement represents a large chunk of their total advertising revenue, hence, its importance both to their business and the power relations within the industry. Mabweazara, Muneri and Ndlovu (2020) found similar trends in sub-Saharan Africa in their study of patronage and clientelist practices in the media. Their findings support those by Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020), who suggest that clientelism is one of the major reasons for the dying tradition of investigative reporting in Nigeria. These scholars agree that the relatively poor remuneration in the media in the harsh economic environment in which journalists have to operate expose them to such pecuniary temptations and indirect control by the elite.

Their assessment was corroborated by the Project Lead at Punch Vertical, who was blunt in her assessment, admitting that advertising was "a threat to the practice of the media and performance," and that it takes guts to choose to be independent. She added, "by the time you criticize the actions of the government that will bring adverts, it becomes an issue…to be sincere, there are days we want to do some stories and we drop it so as not to lose money" (Interview, Sola Ayo-Adenrele, 2019, Lagos). Not only were the senior journalists interviewed conscious of the corrosive influence of advertising on a media which has to self-censor itself, they equally decried the way it is being used by the government to beat media houses into line. The Guardian's Editor-In-Chief reiterated the fact that the Nigerian government remains the biggest player in the economy and, therefore, wields great influence because of its total advertising spend. "It is very simple; how many industries are thriving in Nigeria outside telecom and banking? …and government is the biggest business in Nigeria…when you are shutting out, when you are refusing to patronise a supposed opposition paper, it is bad for democracy," he said (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos).

It is an argument supported by the Editor of the Saturday Tribune, who agreed that trying to use advertising to control the media was a real threat (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan). His argument that "it is a threat if you operate in a space where government is in absolute control" aligns with the views expressed by his counterpart at The Guardian on Saturday. "What we are seeing is anytime you are critical about the government, they just withdraw their adverts from you but all these while we have been able to survive by getting adverts from other sectors although we know government is the biggest spender in the economy"' she opined (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos). The senior journalists said

advertising patronage is often withdrawn from critical media organisations, a claim that was supported by the Editor of The Punch. He recounted an occasion when The Punch was denied advertising because it fell out of favour with the Federal Ministry of Finance. "It is a threat because some people will not survive without government revenue, some will; Punch has never depended on the government money…at a time, Okonjo Iweala banned the Finance Ministry from giving adverts to The Punch[40]," he said (Interview, Demola Oni, 2019, Lagos).

His anecdote appears to corroborate other claims of the government trying to use advertising to muzzle the media. The Editor of the Sunday Tribune also cited another instance when the Federal Government suspended the placement of advertisements to newspapers. "The first thing this government (in reference to the Muhammadu Buhari administration) did is to stop the economic spread of the media. Tender papers are used for advertising…there was a command to print in tender papers only...they have their own plans, to make the media houses to come and beg so they can see who is their friend and enemy," he stated (Interview, Shina Oladeinde, 2019, Ibadan). This sort of pressure on the newspapers results in revenue losses especially because the government is the biggest player in the economy. More fundamentally, it forces some of them into editorial compromises that privileges governments and its officials.

In an economy where the private sector contributes only 13.5% to the economy (Nairametrics, 2020), advertising is a powerful tool in the hands of government officials who prefer a more pliant media and who won't hesitate to apply pressure when necessary. While the government might be the biggest advertiser and its officials are willing to use that as a tool, the practice of pressuring media organisations for positive editorials appears to cut across both the public and the private sector. These claims align with the findings by scholars who argue that patronage and clientelism hamper the media's ability to perform its normative role of holding the government and its official to account (see Mabweazara, Muneri & Ndlovu, 2020; Onyenankeya & Salawu 2020).

The strategy appears to be favoured by companies in the private sector with big advertising budgets and which, like the government, do not hesitate to use it against the media. As the

[40] As a way of enhancing transparency, Nigeria's Accountant General's Office (under the Federal Ministry of Finance), when Okonjo Iweala was a two-time minister (from 2003-2006, 2011-2015) published the statutory allocations to the states and the Local Governments running more than 10 pages every month. This was a regular source of revenue to the newspapers selected for use. To be cut off from such patronage would have been a major loss for any newspaper.

Publisher of The Cable explained, “It is a major problem in Nigeria, major, major, major problem…like I said it is even understood that if I am doing advert with you; you can’t be running stories against me” (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). His observation that business owners demand only positive coverage from newspapers benefiting from their advertising patronage sounds alarming but appears to be widespread. Nigerian Tribune’s Editor-In-Chief, also admitted to the trend, saying “you see for a business mogul who brings in his money for advertisement, it determines for you as the editor what to put on your front page the next day” (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan).

Using advertising patronage as a tool for controlling the media places significant power in the hands of the biggest spenders; but it appears to distort discourse in the communicative space on another level. In addition to allowing the political and business elite to ensure only favourable editorial coverage of their activities, the practice also appears to limit the space for the analysis and coverage of serious issues. “For those who are the political actors or the business mogul, they have a way of controlling information using their own stories and pictures to block relevant news from the front page,” noted Dickson (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). By the practice of ‘controlling information,’ he was referring to the placement of advertising that covers the entire front cover of a major newspaper by governments and brands.

Explaining the trend, he said, “you are also conversant with advertisers coming with their wrap around…there will not be any stories on the front page so if something critical that should help the advancement of the society breaks that day it will be tucked inside” (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). That practice is called ‘wrap-around,’ and interpreted as the media’s way of reacting to market forces by Oso and Akanni (2018). However, as the Editor-in-Chief of Nigerian Tribune suggests, the extent that it displaces stories from the front page, the most prominent position in any newspaper, it represents another form of elite control of information (Interview, Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan).

Foucault's (2019) analysis of power and knowledge referenced in Chapter 5 highlights the key role that a system of communication plays in the formation of knowledge because power is exercised when knowledge is extracted, appropriated and distributed. Any hint of media capture by the major newspapers in the way that the senior editors have described should be seen as a red flag because of the wide implications to the political process. Were the newspapers to be so controlled by the political and economic elite, the media’s normative role of providing

a platform for rigorous debates and helping the people make informed decisions at elections is undermined.

Understanding the problem is one thing, but manoeuvring around it is far more difficult, as the Publisher of Premium Times agreed. The main challenge, he argued, is how to finance critical and investigative journalism in an environment where government, as the biggest advertiser, is willing to use its dominant position to pressure the media into making editorial compromises that undermine the democratic process. "The problem with financing journalism has been to what extent does it make it independent…I am not a great fan of advert, I know you can't get into newspaper without adequate funding, you can manoeuvre here and there with the advertisers," he said (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg).

If what Mabweazara, Muneri and Ndlovu (2020) and Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) call patronage and clientelism undermine the media in the way that the publisher of Premium Times describes, there are few viable alternatives. His suggestion that newspapers ought to have other sources of revenue to be able to function independently resonates with other senior journalists even if it raises critical questions about how to do that without crossing ethical lines. One of those who agrees with the call for other models of financing is the Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch newspaper (Interview, Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos).

He argued that the challenge for media houses was to develop more sustainable business models that would allow them to withstand pressure from advertisers (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). He explained further: "what it boils down to is…that good journalism alone is never enough…so, when you are planning the business side or when you are managing a business that is something that you have to consider" (Interview, Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). Advertising has been the mainstay of private media, but the tight economic environment is forcing some of them to embrace other avenues including subscriptions and donor funding.

The Publisher of Sahara Reporters agreed that such considerations about revenue sources were made when he was establishing the newspaper. "We made a decision, that we will not allow any government advertisement has helped us to fight the most powerful political vices in town which is public sector corruption…I think it is about modelling, people model their businesses

to suit their agenda or to suit their passion or conviction or something of ethical responsibility, it will not be very difficult," he added (Interview, Omoyele Sowore 2019, Skype). To do otherwise, he argued, newspapers would have to make compromises. The most appealing model appears to be donor funding, which has flowed generously from such agencies as the MacArthur Foundation, which, in its last disbursement, allocated $6.3 million to some media organisations in Nigeria (MacArthur, 2019).

Similarly, sixteen Nigerian media organisations including The Punch and Premium Times were beneficiaries of funding from the Google News Initiative (The Guardian, 2020a). The sentiments expressed by the senior journalists over the government and business community use of advertising as a form of pressure is understandable, arguably being the most insidious of many ways of controlling the media. Given the reluctance in journalism to concede that there are factors undermining its independence, the admittance that advertisers use their patronage of the media to exert pressure may help to explain some of the shortcomings already described by scholars like Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020).

They identified clientelism – including the provision of editorial support in exchange for advertising – as one of the hinderances to the critical, investigative reporting that is critical to democratic nations like Nigeria. In addition to lowering the bar for journalism practice by forcing the media into self-censorship, it also allows the political and business elite to get away from the close scrutiny that is required to maintain good governance. However, probably the most damaging consequence is the way in which the elite control limits access of other people into the communicative space.

**Donor funding**

Accepting funding from Western donors is one way which some of the new media platforms are sidestepping the commercial and editorial pressures that come with advertising. As already detailed in Chapter 4, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and the Cable are recipients of such funding from the likes of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa. While there are suggestions that it has helped them to maintain some level of independence to produce investigative journalism, many of the senior journalists interviewed voiced their concerns that it might be counter-productive. Most of the concern has to do with the agenda of the donors,

which recipients might be pressured to push. “By the time donor funds come in, Africa is porous, they can use the media to undermine the government,” Ayo-Adenrele warned (Interview, Sola Ayo-Adenrele, 2019, Lagos).

The Editor of The Guardian on Sunday said he believed that such funding “is tied to a particular story and the journalist is to make sure the money fits the agenda…donors have their agenda” (Interview Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos). He suggested that the recipients mostly do not care about the inherent danger, adding, “but what is the business of hit and run organisation with values? …they collect what they want and run…It is a threat to originality in Nigeria; those stories are purpose driven and not original”. Arguing along the same line, the Editor of The Guardian on Saturday also said she believed that those funded in this way are always willing “to please their oversees funders” and that “It could be spying for the CIA, we don’t know, anything can be possible, they could be using the media channel to do all that, there could be more to it” (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos).

The contestations around donor-funded media are more pressing now because organisations in the rich North are able to determine what issues are brought into the public sphere (Schiffrin, 2017b). That in itself is fraught with problems, first, because it presupposes that other issues that are judged to be unimportant are ignored; and second, because it removes the final decision on such issues from the journalists themselves. This, some have argued, is a matter of public importance that should be critically re-examined. Schiffrin (2017b) for instance, argued:

> why should we care? By using journalism to promote coverage of health or governance or corruption or elections or criminal justice, donors are making decisions about what problems the public should know about and even pressure governments to fix. That involvement in agenda-setting and public policy affects everyone, and so it matters that donors and journalists work together.

Whether that alignment of donors and journalists can eliminate the threats to the media’s independence remains to be see but the outlook appears to be bleak. For new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable, who favour donor-funding as a way of side-stepping advertisers influence and being able to compete with the more-established print media, the absence of traditional media structures to guarantee editorial independence is missing. In most of the more-established media companies, the editorial and advertising departments usually operate independently of each other; at least in theory giving

journalists some level of independence. However, as Schiffrin (2017b) notes, new media companies lack such structures and are, thereby, more pliable. “The new startups are small and the people who do the fundraising are often the same people who commission, edit, and write the stories,” she argues (Schiffrin, 2017b). This is a threat that is not lost to practitioners like The Punch newspaper’s Executive Director who was quick to add that, “‘there is no free lunch anywhere…so we should not be deceived by those who are pouring resources into our journalism…there's that danger…if it's the lifeblood of your business you will wants to keep its flowing and circulating…you may be tempted…you are likely to be tempted to do their bidding” (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos).

However, those concerns did not completely mask the perception that such funding has positively impacted journalism in Nigeria. Oni of The Punch cites contributions to capacity development as one of the benefits of donor funding. “There will be specialisation if an agency like Ford gives funds or grants to an agency like Premium Times for education, it will allow specialisation on education, enhance your operation, build capacity for your staff, even when the funds end, the things done will remain,” he stated (Interview, Demola Oni, 2019, Lagos). Another senior journalist who agreed that donor funding has added value is Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch who opined that, “the media organizations that have benefited from such funding, you would have to admit that it does benefits and helps to enhance the practice, the quality journalism that we have in Nigeria” (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos).

Their argument that donor funding has lifted the quality of journalism practice in the country aligns with those who canvass such aids in the name of media development. Such financial support is viewed as part of the overall international development work in the West but criticised for its vanity in light of the long history of failure of other economic aids to the ‘poor’ South (Nyarko, Mensah & Hamusokwe (2020).

The criticisms of donor-funding were dismissed by the Publisher of The Cable, whose newspaper has enjoyed funding from the MacArthur Foundation. He insisted such funding had helped his newspaper to undertake investigative reporting, admitting that indeed, funds go to the area agreed with the funding agency. “They tell us areas of focus, which is fair, if we want to focus on education and power sector or policy…we say policy say yes,” (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). He insisted, however, that funders don’t involve themselves in issues

like news management. “They don’t vet our story, they don’t tell us what state investigate and the one not to, no,” he added. Another publisher, whose newspaper has benefited from such funding, also dismissed the concerns about donors and their agenda, insisting that the journalistic values that could be advanced as a result were more important. “It is values that matter at the end, what values are we trying to promote? I cannot say because it is coming from outside it will affect the media; it is value that matters at the end of the day,” he said (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). He added that “there are worse enemies of Nigerians who are Nigerians than foreigners funding the media. Someone stealing funds is worse than a foreigner funding the media”.

Those sentiments are, however, are at variance with the position of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN, 2011), which frowns on donor funding for having unintended negative impact on the media. This includes forcing the agenda of donors on newspapers and distorting the media market. Aside from those unintended consequences, there is the more disturbing prospect of donors turning off the tap at will, leaving the recipients in the lurch. The Publisher of Sahara Reporters, who admitted that he had experienced being left in limbo, believes that donors sometimes lacked the appetite for certain kinds of advocacy. “I will be the first to reveal to you that some donors when they are under pressure they will be very clear to you that they are not interested in social media so you pushed your luck too far because they want to distant themselves from controversial reporting because they prefer to sit on the fence, they don’t like controversies and are very allergic to legal challenges,” he stated (Interview, Omoyele Sowore 2019, Skype). He elaborated by adding that “donor connections are set up by people who have political connection. If your donor is coming from there, you are likely to get a call from the programme officer who says we will pull our plug…I had instances to where people who had sent legal threats to some of our donors and that held us up to six months before they could release the fund”.

Just as Paterson, Gadzekpo and Wasserman (2019), Schiffrin (2017), as well as Harding and Burke (2019) have argued, the West, China and Russia are scaling up their media programmes in Africa and, regardless of the benefits cited by media figures in Nigeria, the critical question is whether donors can be trusted to advance journalism in the country. Can they be trusted to fund media development without advancing their countries’ agenda to the detriment of Nigeria’s? Such questions are pertinent, knowing that donors will always advance their agenda through news coverage that is likely at odds with the culture and developmental objectives of

Nations like Nigeria. There are suggestions that funding like that received by Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable also helps to deepen Nigeria's democracy by strengthening independent journalism. The Editor-In-Chief at The Guardian is one of those who believed that donor funding is helping to expand the democratic space. However, he is also worried about whether the recipients can truly remain independent. His concerns border on the public's trust in media, which is a key pillar in the sustainable development of democratic nations like Nigeria and how effectively they function.

**Access into the media**

Access into the media is at the core of the media's normative role as a public sphere. As Habermas (1989) suggests, the media should provide equal access to people across all social strata. Additionally, many have argued that new media is closest to the communicative space described by the German scholar (Dahlgren, 2009). Access into the media engenders participation that is crucial to the development and strengthening of democracy. This is because new media enables ordinary people to easily access the media. The results of the online survey conducted appear to support this claim.

Ordinary people are mostly unable to differentiate between the level of access they have into the media and the result of the online survey appears to corroborate this feeling. For instance, more people (60.5%) in the online survey said they can air their views more easily on the platforms owned by digital-born newspapers, against 34.5% who said they could do so in print editions of newspapers. Over half of the people surveyed (51.7%) said they have easy access to the online editions of print media (see Figures 18-20).

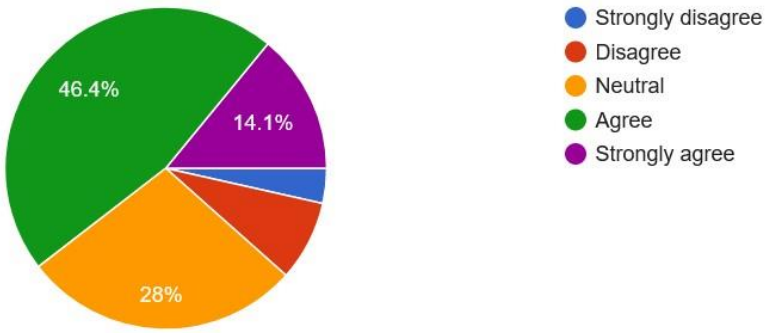



Figure 18: Easy access to digital-born newspapers (Olaniyan, 2020)

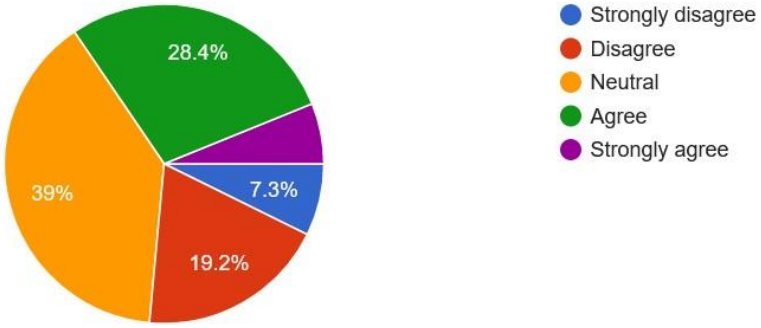



Figure19: Easy access to into print editions of newspapers (Olaniyan, 2020)

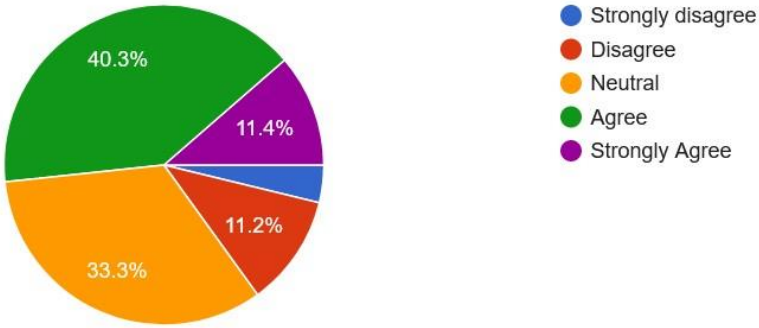



Figure 20: Easy access to the online editions of newspapers (Olaniyan, 2020)

Regardless of the perception about access into the media, the issue goes beyond just simply being allowed the space to make a point in your own words and includes questions of how professional mediation handles what is said (O'Sullivan et al., 1994). Additionally, questions about access crop up when discussing whether the people are involved in simple conversations or whether they are allowed to influence production processes in any way. In other words, the whole question boils down to whose voices are dominant in the conversation in the media space.

The findings from the online survey appear to be backed by the sentiments expressed by the senior journalists interviewed as they all appear to agree that more people have joined the conversation in the communicative space provided by new media. However, since there are more elite voices in the newspapers because they have the social capital to exert control over the media, the nature of access that ordinary people have into the media is open to question.

The Editor of The Guardian on Sunday affirmed his belief that people have better access when he said, "It is true they are able to take on more number of people to discuss what they put out there" (Interview, Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos).

That argument was supported by the Publisher of the Premium Times who went further to say, "It has expanded our outreach and in reverse to that it has created access for people to have information" (Interview, Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). Some of the senior journalists cite the trend of celebrities managing and controlling their own narratives as evidence of better access into the media but that may distort the arguments. The Executive Editor at The Punch, one of those who made the suggestion, may have been right when he said that "every person with, a smartphone, and his/her social media handle is a publisher," and that this had allowed people including "celebrities now manage and control their own communication processes" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). However, even if this is true, there is nothing to suggest that the people have been accessing platforms owned by institutional and non-institutional media.

It would appear that people may be vocal and active in their private social spaces as those are not controlled by the established protocols for which the media has been heavily criticised. The question of access and participation are defining principles in looking at alternative media (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008, p.11). Bailey, Cammaerts and Carperntier (2018, p.11) distinguish between "participation in the media and through the media," then go on to explain that participation 'in the media,' means "participation of non-professionals in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media decision-making (structural participation)". On the other hand, participation 'through the media' means "opportunities for extensive participation in public debate and for self-representation in public spaces" (Bailey et al., 2008, p.11).

What the Executive Director of Punch referenced, therefore, appears to be nothing more than participation through the media, as access to the more fundamental aspects of content-related participation and decision making are still subject to controls by the platform owners (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). The two levels of access described by Bailey et al. (2008) remain ideals, with the first type difficult to implement in traditional media system accustomed to tight control of production processes. Participation through the media, which involves the ability to participate in extensive public debate and representation is the more likely achievable

of the two. However, as previous sections have shown, access at this level is still subject to the amount of social and political capital possessed by individuals and groups who desire to air their viewpoints through the media. The implication of this is that new media may have expanded the space for political communication, but the playing field is still far from being level, especially for minority groups. As O'Sullivan et al. (1994, p.4) have argued, accessing the media involves the practice of quoting people or groups who are not "directly employed by the media organization itself," so looking at the people cited by the media can be a good indication of who is finding it easy to access the media space.

For instance, content analysis of 41 stories showed a common trend running through all of them, regardless of whether they were published by the print media (The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune) or by the new, digital-born newspapers (Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable). As the analysis of the selected samples in the section that follows shows, there is an indication that they may have more in common than their perception would suggest. As the selected stories (see Tables 14-16) indicate, the predominant voices in the newspapers are essentially the same.

Table 14: Selected stories for 2012 (Olaniyan, 2020)

**2012: Soldiers take over Lagos roads**

| S/N | NEWSPAPER | STORY TYPE | PREDOMINANT VOICES | TONALITY | SPACE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | The Guardian | Civil unrest | State/Political parties/Experts & Academic/Civil society | Positive | More than 15 paragraphs |
| 2. | The Punch | Civil unrest | State/Political parties/Ordinary people/Expert & Academic/Civil society/ Judiciary & Courts | Negative | More than 15 paragraphs |
| 3. | Nigerian Tribune | Civil unrest | Expert & Academic | Negative | 10-15 paragraphs |
| 4. | Sahara Reporters | Civil unrest | Ordinary people | Negative | 5-10 paragraphs |
| 5. | Premium Times | Civil unrest | Ordinary people/Civil society | Negative | 10-15 paragraphs |
| 5. | The Cable | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

**Sample 1: Anger trails troops' deployment in Lagos (The Guardian)**

By: Martins Oloja, Mohammed Abubakar (Abuja), Kelvin Ebiri (Port Harcourt) and Odita Sunday (Lagos)
Date: January 18, 2012

"EVERY one of us, or at least majority of us who hold public office danced and sang before these same people when we were seeking their votes. Why should we feel irritated when they sing and dance in protest against what we have done? For me this is not a matter for the military. The sooner we rethink and rescind this decision the better and stronger our democracy will be". With these words yesterday, Governor Babatunde Fashola openly condemned the Federal Government's deployment of soldiers in Lagos to disrupt the protest against removal of petrol subsidy. He called for the immediate removal of the troops from the streets.

**Sample 2: Jonathan crushes subsidy protest with soldiers (The Punch)**
By: Niyi Odebode, Adelani Adepegba, Success Nwogu, Ade Adesomoju, Tayo Famutimi
Date: The Punch January 17, 2020

The Federal Government deployed soldiers in Lagos in a bid to stop the continuation of the pro-subsidy protests spearheaded by civil society groups. Government also deployed soldiers in Oyo and Ogun states.
Our correspondents report that the soldiers massed at the Gani Fawehinmi park anti-subsidy removal protests and the other parts of Lagos metropolis.

**Sample 3: Soldiers deployed in Lagos (Nigerian Tribune)**
By: Soji Ajibola, Lagos
Date: Nigerian Tribune, January 17, 2012

Following the suspension of protests and rallies by the labour unions, the Federal Government, on Monday, deployed armed soldiers in strategic areas in Lagos State, as a measure to guard against the use of public demonstrations for alleged narrow political interest.
The NLC had, in a statement on Sunday, said it would not call out its members out on the streets, but would continue the strike, which was later suspended on Monday afternoon.

**Sample 4: Soldiers Flood Lagos Streets As Jonathan Orders The Army To Forestall #OccupyNigeria Protests (Sahara Reporters)**

By: N/A
Date: January 16, 2012

President Goodluck Jonathan has deployed hundreds of gun-wielding soldiers on the streets of Lagos in a desperate bid to forestall peaceful protests scheduled to continue today.

Through reports filed by citizen reporters affiliated with Sahara Reporters it was gathered that the armed soldiers have taken positions in such spots as Ikeja, Ikoyi, Surulere and Ojota as well as other spots where thousands of Nigerians have poured out in protest the government sharp increase in price of petrol. About 16 check points and barricades have been mounted around the Gani Fawehinmi Park in Ojota according to reports.

**Sample 5: Soldiers take over Lagos roads (Premium Times)**
By: N/A
Date: January 16, 2012

Lagos, which has witnessed massive but peaceful protests in the last one week, woke up Monday to an unexpected intrusion by gun wielding military officers. Armoured tanks with truckloads of military officers were positioned at strategic spots in Nigeria's commercial city, leaving a very uneasy and pensive calm across the city. This is coming after an early morning national address by President Goodluck Jonathan where he announced a reduction in the price of fuel from N141 to N97. The President hinted of the crack-down in his speech.

"Government will not condone brazen acts of criminality and subversion. As President, I have sworn to uphold the unity, peace and order of the Nigerian State and by the grace of God, I intend to fully and effectively discharge that responsibility," he said adding that 'government is desirous of further engagement with the groups'.

**Analysis:**
Using the story of the protest of January 2012 as an example, the content analysis showed that predominantly, all the stories referenced elite voices, mostly in government, judiciary and civil society. Understandably, the story about the protests against the government's decision to increase the pump price of petroleum products and the deployment of soldiers to quell the riots in Lagos was big. The treatment of the stories by all the selected media highlight McNair's (2009) description of the factors that shape news. His analysis suggests that what is news is

determined by factors such as economic, political, professional–organisational, technological, culturalist, and the sociology of sources.

The protests under the loose movement known as OccupyNigeria managed to shut down economic activities for one week prior to the deployment. All the headlines described the development as a government moving against what were legitimate civil actions to protest a government policy. These appear to strengthen the argument by McNair (2009) that access into the media reflects the power relations of the society. His assertion, in line with the culturalists, that "access to the journalistic media is not equitable: the powerful can call on greater resources to attract the journalists' attention than poorly funded pressure groups or political parties" (p.60) appears to be visible in the way the respective newspapers have treated the story.

The Guardian used many sources in its story attributing quotes to state, political party, experts and academic, as well as civil society. Its headline 'Anger trails troops' deployment in Lagos' and the opening two paragraphs referenced a statement by the then Lagos State government, Babatunde Fashola. The introductory paragraph is a quote from the Lagos State governor condemning the deployment and the second referenced his demand that the soldiers be withdrawn. The Guardian's approach contrasts with those of The Punch, which screamed in its headline 'Jonathan crushes subsidy protest with soldiers'. Its opening two paragraphs said the deployment of soldiers was to stop subsidy protests and alluded to similar deployments in the neighbouring Oyo and Ogun states. It cited state, political party, ordinary people, experts and academics, civil society, as well as judiciary and courts.

The Nigerian Tribune, which went by the headline 'Soldiers deployed in Lagos', framed the troop deployment as government's measure to stop the protest from being used for 'narrow political interest'. Its main sources were academics and experts. Both Sahara Reporters and Premium Times approached the story in slightly diverse ways, favouring civil society and ordinary people for their dominant attributions and references to gun-wielding soldiers in their opening paragraphs. Sahara Reporters, writing under the headline 'Soldiers Flood Lagos Streets As Jonathan Orders The Army To Forestall #OccupyNigeria Protests,' alluded in its first paragraph to the government's deployment of 'gun-wielding' soldiers in a 'desperate' move to forestall the 'peaceful' protests. The second revealed that its report was from citizen journalists from across the state and also cited specific action taken by the soldiers such as the

sixteen check points mounted in various parts of town. Premium Times, in its own introductory paragraph, also alluded to ‘gun-wielding’ military officers in ‘armoured tanks’ positioned in strategic spots of town. Its second paragraph quoted the government as saying it would not ‘condone brazen acts of criminality and subversion’.

Table 15: Selected stories for 2013 (Olaniyan, 2020)

**2013: APC rejects national conference**

| S/N | NEWSPAPER | STORY TYPE | PREDOMINANT VOICES | TONALITY | SPACE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | The Guardian | Politics | State/Political parties/Civil society | Negative | 10-15 paragraphs |
| 2. | The Punch | Politics | Political party | Negative | More than 15 paragraphs |
| 3. | Nigerian Tribune | Politics | Political party | Negative | 5-10 paragraphs |
| 4. | Sahara Reporters | Politics | Political party | Negative | 5-10 paragraphs |
| 5. | Premium Times | Politics | Political party | Negative | 10-15 paragraphs |
| 6. | The Cable | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

**Sample 6: Why we oppose submitting confab’s outcome to N’assembly, by S’West (The Guardian)**

By: By Akpo Esajere (Lagos), Saxone Akhaine (Kaduna), Bridget Chiedu Onochie, Adamu Abuh and Terhermba Daka (Abuja)

Date: October 23, 2013

Elections in Nigeria are never adequately reflective of the true wishes of the people, as only an abysmally low minority population of voters participate in the polls. National Assembly’s polls are the worst affected, being less popular and attractive than the presidential and the governorship versions: thus, rendering the federal legislature's claim to being the representatives of the Nigerian people and custodians of their sovereignty statistically unjustifiable

So argued leaders of the south-West as part of their case for "a genuine people's constitution" what they also tagged "an autochthonous constitution" at their pre-national consultation in

Akure (Ondo State) last Friday with the Presidential Advisory Committee saddled with anchoring the conference.

**Sample 7: APC to boycott national dialogue (The Punch)**

By: Olusola Fabiyi, Abuja

Date: October 22, 2013

THE All Progressives Congress has said It will not participate in the planned national dialogue announced by President Goodluck Jonathan on October I.

It hinged its decision on the fact that the "dialogue was nothing but a mere constitutional amendment process" which is already being carried out by the National Assembly.

**Sample 8: Why APC is scared of national dialogue (Nigerian Tribune)**

By: Olawale Rasheed, Jacob Segun Olatunji, Abuja

Date: October 23, 2013

The leadership of The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has slammed the All Progressive Congress (APC) over its decisions to boycott the forthcoming national dialogue, affirming that the opposition has nothing to contribute for the progress of the nation.

The APC had, through its Interim National Publicity Secretary of the party, Alban Lai Mohammed, described the planned conference as diversionary and that the Federal Government lacked credibility to organize such a conference.

**Sample 9: APC Rejects National Conference, Says Jonathan Has Lost Focus (Sahara Reporters)**

By: N/A

Date: October 22, 2013

Nigeria's main opposition political party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) today announced its rejection of the National Dialogue being organised by President Goodluck Jonathan.

The position was taken at a meeting of the National Executive Committee of the APC in Abuja. It was attended by six governors.

**Sample 10: APC rejects National Conference (Premium Times)**

By: Sani Tukur, Abuja

Date: October 23, 2013

The opposition All Progressive Congress, APC, has toed the line of one of its leaders, Bola Tinubu, by rejecting the proposed National Dialogue being planned by the Federal Government.

The party's position was made known Tuesday after the meeting of its National Executive Committee.

**Analysis:**

This was another story of national significance that showed a similar approach to the previous one in the description of the narrative. Unlike the story selected for 2012 where there were contrasting styles, especially with the preference of Sahara Reporters and Premium Times for ordinary voices and those from the civil society, this story cites political parties as sources. Only The Guardian cited state and civil society voices in addition to those of political parties. Being a sensitive and pressing issue, the decision of the All Progressive Congress (APC) to reject invitation to attend the constitutional conference attracted critical coverage as the sentiment analysis in NVivo showed.

The Guardian was the only one to have buried the story under a related story about the South-West's opposition to submitting the report of the national conference to the National Assembly for consideration. The other four newspapers pegged their stories on the APC's refusal to participate in the national conference, with slight variations from the Nigerian Tribune (through its headline) choosing to call attention to why the party made that decision; and the Premium Times using its introductory paragraph to allude to the influence of APC leader, Bola Tinubu, in what the party was doing.

Table 16: Selected stories for 2014 (Olaniyan, 2020)

**2014: Jonathan writes national assembly for extension of emergency rule in NE**

| S/N | NEWSPAPER | STORY TYPE | PREDOMINANT VOICES | TONALITY | SPACE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | The Guardian | Civil unrest | State/Political parties/Others | Positive | More than 15 paragraphs |
| 2. | The Punch | Civil unrest | State | Neutral | More than 15 paragraphs |
| 3. | Nigerian Tribune | Civil unrest | State/Civil society | Neutral | More than 15 paragraphs |
| 4. | Sahara Reporters | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 5. | Premium Times | Civil unrest | State | Neutral | 5-10 paragraphs |
| 6. | The Cable | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

**Sample 11: Jonathan extends emergency rule in Adamawa, Borno, Yobe (The Guardian)**

By: By Adamu Abuh, Azimazi Momoh Jimoh, Bridget Chiedu Onochie (Abuja), Kabir Garba, Abiodun Fanoro (Lagos) and Isa Abdulsalami Ahovi (Jos)
Date: May 14, 2014

Citing deteriorating security in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday issued a proclamation extending the emergency rule in the three North-East states. He also requested to the National Assembly to approve the extension in the best interest of peace and security in the affected states.

In a related development, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) have condemned the reported conversion to Islam of the Christians among the over 200 school girls who were abducted by the Boko Haram group, describing the development as totally unacceptable and downright unconstitutional. Meanwhile, the newly-registered Unity Party (UPN) has urged the Federal Government to embrace the opportunity for dialogue offered this week by the Boko Haram insurgents.

**Sample 12: Jonathan seeks emergency rule extension in Adamawa, Borno, Yobe (The Punch)**

By: John Alechenu, Sunday Aborisade, Abuja
Date: May 14, 2014

President Goodluck Jonathan on Tuesday asked the senate to approve the extension of the state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states.

Jonathan, in a letter to Senate President, David Mark, explained that his action was because terrorism had yet to abate in the affected regions.

**Sample 13: Jonathan seeks extension of emergency rule in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa (Nigerian Tribune)**
By: Taiwo Adisa, Jacob Segun Olatunji, Kolawole Daniel, Abuja
Date: May 14, 2014

President Goodluck Jonathan, on Tuesday, approached the Senate with a request seeking the extension of the one-year-old state of emergency declared in the three north eastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.

The president, in a letter dated May 5, 2014, said the development became necessary, in view of the prevailing situation in the area.

Sample 14: Reps to debate Jonathan's request for extension of emergency rule Wednesday **(Premium Times)**
By: Festus Owete, Abuja
Date: May 13, 2014
The House of Representatives will on Wednesday debate President Goodluck Jonathan's request for extension of the state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, the Speaker, Aminu Tambuwal, has said.

Mr. Tambuwal stated this at plenary on Tuesday in Abuja when he read the President's letter of request.

**Analysis:**

This is another story which shows more similarities in coverage than differences. The story about the insecurity in the North-Eastern part of the country recoded mostly neutral sentiments for all the newspapers in NVivo. The dominant voices in all four stories analysed are states and political parties (The Guardian) and civil society (Nigerian Tribune). All the stories named President Goodluck Jonathan in their headlines in reference to his decision to seek an extension from the National Assembly to the state of emergency in the region that had been destabilised by the Islamist insurgency. As expected, such an action would have been interpreted as indicative of a strong understanding of and capacity to handle local security issues. However, the only positive sentiment recorded was in The Guardian, while the remaining newspapers returned a neutral sentiment score.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Obijiofor (2015) called attention to the tendency of African media to favour government and its officials by granting them greater access to the media space than ordinary people and framing news from values that project certain officials over the people. While new media is now regarded as the modern-day equivalent of the Habermasian public sphere, that ideal communicative space is far from being established. Its envisioned ability to allow for rigorous discourse of public issues remains elusive. Sparks (2001, p.75) captures this obvious shortcoming of the media by asking "whether they are structured in such a way as to allow an inclusive discussion between equal parties, directed at reaching a common agreement." He then argues that the traditional media fall short of Habermas' (1989) ideal communicative space because: (i) there are limitations on what may be said, (ii) existing media super serve social elites; and (iii) they are large-scale undertakings, requiring professional production to be profitable (Sparks, 2001, p.8).

These shortcomings also provide some of the basis for the tendency to overstate the affordances of Internet-mediated communication, when, at best, only a cautious optimism appears to be the best approach. New media is still regarded as more democratic and participatory than traditional media. This despite the fact that Banda, Mudhai and Jettey (2009) favour a more cautious approach with their dismal assessment of Africa's potential to achieve universal coverage for Internet connections. The tendency of the media to privilege the voices of government officials raises two critical issues – media capture and donor funding. Both of which are potentially strong enough to shape the immediate direction of media development in the country. It strengthens the criticisms that new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are far from being viable alternatives to traditional media.

**Representation in the media**

As already mentioned, the new media as it operates in Nigeria allows what Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) call access through the media and, therefore, more participation by ordinary people in the media space. The result of the online survey conducted for this research shows that 73.6% of media users believe they have a better chance to express their views on the digital editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune against 67.4% of people who said they could do the same in the print editions of those newspapers. The suggestion that online newspapers are more generally accommodating is further supported by the fact that, about 74.4% of those surveyed said they believed they have a better chance of airing their views on the digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable.

These findings should be understood in the context of the print media environment where, until the advent of new media, participation and access to the public sphere by ordinary people was limited mostly to letters to the editor (Franklin et al., 2005). In a mediatized world, analysing the media and its normative role ought to go beyond allowing access into the public sphere. This should include the idea of the media as public sphere or the ideal communicative environment where people not only have equal access but also where the views of all diverse groups are accommodated.

This presupposes that communication in the space is guided by the principles of objectivity, impartiality and fairness, all of which are foundational to modern-day journalism (Maras, 2013; Anderson & Schudson, 2020). However, as the media and new media have the potential to shape behaviour and the general understanding of the world (Heinecke, 2019), scrutiny of news and its presentation often exposes elements of unfair representation of some views or groups. News production is dynamic and regardless of the digital disruption is still influenced by economic, political and social factors (Schudson, 2019).

Those factors often erode the journalists ability to uphold the key tenets of fairness and objectivity; hence, calling to question the media's claim to its normative role of a public sphere. Therefore, the claim by media users and arguments by the senior journalists interviewed that new media has democratised access to the media may be difficult to sustain because of the representation of views and opinion which privilege the elite. In addition, as Ojebuyi and

Salawu (2018) highlight, ownership and ideology affect the production and presentation of news in the Nigerian media. resulting in biased reporting of events. “The intricacies and responsibility of applying the numerous forces while taking editorial decisions may make it practically impossible for journalists to be absolutely objective in their professional performance,” they argued (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2018, p.93). The forces referred to transcend channels as the analysis of the pattern of coverage in the new digital-born newspapers and the online editions of print media, cited in the previous section, show more similarities than differences.

If commenting and contributing content to online platforms were to be taken as fair access and representation in the media, then the Nigerian media would be one of the most open. This is because, as the previous section showed, both the print media and the digital-born media illustrate a tendency to cite elite voices rather than ordinary voices. The claim to more representation and participation by ordinary people most likely refers to the relatively more engaging nature of digital media rather than the elevation of ordinary voices. As both the publishers of Sahara Reporter and The Cable stated, the traditional print media had no way of accommodating responses from readers. “If I read a story in the printed newspaper, and I have the intention to react to it, I have to write a letter to the editor and it will take some weeks, but the new media create the ability to react” (Interview, Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype). Kolawole went further when he said, “you write a letter to the editor and hope your letter is published…very rarely could citizens even set agenda of a topic, bring up an issue and make them, you know today we say go viral, make them focus on those news” (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos).

They may be correct in their assessment and, as The Publisher of the Premium Times argued, “digital journalism has enabled us to do a lot” (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). Fürsich (2010, p.113) notes the “the media’s power to steer attention to and from public issues often determines which problems will be tackled or ignored by society”. It may also help explain the limited impact of campaigns that are started by ordinary people on social media. Olaniyan (2014) and Akpojivi (2020) have detailed how hashtag activism including #OccupyNigerian and #BringBackOurGirls, has sometimes gate-crashed into the mainstream. However, the representation of ordinary people in the media remains limited to commenting and contributions to content. Evidence from other studies have tended to reinforce this observation about the limited impact of commenting. In one such study, Kalogeropoulos

et al. (2017) found in a study of online and social media participation that commenting was often limited to: (i) those with active social media presence; (ii) people who are partisan, their affiliations notwithstanding; and (iii) those with an interest in hard news. Their study, which compared Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, also found that the online communicative space was more likely to reinforce long-standing inequalities in participation, while offering the potential for corrective others, such as the non-participation of young people (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017, p.8).

In another study, Pinto-Coelho, Carvalho and Seixas (2019, p.743) found that because the ordering and set-up of news platforms, commenting was rendered powerless. Their observation that, "the press offered their readers a narrow and simplistic map of the political process where only elite actors mattered and where citizen participation was reduced to reified objectivations or individual emotional stances," suggests that one should take a less optimistic view of any participation limited to commenting. When it comes to representation in stories in prominent positions, the default setting for most news platforms is still to do what Obijiofor (2015) had observed, go to the elite. Sundar (1998, p.56) argues the elite are considered the 'bread' and 'butter' of news stories because of they provide relevance and credibility. For news managers then, the temptation is to turn to those who, in their judgment, possess the qualities considered 'relevant' or the expertise that enhances 'credibility,' a process which often eliminates all but the social and political elite.

This may help to explain why there appears to be similarities in the style of coverage by both the online editions of the print media and the new, digital-born newspapers. In addition, and as already referenced, the pressure to maintain cordial business relationships with advertisers, meant that such business decisions often influence advertorial decisions.

**Alternative media and new online platforms**

The interest in looking at Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable as samples for this study stems from the perception that their emergence as popular channels for communication owes to the flagging fortunes of print media and to their positioning as alternatives to traditional media. As detailed in Chapter 3, the new, digital-born newspapers are conceptualised 'activist new media' in line with Lievrouw's (2011) taxonomy of the genres of alternative and activist media, which embraces participatory journalism. All three news platforms have emerged in the

Nigerian media industry as hubs of a new kind of journalism practice that incorporates the elements of ordinary citizen participation in ways that were hitherto unthinkable (Kperogi, 2016; Akanni & Oso, 2018). Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable have, in their relatively short history, developed their platforms in ways that allow them to compete with the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune (see Table 4). If the different channels of distributing news content are considered as touchpoints, the increasing popularity of the new, digital-born newspapers is more understandable. Even if their real impact and effectiveness as alternative channels of political communication are unclear. The rapid growth in the online communities of the new, digital-born newspapers in comparison with those of the traditional media is indicative of more widespread acceptance. Not only are they among the most visited websites in Nigeria, they also have relatively more followers on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

The increasing reach and influence of the new, digital-born newspapers, as seen in their growing followership across different touchpoints, appears to be consistent with the finding from the online survey. The findings showed that people believe they can more easily air their views on the platforms owned by Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable. However, and regardless of these suggestions, many still doubt their effectiveness as alternative channels. One possible explanation could be the generally questionable practices by practitioners in the new media space. In essence, the absence of professional gatekeeping that makes online publishing attractive to non-professionals as channels of expression also negatively impacts on their operations.

Without the gatekeeping serving as a brake on journalistic expressions, the new digital-born newspapers have endeared themselves to ordinary Nigerians with their relatively more aggressive reporting style. That style appears to resonate with media users who agree that the Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable provide better checks on government and its officials through their more aggressive style of coverage. More than half of all respondents (55.2%) agreed that the digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable and others provide better checks on government and its officials. While 50.1% said they believe that the online editions of institutional newspapers like Guardian, Punch, Tribune and others are better in this regard (see Figures 21 and 22).

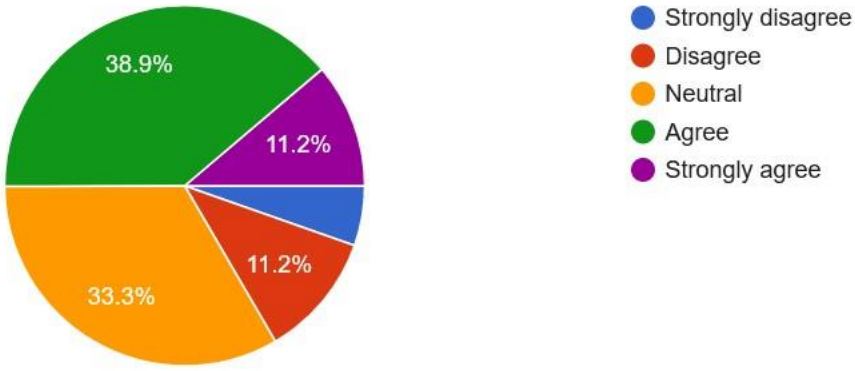



Figure 21: Online editions of institutional newspapers (like Guardian, Punch, Tribune & Others) provide better checks on government and its officials (Olaniyan, 2020)

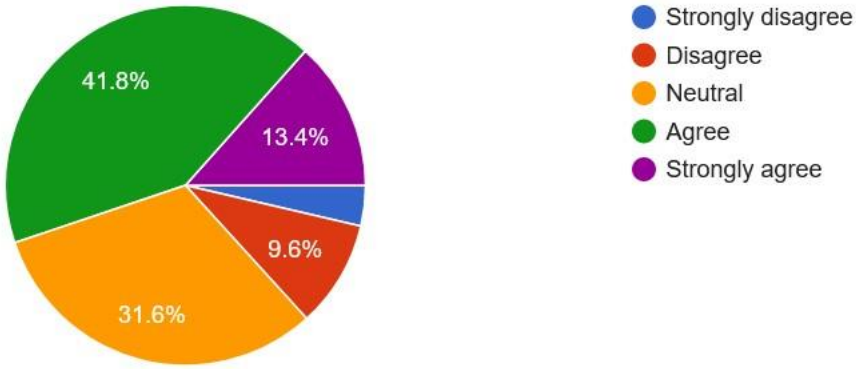



Figure22: Digital-born newspapers (like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable & Others) provide better checks on government and its officials (Olaniyan, 2020)

However, the digital-born newspapers were also slated for their recklessness, as more than a third of all respondents in the online survey (36.3%) said they believe that their performance when covering the government and its officials were untidy. This is against the 33.6% or a third of all respondents who said they believe that the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune are more reckless when covering the government and its officials (see Figures 23 and 24).

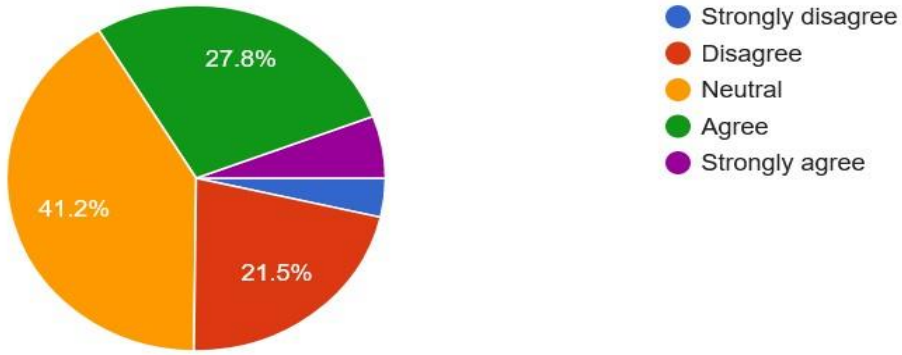



Figure 23: Online editions of institutional newspapers (like Guardian, Punch, Tribune & Others) are more reckless in their coverage of government and its officials (Olaniyan, 2020)

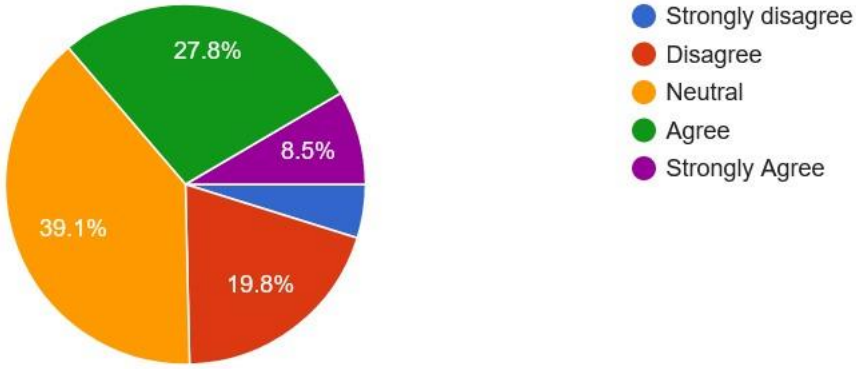



Figure 24: Digital-born newspapers (like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable & Others) are more reckless in their coverage of government and its officials

That both the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune are perceived as being as reckless in their coverage of government officials as Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable suggest a general distrust of online news. It also highlights the perception that they are of relatively lower quality compared to print editions, which is subjected to relatively more rigorous production processes The senior journalists interviewed acknowledged that as a result of the stiff competition to 'break news' and thereby be able to compete with social media users sometimes accuracy is sacrificed for speed in the online editions of the newspapers. In the process, errors are committed, and retractions are then

published, hence, the public perception that online newspapers are generally more reckless. It is understandable that digital news publications would be deemed as reckless given their penchant to pick unverified news sometimes from personal accounts of so-called influencers and rushing it through the production line for publication online.

This leads back to the question of whether the new, digital-born newspapers diminish or strengthen Nigerian media's credential to enhance the democratic process and deepen democracy. Some of the senior journalists interviewed believe traditional media would remain the preferred choice of the people in reference to the perception of media users who consider the new, digital-born newspapers as being less professional in their operations to impact the democratic process in any major way. The Editor of The Guardian on Sunday, for instance, agrees that the new media platforms were not yet viable as alternatives. His assessment is based on the non-institutional nature of their operations, which opens some of their platforms to the recklessness cited by media users. "Not yet, I think they raise a lot of issues, because at the end of the day I do not think it helps to orientate the people" (Interview Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos)

This assertion may not be unfounded because, as the content analysis of selected stories showed, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are using the same format as the traditional media. Kenix (2011, p.19) rightly highlights that format as aiming to "maximize audiences through pack journalism that is conventional and formulaic, which results in content that can be binary and reductive". The findings from the content analysis suggest that the new digital-born newspapers are also following this pattern, hence, they cannot be viable alternatives to mainstream media. He also highlights the subversion of access as motivation for alternative media, but the findings show the new media platforms privilege essentially the same sources as mainstream media.

"We have seen more of guerrilla journalism, at the end of the day, it is lots of hit-and-run journalists" (Interview Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos). This is a position supported by The Editor-In-Chief of the Nigerian Tribune, who also suggested that the new media platforms lacked what it takes to go the distance. His argument was that "if you weigh them, you will want to give it to maybe traditional media, you know for this new kid on the block, they are also susceptible to quite a number of things that will make them not to last the distance" (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). Both the editors of the Saturday and Sunday

Tribune believe the more open access nature of new media also makes them more susceptible to abuse. This, therefore, weakens them as viable alternatives to traditional media as the preferred channels for political communication.

Olagunju's position that the new media platforms "can use any story" and that "politicians know these dynamics and are exploiting it; they go there to sell all sorts of propaganda" (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan) is supported by Oladeinde (Interview, Shina Oladeinde, 2019, Ibadan), who stresses, "it is easy for online media to do what they do, it is guerrilla journalism, you can do what you want to do but for traditional, they can withdraw your license or stop your paper from circulating". However, the editor of The Guardian on Saturday disagreed, insisting that the new media platforms are viable alternatives. "Of course, they are, it is just that they can be very sensational…as I told you earlier anything that happens now, and right in the spot of the event, somebody is already tweeting, sending messages and saying details later, so news breaks fast," she maintained (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos).

The Publisher of Sahara Reporters went further to suggest that the new media platforms have supplanted traditional media because they empower people in the communicative space. He argued that new media have the staying power, adding "the reason why people follow news is that…this is very important; is the fact the guy who was a complacent consumer of news became participant in issue, so that was the biggest challenge to the old media…new media was a dream for all, everybody became important, there is nothing more important as people feeling important when they engage with confidence, that is what new media did" (Interview, Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype). His arguments appear to resonate with people, the majority of whom believe new media platforms are realistic alternatives as watchdogs. Asked if they agreed that the new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are realistic alternatives to traditional media (print newspapers, radio and television) as watchdogs, three out of five people or 61.3% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed, while less than 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Notwithstanding the perception that new media platforms are viable alternatives, there are questions on how different they really are from print media. As the content analysis showed, in the coverage of general and routine stories, they offered nothing different. Benson's (2003) question about 'how alternative are the alternatives' is pertinent in this regard. His analysis

focused on a segment of the American media market, but the same question can and should be asked about the new media platforms which cast themselves as alternatives but whose content promote predominantly the same voices found in their print media counterparts.

Couldry (2015, p.44, 47) differentiates between 'voice' as the "expression of opinion or, more broadly, the expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that a political system could acknowledge" and 'voice' as a value. He argued that "treating voice as a value means discriminating in favour of ways of organising human life and resources that put the value of voice into practice," but that "alternative media, which initially express voice, may be more or less successful in sustaining the conditions whereby such voice is valued and taken into account in society" (Couldry, 2015, p.44-47). It's a dilemma that is not lost on the Publisher of Sahara Reporters, who argues that the "biggest threat to citizen journalism…is that the moment we become citizen journalist on platforms then we start competing with people who are on conventional journalism platform…we want to get their awards, we want to be like them" (Interview, Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype).

By 'them' he meant the print media like The Guardian, The Punch, the Nigerian Tribune and others which had been the preferred channels for political expression over the years but whose influence appears to have waned post-1999. Faced by problems including the harsh economic environment, many of them have embraced the more pragmatic approach of compromising their editorial policies to accommodate influential advertisers.

Coming at a time of worsening corruption that was draining the national treasury (Costa, 2007), people sought avenues to express their frustration and the new online platforms made that possible (Lee, Jideofor and Petty, 2016). While print media and their online editions were more restrictive, especially when the editorial content is critical of the political and economic elite, news sites such as saharareporters.com and premiumtimesng.com, which have incorporated user-generated content and advocacy into their news operations, appeared on the scene to accommodate divergent views.

Such "alternative platforms including blogspots, listservs, and video sharing websites" (Akoh & Jagun, 2012, p.8) became hubs for "political activism and whistle-blowing" in the way that the platforms of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune were either reluctant or unable to do so. It would appear that Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable and others must

overcome some challenges if they are to completely replace traditional print media as preferred channels of communication. Journalism in mainstream media, according to Kenix (2011, p.19), is generally "conventional and formulaic," with the result that content is mostly "binary and reductive".

That formula, tested over the years is maximised for profit making. This means that new media platform owners who want to run newspapers profitably may be forced to adopt some of the same processes as the mainstream media they are supposed to replace. In addition, the new digital-born newspapers are still regarded as largely lacking the rigorous news production processes of the mainstream print media. Thus, resulting in the negative perception in the minds of media users, who still appear to return to the likes of The Guardian, The Punch and the Nigerian Tribune for confirmation and detail that they feel is lacking in the stories published by new media platforms.

New media platform owners admit that they have struggled with financing their operations because of their reluctance to fully embrace the traditional advertising model. However, as their operations are fully digital, they face additional challenges to compete with the financial muscle of the print media, especially because online news platforms in the Nigerian context are still far from being as profitable as print. To address this financing challenge, the new media platform owners have accessed donor funding, which will be the focus of the next section.

**Public trust in the media**

Public trust in the media is difficult to conceptualise, according to Fischer (2016), because of (i) issues with defining and measuring trust; (ii) a disconnect between the ideal of informing the people and consumption of news in the digital era; and (iii) questions regarding trust in the media in the post-truth era. Making the same point about the concept of trust in the media, Ward (2017, p.3) suggested focusing instead on replacing "the passive, hierarchical, and ideal" concept of "trust in news media" with the "active, realistic, and more democratic" concept of "reliance on news media".

When people can rely on news produced by journalists and their organisations, it invariably means people trust the judgment made by others for them. This is especially true because what is selected for publication as news is only a part of what is considered worthy of being shared.

Trust is, therefore, important in the mediated communication process and for this study is understood to express "the expectation that other actors will behave in a certain way" (Otto & Köhler, 2018, p.4). Expounding on their argument, they state that "selecting information is such a complex task that it is passed on to others. Instead of selecting ourselves, we select the selections made by others; selection is delegated" (Otto & Köhler, 2018, p.4).

Such confidence reposed in the journalist and their organisations to present news establishes a relationship based on credibility, one that is threatened when the public's expectations are unmet. This highlights the fact that trust is expressed through the journalistic process in thematic selectivity, factual selectivity, factual correctness, and explicit evaluations (Kohring, 2002, p.105).

Trust has been and remains a core ingredient of media practice, the absence of which erodes credibility and reliability (Heinecke, 2019; Osburg, 2019). As Otto and Köhler (2018) note, trust in the media is assessed by focusing on trust in the message or media content itself; the content's source or communicator; and the channel or the medium used to disseminate the message. In plain language, the media is relied upon by the public on the basis of truth and objectivity, and anything short is considered a breach of trust. While it remains a critical foundation of the media business, as Osburg (2019, p.15) argues, "trust is at a historic low" and the "ongoing digitalization is to some extent complicit in this implosion of trust, but as so often, technology is both the problem and the solution".

His arguments were supported by many of the senior media practitioners interviewed, who acknowledge that the media faces an existential threat because of the question marks over credibility and reliability issues. The Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch agrees that, as an industry, the media was "in the business of selling trust" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). This was in obvious reference to the selection of news for use by the public as highlighted by others like Otto and Köhler (2018). In other words, the public, according to Adeyeye, relies upon journalists and their organisations to present credible and reliable information, for which some are willing to pay. The continued existent and long-term profitability of media organisations, therefore, rests on the news being produced meeting the critical credibility test. The editor of The Guardian on Sunday was conscious of the potential damage that the media's failure to meet those expectations can cause. "It is a

serious threat if the perception is that we are not telling the truth as the media then you lose the public trust and it is very important" (Interview Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos).

The potential damage to the media's foundation was also highlighted by the editor of Saturday Tribune, who also believes that trust was being eroded and that journalism would lose its influence "the moment people lose trust in the media," adding, "we are done…once the media is not trusted, the government can for what they want" (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan). His assessment may not be out of place because public trust in the media has come under increased scrutiny with the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States of America. Distrust in the media, according to Ward (2020b, p.101), stems from a general scepticism about truth in general; the belief that profit-making media cannot serve the public good; and the argument that 'non-objective, perspectival' journalism are better suited for the political climate of the 21st century. Demola Oni, editor of The Punch, believes the digital disruption was encouraging "distrust in the media among the people," and that the "level of distrust will continue to grow because we will have people, who will try to manipulate the media" (Interview, Demola Oni, 2019, Lagos). Their views are consistent with research findings which suggest that public trust in the media in Nigeria and other West African countries is at best fragile. A study by Lee et al (2016) found that people's distrust stemmed from their belief that most media are political instruments; most media organisations compromise editorial independence to survive and organisations resort to lowest-common-denominator content to drive traffic (see p.13).

One of the reasons for the erosion of trust in the media is the penchant of new media practitioners to sacrifice accuracy for speed (White, 2017). The Publisher and The Cable both admitted that in rushing to publish, mistakes were easily committed. "There are some mistakes that we have made is because of the rush to go to press," noted one interviewee, who stressed the need for platforms to build trust by "breaking news" (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). However, the arguments about new media being responsible for growing distrust of journalists is at odds with other studies that have found that in Nigeria, "mistrust of professional media" is actually leading an increasing number of people "to embrace new and social media tools that allow them to seek alternative views, contribute their perspectives, and redefine popular media narratives" (Lee et al., 2016, p.14). The authors also found that distrust stemmed from people being aware "that political actors have vast influence over the media in Nigeria" (Lee et al., 2016, p.14).

The emphasis on 'breaking news' rather than accuracy suggests an erosion of journalistic values, which may actually offer a glimmer of hope for the print media as well as for media platforms which remain committed to good journalism. The Publisher of the Premium Times was more optimistic that, in spite of the existential threat that fading public thrust represents, journalism has "far more tools than ever before to be able to do this, the possibility of doing good journalism exists" and that there was still an appetite and willingness for good journalism (Interview Dapo Olorunyomi, 2019, Johannesburg). The reference to 'tools' alludes to the technology that makes new media different to traditional media; and which allows instant feedback and fact-checking among other things (Graves & Glaisyer, 2012). In the muddied waters of citizen journalism and blogs, where the gatekeeping function has all but collapsed, such technological enablement that allows journalists and the public to check the accuracy of news is welcome but may not be enough.

There is reason to believe that a lot more is required than just the tools of technology to ensure the public retain their trust in the media. The Guardian's Editor-In-Chief, for instance, was equally optimistic that new media tools had generally improved the environment for journalistic practice but believed that the print media was "still the believed and credible...the most trusted" (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos). His position appears to be supported by data from the online survey, which shows that online news in general suffers from credibility issues. For instance, only 6% of the people surveyed said they never had cause to disbelieve stories from online platforms (see Figure 25).

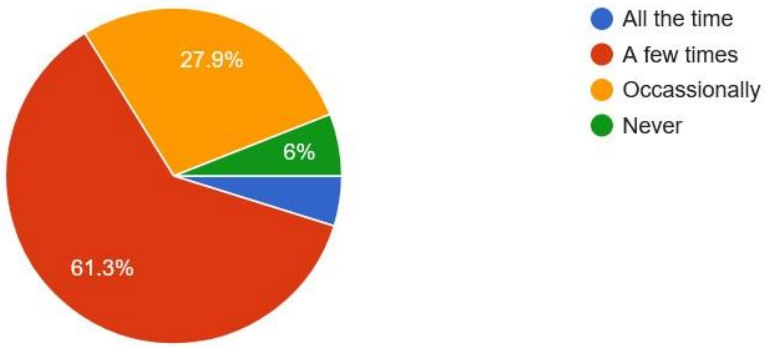



Figure 25: The public's disbelief in news from online sources (Olaniyan, 2020)

However, the responses hide other considerations as the question probed the general impression of media users to online news and did not make any distinction between platforms owned by the likes of The Guardian, The Punch or the Nigerian Tribune and those owned by the likes of Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable. Additionally, the tools referenced by The Premium Times' Publisher are being used by journalists and non-journalists alike. This suggests that the task for improving the quality of journalism and the credit for trust in news cannot be claimed by professional journalists alone. As Graves and Glaisye (2012, p.18) note, "fact-checkers come in various forms - journalists, media critics, partisans". This means that the burden for restoring trust in the media is shared by those interested in the political communication process.

The senior journalists interviewed consider the threat to public trust to be an existential threat, but the entire industry is still struggling with how to respond. It is a significant statement of intent that factchecking desks and investigative desks are not established while central newsroom sections like sports, business and politics desks have always been. As Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) suggest, the lack of funds and commitment might be hindering the establishment of desks that can help the media restore public trust in journalism.

**Watchdog journalism and the failure of the media**

A critical media that is able to hold the elite to account through investigative reporting remains the ideal for democracies. Norris (2014) argues that such media ought to exist as an 'independent guardian' to serve as a check on the powers of government. It is understandable, therefore, that most analysis of the media's performance eventually revolves around whether and how well they have functioned in their role as watchdogs. However, recent assessments have been critical of the Nigerian media in their failure to perform this duty of holding the elite to account.

Olukotun (2018a), in his own analysis, focused on the media's failure in spite of the passage of the Freedom of information Act and the relatively more conducive environment for such journalistic practice. Other equally critical assessments have focused on the near absence of investigative reporting in most of the news content. Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020), for instance, revealed that routine stories continue to dominate the output for newspapers, while

investigative reporting accounts for a paltry 6%. There is an admission within the industry that the media is failing in the all-important roles of watching the elite and holding the government to account. At least three themes emerge from the analysis of the qualitative interview data in this regard.

First, the senior journalists interviewed agreed that the watchdog role should be at the core of good journalism, especially in the context of the current democratic environment. “If the media is not there to put the authorities on their toes, we will not get anywhere” (Interview, Sola Ayo-Adenrele, 2019, Lagos). Her point, that the media should scrutinize the policies and activities of government mirrors the ‘independent guardian’ referred to by Norris (2014). Another senior journalist and the editor of Guardian on Saturday supported this view, saying the press should ever remain a watchdog…because without the media, this country is finished,” she said (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos). Another senior journalist, the Editor of The Punch, concurs but added that watchdog journalism should be at the core of every newspaper’s operation. “Investigative journalism is interesting and intriguing because it is what will allow any newspaper to progress, it is supposed to be the nexus on which newspaper will stand,” he argued (Interview, Demola Oni, 2019, Lagos).

Second, it is clear that while they all agreed that the media ought to continue to function as watchdogs, they also admit that it was ill-equipped to do so. One of the constraints cited is the economic pressure that forces them into compromises with the government and businesses who are the main sources of advertising revenue. According to the Editor-In-Chief of the Nigerian Tribune, “the watchdog is hungry, the watchdog feeds from any person, anybody, anywhere, anytime…that is the sad reality of media practice in Nigeria today with the exception of maybe one or two, most media houses don’t practice watchdog journalism again,” (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan) because of the patronage and clientelism that Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) allude to.

His admission that advertising revenue has a direct bearing on editorial practices echoes the criticisms of media capture and helps to explain why the media has struggled to fulfil its normative role post-1999. Dickson also added that “the media owners are in bed with the political actors of today with the exception of maybe two or three media proprietors every other media proprietor is in bed with this regime…the role of a watchdog has become so precarious, so dangerous now…the role of watchdog in our current dispensation is a very heavy one”

(Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan). It is a stark assessment of the involvement of politicians in media ownership, which severely limits the ability of journalists to criticise governments or political parties. It also suggests that government patronage of newspaper owners through business contracts and appointments to boards of government agencies are equally destroying the media's ability to serve as watchdogs.

Dickson's arguments are supported by his colleague and the editor of the Sunday Tribune who also painted a grim picture, arguing "newspapers are struggling to survive now…the politicians are the client…people you are supposed to be the watchdogs over are the ones bringing the money; are you supposed to reject the money?" (Interview Shina Oldeinde, 2019 Ibadan). His stark admission strengthens the view that investigative reporting may take a back seat when the choice is between either pursuing critical reporting or offending big-time advertisers. It also strengthens the longstanding criticism of the Nigerian media that ownership considerations will always supersede the interests of the people.

In the same way that media owners in the pre-independence era and those (like M.K.O Abiola) in the era after independence used the media to further their political ambitions , others (like Bola Tinubu and Orji Uzor Kalu) have been using their media outlets to support their ambitions The Editor-In-Chief at The Guardian was one of those to make this point, saying "a few media houses may have sold their soul for a pot of pottage" (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos). Aside from the economic pressure, there are also suggestions that the capacity to conduct investigations is unavailable in the industry. This is a position supported by the editor of The Punch who argues that "the capacity to do it is no longer there…you do not have people who are committed any more only people interested in money are there" (Interview, Demola Oni, 2019, Lagos).

Oni's observations highlight the central arguments by McChesney (2015) that for-profit, advertising-saturated and corporate media contradicts the essence of media that serves the needs of people in democracies. His reference to journalism in decline, as well as the undermining relationship between the media and the capitalist economy, may refer to the American media system but it captures the frustration of the senior journalists with the current state of investigative journalism in Nigeria. Additionally, the toxic and divisive politics of the fourth republic is believed to discourage investigative reporting. The Editor of Tribune on Saturday who holds a dim outlook for investigative reporting said, "the future looks blurry

because for the first time we have a government that is polarising Nigeria along ethnic lines…this is dangerous for our democracy and the media" (Interview, Lasisi Olagunju, 2019, Ibadan).

The third theme emerging from the analysis is that there appears to be hope within the industry regardless of its present struggle, and the media will remain relevant as it carries out checks on the government and its officials. One of those who holds this belief is the Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch who insists that "journalism in my view will in some form or the order, we always, play that role of being the megaphone through which journalist and the people speak truth to power" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos). He went further to suggest that "only a few stakeholders will be true to this rich tradition of the type of Journalism that we have in Nigeria". The Publisher of Sahara Reporters agreed and suggested that new media tools are useful and will help to revive the investigative tradition. "You can still be a good investigative journalist using all the tools out there to work," he said (Interview, Omoyele Sowore, 2019, Skype).

His assessment was backed by the Publisher of The Cable who also believes the entry of new, digital-born newspapers is helping to revive a dying tradition. "At a point, we were no longer even discussing investigations again, I am not sure between 1999 and 2005/2006 in fact we were not even doing investigation…I think the entries of Sahara Reporter, Premium Times, Cable has revived that tradition," he said (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). He added that only very few mainstream papers are keying in.

Their claims may refer to the publication of leaks from insiders in the government and organisations, but Aiseng and Akpojivi (2019), as well as Shires (2020) have highlighted the dangers in such unconventional practices. However, the assessment by Sowore (Interview, Omoyele Sowore 2019, Skype) and Kolawole (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos) might not be far off the mark as more people believe that the digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable have done a better job at holding the government and its officials to account (see Figures 26 and 27).

For instance, more than half or 55.2% believe that the new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Time and The Cable provide better checks on the government and its officials. However, half of the people or 50.1% said they believed that the online editions of

print media like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune do a better job of keeping the government and its officials in check.

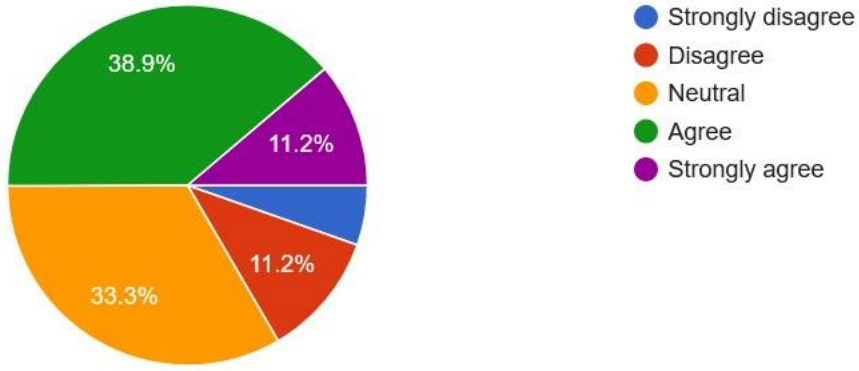



Figure 26: Online editions of institutional newspapers (like Guardian, Punch, Tribune & Others) provide better checks on government and its officials (Olaniyan, 2020)

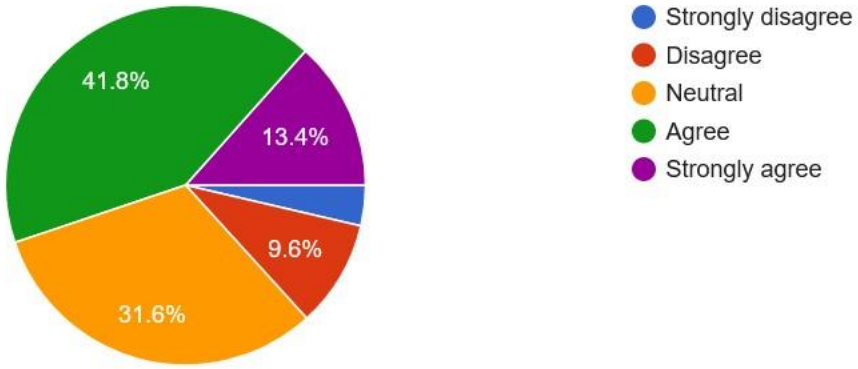



Figure 27: Digital-born newspapers (like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable & Others) provide better checks on government and its officials (Olaniyan, 2020)

When narrowed down to the fourth republic, more people (59.3%) believe the likes of Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable have performed better as watchdogs, against 43.6% who think print media the like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune have done better. Nearly half of all surveyed or 47.2% believe that traditional media (print newspapers, radio & television) have been better watchdogs in the fourth republic. This suggests that new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable and others like them are

making a positive impression in the minds of media users in the country when it comes to serving as watchdogs (see Figures 28-30).

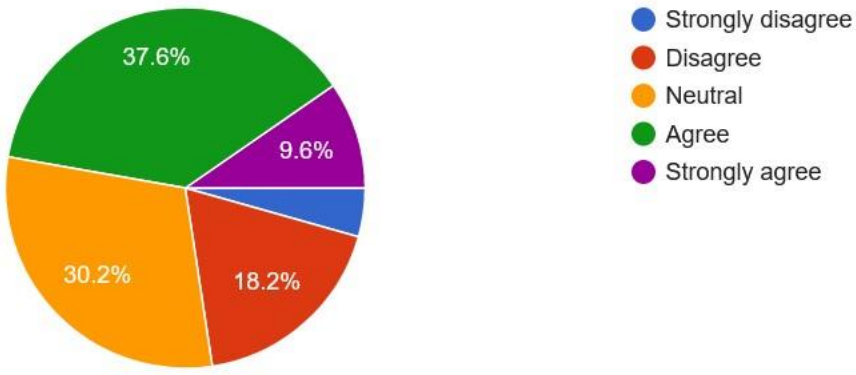



Figure28: Traditional media (Print newspapers, Radio & Television) have performed better as watchdogs in the fourth republic (Olaniyan, 2020)

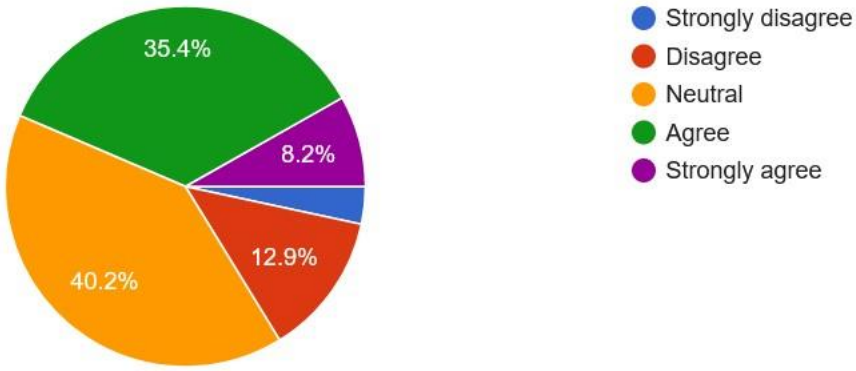



Figure 29: Institutional print newspapers (like Guardian, Punch, Tribune & Others) have performed better as watchdogs in the fourth republic (Olaniyan, 2020)

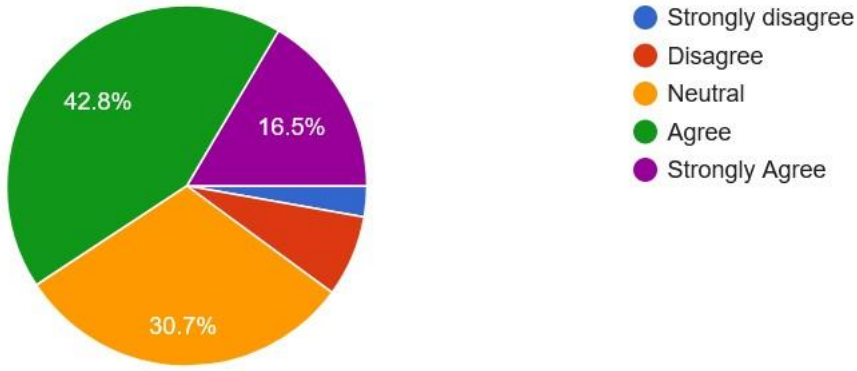



Figure 30: Digital-born newspapers (like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times, The Cable & Others) have performed better as watchdogs in the fourth republic (Olaniyan, 2020)

The obvious question is whether there is a direct correlation between the tendency of the new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable to be more willing to take risks, making them seem more reckless, and their perception as providing more rigorous checks on the government and its officials? The answer may lie in both their less formal and formulaic journalistic operations, which both allows them to ignore advertisers' influence and publish more critical news stories. It may also help to explain why certain stories are not published on the more traditional platforms of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune, whose editorial managers would rather err on the side of caution than risking reputational damage that comes from publishing unverified news and information.

**Regulation and new media**

If, as argued in previous sections, despite the vastly the improved legal environment; the overall impact of new media on the development and growth of Nigeria's democracy is still limited, what is the essence of the push for more regulations? Does the fear that new media is fuelling misinformation and disinformation justify attempts by the government for regulations that will effectively limit use? Or does the proposed regulation strengthen the government's hands in muzzling the media? Regulation of the media is easily abused by the government to control the media through the backdoor (Akpojivi, 2018), hence, these questions are pertinent and provide the context for evaluating the proposed legislations to control the use of new media platforms (including social media). The proposed laws, the 'Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill 2019' and the 'National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speech Bill

2019' have been criticised by those who query the intentions behind them (Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2021).

The Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill 2019, otherwise known as the Social Media bill seeks to:

I. to prevent the transmission of false statements/declaration of facts inNigeria and to enable measures to be taken to counter the effects of such transmission;
II. to suppress the financing, promotion and other support of online locations that repeatedly transmit false statements/declaration offacts in Nigeria;
III. to enable measures to be taken to detect, control and safeguard against coordinated inauthentic behaviour andother misuses of online accounts and bots;
IV. to enable measures to be taken to enhance disclosure of information concerning paid content directed towards apolitical end; and
V. to sanction offenders (Omilana, 2019).

The proposed law forbids anyone within or outside Nigeria from transmitting or having reason to believe a statement that: (i) is a false statement of fact; and (ii) the transmission of the statement in Nigeria is likely to be prejudicial to the security of Nigeria or anypart of Nigeria; is prejudicial to public health, public safety, public tranquillity or public finances; is prejudicial to the friendly relations of Nigeriawith other countries; may influence the outcome of an election to any office in ageneral election or a referendum; may incite feelings of enmity, or hatred directed to a person orill-will between different groups of persons; or diminish public confidence in the performance of anyduty or function of, or in the exercise of any power by the Government. The law, if passed, will punish offenders, upon conviction with a fine not exceeding N300,000 ($625) or to imprisonment for a term not exceedingthree years or to both; or in any other case, to a fine not exceeding N10 million ($20,833).

The National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speech Bill 2019, better known as the Hate Speech Bill, seeks to criminalise the use, publication, production and distribution of "any material, written and or visual which is threatening, abusive or insulting or involves the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behavior" (Premium Times, 2019). The proposed law, if passed, will holds offenders liable to life imprisonment and where the act causes any loss of life, the person shall be punished with death by hanging. Though the sponsors of the two proposed laws said their intentions are to curtail misinformation and disinformation, there

are fears that existing laws contain adequate provisions to do the same. Others have called attention to the potential of the proposed legislations to be used to curtail free speech and public participation in political debates (Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2021).

In addition, existing laws such as the Cybercrime Act of 2015 already have provisions that prohibit hate speech or what it calls racist and xenophobic offences. Section 26 (1a) of the law forbids the distribution of racist or xenophobic material through a computer system or network and specifies a five-year imprisonment or a fine of N10 million or both. Yet, the proposed 'National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches (Est, etc) Bill, 2019' is being pushed as a piece of regulation to curtail ethnic discrimination, hate speech and harassment on the basis of ethnicity. The Cybercrime Act also forbids cyber-stalking and cyber-bullying, with proven offenders liable to a fine of not less than N2 million, imprisonment for a term of not less than 1 year, or both. The law also stipulates a punishment of up to a term of not less than 10 years; fine of not less than N25 million or both, depending on the severity of the offence. Those appear to be similar to what proponents of the 'Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation and Other Related Matters Bill 2019' say is the aim of the legislation. Among other things, the proposed legislation is designed to "prevent the transmission of false statements/declaration of facts in Nigeria and to enable measures to be taken to counter the effects of such transmission; and to suppress the financing, promotion and other support of online locations that repeatedly transmit false statements/declaration of facts in Nigeria, all of which could reasonably be accommodated under the Cybercrime Law" (Hate Speech Bill, 2019).

Those potential threat to free speech is not lost on the senior journalists interviewed and aligns with the view of some scholars (Maitra and McGowan, 2012), who argue that some free speech is disagreeable and harmful. The Publisher of The Cable, for instance, called attention to the existing laws like the Cybercrime law, insisting that they already cover the things for which the Social Media Bill and the Hate Speech are planned. "In terms of using the internet to harass people, cybercrime is already taken care of there and in Nigeria communication act 2009 it is already stated what you can use," he said (Interview, Simon Kolawole, 2019, Lagos). The Editor-In-Chief of The Guardian also cited the existence of laws against libel, which calls into question the motive behind the proposed Social Media Bill. "If you are a journalist there are ethics and rule and regulations of the profession and those are enough," he insisted (Interview, Debo Adesina, 2020, Lagos).

His position was supported by his colleague and the Editor of The Guardian on Sunday, who - while acknowledging the dynamic nature of digital communication - said the laws against libel and defamation should be adequate to cover new media. The dynamism and dangers of policing communication in the age of new media is not lost on practitioners, but many fear that the government would strengthen its hold on the media through the guise of stopping misinformation and disinformation. Of the proposed measure of the death penalty for hate speech, The Guardian's Sunday Editor said "it is too extreme; it can be used as political tools where what is not intended can be implied… I support the argument that we have enough laws" (Interview Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos). The Executive Director of Digital Operations and Publications at The Punch also made the same point, stressing the need to enforce existing laws: "our problem in Nigeria is not a lack of laws, we have laws in place…it's really about enforcement…because trust really between us our political leaders and other leaders actually has broken almost completely…we are also very suspicious of the true motives" (Interview Joseph Adeyeye, 2019, Lagos).

In addition to enforcing existing laws, there were suggestions for the government to explore working with likes of Facebook and Google to curtail misinformation and disinformation. The Editor of The Guardian on Saturday, one of those who suggested, said she believed the two giants in the online space can help in the fight against information disorder. "It important that the industry with Google, Facebook to counter whatever fake news there is" (Interview, Nike Sotade, 2019, Lagos). Her colleague, and Editor of The Guardian on Sunday, agreed, saying "maybe, the owners of the platforms such as Google and Facebook at their level are answerable to government, like parliaments intervene if Facebook goes off course" (Interview Alabi Williams, 2019, Lagos). The need for stricter regulation to curtail misinformation and disinformation may be a necessity, but mistrust of government by Nigerians means that many will continue to question the intentions of the two bills.

For instance, and regardless of the general admission that new media is muddying the communication space and contributing to the growing incidence of misinformation and disinformation, many still consider citizen journalists as able to strengthen the democratic process rather than threatening it (see Figure 31). For instance, the online survey found that only 27.3% of the people believe that citizen journalists were a threat to the democratic process, as opposed to 40.4% who disagree.

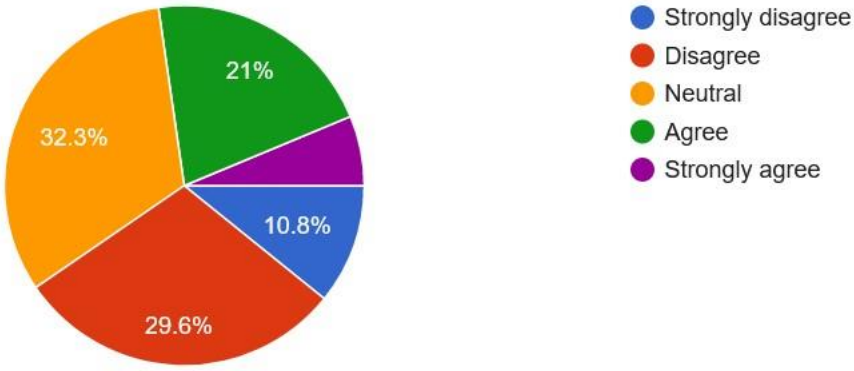



Figure 31: Are citizen journalists are a threat to Nigeria's democratic process? (Olaniyan, 2020)

This perception appears to fuel the suspicion of the real intentions of the sponsors of the proposed legislation and is in sync with findings from studies on how repressive regimes control the media (Norris and Inglehart, 2010). For instance, slightly more people (39.3%) surveyed said they disagree that the proposed regulations will safeguard Nigeria's democracy; while 35.6% agree. The extent of public distrust is evident in the number of media users who believe that if successfully passed, the proposed legislations will stop new media practitioners and citizen journalists from holding the government to account. Almost half of those polled (48.5%) believe the proposed pieces of legislation will hinder the media's ability to monitor the government and its officials, while less than half of this number (21.5%) disagree (see Figures 32).

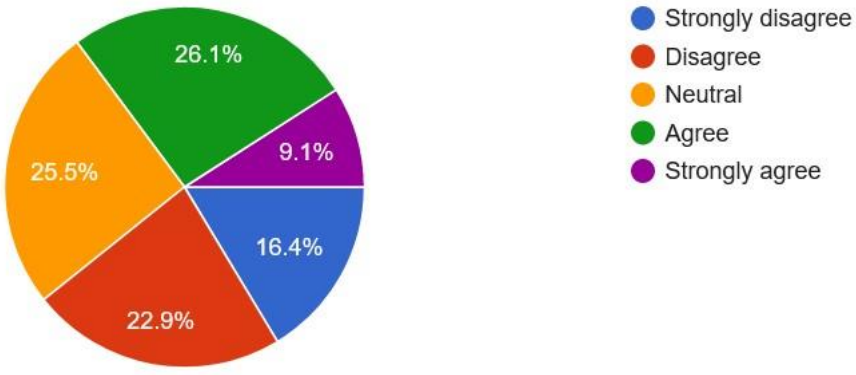



Figure32: The proposed social media law will safeguard Nigeria's democracy (Olaniyan, 2020)

**Conclusion**

One of the more common themes in the qualitative interview is the belief that the new, digital-born newspapers have brought something new into Nigerian journalism and have inspired positive changes across the entire industry in the process. The most frequently mentioned of the positive changes include: (i) their more democratic and participatory news processing model; (ii) speed; (iii) investigative reporting; (iv) collaboration; and (v) innovative use of technology like social media. All of these are being replicated to different degrees and effect by the traditional print media in an attempt to be more competitive; which can strengthen the media to perform its normative roles.

McNair (2011), who believes that the media are important to the political process because they come closest to encapsulating Habermas' ideal communicative space or the public sphere, suggests that the fourth estate must function along these lines to impact democracy positively. He, therefore, proposes five functions for the media in 'ideal democracies,' including informing the people; educating them; providing a platform for public political discourse; publicising government activities and those of political institutions; as well as serving as a channel for advocacy of political viewpoints (see p.19-20). New media, as these findings show, strengthens the media's ability to perform these functions.

Regardless of the positive changes inspired by participatory journalism, the responses showed a grim awareness of the threats posed by the more open ecosystem of new media, especially with regards to public trust. In summary, the responses showed that trust remains the most crucial factor in journalism, but the activities of most of the new, digital-born newspapers were undermining public trust and that the print media remains the most trusted. Aware of the positive impact and the threat from new media, the interviewees believe there are three sure ways to incorporate the best features of citizen journalism into media practice in Nigeria while eliminating the damaging ones. First, there is an acknowledgment that the more participatory nature of the new, digital-born newspapers is one of the main reasons why they have grown their influence within a short time. Therefore, traditional print media must embrace this feature by among other things: (i) investment in new technology; (ii) developing stronger online presence; and (iii) training of print journalists in practical and more engaging storytelling.

Second, new media's contribution to the revival of investigative journalism and the centrality of the of media's role as watchdog was acknowledged. While the outlook is not encouraging,

the interviewees stress the need to return to a tradition that has been ingrained into the Nigerian press from its foundation and which can enhance public trust. Four issues stand out from the responses on how watchdog journalism can be enhanced: (i) the harsh economic environment makes it difficult to do; (ii) the capacity for investigations is unavailable; (iii) the divisive politics of the fourth republic stands in the way; and (iv) available digital tools make it relatively easier to do investigative reporting.

Third, there was a consensus that regulating new media practice is important in the fight against misinformation and disinformation but that existing laws were adequate. Five (41%) of all interviewees believe there are provisions in existing media laws that could govern the new media segment of journalism, while four (33%) feel platform owners like Google and Facebook should be made more accountable. Four (33%) believe that education and training citizen journalists is the best approach to fighting the problem, while one participant insists that only good governance can help to reduce the incidents of misinformation and disinformation. The next chapter will discuss in more detail all the findings and make recommendations.

Replicating Habermas' ideal public sphere in any media form has proved to be challenging, and the growing influence of commercial interests make public access difficult for everyone except the elite who can afford it (Oso & Akanni, 2018; Dahlgren, 1991). The German scholar highlighted the distortion in his article, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article – 1964' (Habermas, 1974), in which he rued how in its liberal model, journalism transitioned and altered the public sphere in the process. He postulated that, "In the transition from the literary journalism of private individuals to the public services of the mass media the public sphere was transformed by the influx of private interests, which received special prominence in the mass media" (Habermas, 1974, p.53). The argument he made over three decades ago still speaks to the failure of journalism that Hackett (2010) called a 'deficit,' or which McChesney (2013) referred to as journalism's shortcomings, and what Kunkel and Roberts (2001) described as 'leaving the readers behind.' Regardless of those labels, the shortcomings are visible in journalism practice in Nigeria and the issue of access into the media and representation are arguably the most critical.

There is evidence to support the perception that new media and citizen journalists have changed political communication. For instance, there is agreement that new media allows more Nigerians to access the media space and participate in political discourse. Unlike the

traditional, print media, where access is more controlled by the editors and media managers, ordinary people can have instant access into the new media space once they have the right tools. This means that unlike before, ordinary people are involved in setting the agenda, something that was previously the exclusive preserve of traditional media.

Access and participation in the media space are relatively easier because the new, digital-born newspapers have a less-limiting funding model and also because the elite domination that makes print newspapers inaccessible is more difficult to maintain in new media. However, the overwhelming view is that media capture is a real problem for both the new and traditional media alike. All twelve interviewees agreed that advertisers often used it as a tool to influence the media and that it is a threat against which there are no quick fixes.

The responses showed that: (i) advertisers withdraw their patronage from critical newspapers; (ii) they use it to influence editorial content; (iii) they deliberately starve newspapers of advertising in order to indirectly control the media; (iv) newspapers which rely heavily on advertising revenue are easily compromised; (vi) advertising has the potential to negatively affects the editorial independence of newspapers; and (vii) the problem with negative influence of advertising on the media can easily be overcome if the newspaper is established on sound business principles or revenue models that de-emphasise advertising. One of such funding models explored by the new, digital-born newspapers is donor funding, which, from the qualitative interviews, is as divisive as it is novel. Six of the interviewees argued that because all donors have their agenda, this revenue source is a threat to Nigeria's democracy, while a third believe it also compromises recipients. The belief is that donors want recipients to push certain narratives, focus on certain policies and avoid certain kinds of stories. Seven (58%) of the interviewees agreed that donor funding enhances the quality of journalism in the country because it provides much-needed funds for training and investigative reporting, with the recipient media organisations benefiting the most. While there is acknowledgement that these benefits have the potential to help deepen democracy, they cautioned that the funding agreement has to be founded on good values.

Accordingly, there is a divergence of opinion on whether new, digital-born newspapers represent viable alternatives to traditional, print media. Of the twelve people interviewed, four of them (33%) were either unsure of the viability of new, digital-born newspapers as alternatives to traditional media or whether they are ready to fill that role. Five others (41%)

believe that the new media platforms are already viable as alternative channels for political communication. Among other reasons cited are the speed with which they deliver news, the control they place in the hands of news users, as well as the fact that it enhances the media's ability for investigative stories. Three (25%) believe that the digital-born newspapers are not viable as alternative channels and that traditional, print media still retain the edge as the most influential. One of the reasons cited is the traditional media's more guarded approach to news reporting.

# CHAPTER NINE
# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

This study was designed as a critical examination of the emerging phenomenon of activist new media and why their approach appears to give them an edge over traditional newspaper. The study of the phenomenon in the fourth republic continues the tradition of critical analysis of the normative role of the media in democracies, and how new communication technologies are impacting that role. The Nigerian media has historically been vibrant and adversarial at critical moments in Nigeria's history (Olukotun, 2018; Salawu and Onyenankeya, 2020). As such, it has been praised for its contributions before independence and during the military years when analysis of the media's performance focuses on those moments in history, it is easy to miss the shortcomings that have become more noticeable in the fourth republic (Uko, 2004). The fourth republic has witnessed the increasing use of new media as channels for political communication with non-professionals performing acts of journalism in the way that Alejandro (2010) and Tufekci (2017) described. It is a development that raises questions about the extent and nature of their impact on traditional media and the political process. The aims of this study, therefore, were to: (i) explore how and why citizen journalism or alternative and activist media is gaining ascendancy in their influence on political discourse in Nigeria; and (ii) to interrogate the nature and impact of that growing ascendancy on the Nigerian political process.

In order to achieve these, the study compared the ecosystems of traditional and new media, so as to interrogate the way the convergent media environment appears to enable more political participation from citizens; then critically examined which aspects of the ecosystem of new media can be adopted by traditional media to strengthen them. Accordingly, the study set out to answer the following research questions: (i) to what extent are new media platforms like Sahara Reporters enhancing access into and participation in the political discourse? (ii) how has new media helped to expand the range of citizen's choices in the Nigerian media space? (iii) how are elements of the ecosystem of new media helping to expand the discursive space in the fourth republic? (iv) to what extent have new media practices diminished or strengthened Nigerian media's credential to enhance the democratic process and deepen democracy?

The study used critical political economy to interrogate the media's performance, especially because their normative role demands that among other things, they provide equal access to

every member of the public regardless of social or economic class. Critical political economy was preferred because it focuses on how issues of capital and ownership affect media production and distribution; how these in turn affect access of different classes into the media space; as well as how that commercial model affects the narrative in the media (Mosco, 2016; McQuail, 2016; Garnham, 1990). Essentially, critical political economy is concerned with power relations and their effect on the media and the communicative environment for politics (Wasko, 2004; Hardy, 2014).

This theoretical framework allowed the study to critically assess how ownership of the selected newspapers shape news production and distribution. It also provided a critical look at how new, digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable are being used for citizen journalism and activism, as well as the nature and impact of this on the political process. It was also the basis for challenging the claims that the new media platforms are realistic alternatives to traditional newspapers like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune.

While political economy focuses on the contestations around of the control of the means of production and distribution in the mediated communication environment, it is inadequate for addressing issues of access and representation in the media. As such, the choice of the public sphere for this purpose is clear. Habermas' (1989) description of such an ideal communicative environment might be unattainable but it does provide the parameters for assessing how close the media is to being a neutral platform that can easily be accessed by ordinary members of the public.

## Summary of Key Findings

### Advertising influence, elite control and hegemony

With all its obvious inadequacies, such as the one highlighted by Mouffe (2000), there is no better way to examine the media's normative role than critically examining how best they mirror Habermas' (1989) public sphere. Consistent with the communicative space that enables people to gather without prejudice to their social background, the media ought to perform four roles regardless of the variant of democracy in which they operate. These include: (i) information; (ii) representation; (iii) watchdog; and (iv) propaganda (Scammell & Semetko, 2018).

The transformation of the public sphere in the way that Hartley (2002), Livingstone and Hunt (1994) and Boeder (2005) describe means that for commercial reasons, the media no longer accommodates everyone, but only a few. The Nigerian media has always been historically tied to power. Many of the early press, television and radio organisations having been established by politicians and governments. My analysis of the media environment since 1999 shows that this pattern has persisted, as most of the surviving newspapers, television and radio stations are either owned by politicians or by businessmen with close links to politicians and political parties.

The Gramscian control of the media by the elite is the basis for what Olukotun (2004) termed counter-hegemony, by which he means the establishment of more critical and adversarial news platforms such as The News, Tell and Tempo. It was clear from the outset that a critical study of the media's performance in the fourth republic must be premised on the central question of whether or not they have provided the platform for discourse, shaping of public opinion and helping to create informed voters. As mentioned in Chapter 7 with the explanation of the design of the research, I was motivated by my personal experiences as a journalist who noticed the gradual erosion of the influence the print media. McNair (2000) was probably right when referencing Alistair Campbell, who said the press were the primary agenda setters.

Of the British press, McNair (2000) said:

> they have the power to set the dominant political agenda, as elaborated over weeks, months and years, in editorials, columns and other forms of pro-active, opinionated journalism, amounting to extended narratives of unity and division, success and failure, rise and fall. In this capacity the institutions of the press take the lead in establishing the dominant interpretative frameworks within which ongoing political events are made sense of (p.30).

Those assertions could very well apply to the Nigerian press pre-1999. It rode into that position of influence because of its critical role in the years leading to Nigeria's independence as well as the military years. However, it has struggled to maintain the same position in the fourth republic.

Instead, new digital-born newspapers like Sahara Reporters, Premium Time, The Cable and others have ridden on the back of new technologies, more critical reporting and a more

participatory approach to journalism into prominence. These new entrants have been hailed for filling the void with regards to watchdog reporting and for being more participatory. However, the politics and regulations of the internet, on which their operations are built and from which none is making enough revenue to be truly independent, raise questions about whether they are sustainable. These considerations informed the choice of political economy and public sphere as the theoretical frameworks for the study.

As detailed in Chapter 5, critical political economy is useful in analysing the power relations in the management of resources like media content, while the public sphere allows for a critical evaluation of access and participation in the media space. One of the key findings from this study is the influence of advertising on editorial decisions. The media is reeling from the general economic hardship in the country, and this is forcing many media organisations into making compromises that affect their ability to fulfil their normative roles. Skjerdal (2010), Nwabueze (2010) and Idowu (2018) showed in their work how corruption is creeping into journalism. However, the qualitative interviews with senior journalists conducted for this study showed that organisations are also making compromises in order to keep advertisers happy.

Those compromises mean certain stories, which would be deemed critical of advertisers, cannot be published. Where news organisations have dared to publish, advertisers, including the government, have withdrawn their patronage as punishment. In effect, advertising money is being used as a tool to indirectly control the media and prevent it from fulfilling its role as watchdogs. As the Editor-In-Chief of Nigerian Tribune put it, “the watchdog is hungry the watchdog feeds from any person, anybody, anywhere, anytime” (Interview Edward Dickson, 2019, Ibadan).

The economic pressures weaken the media and allows elite control in ways that shut out ordinary people from the communicative space, thereby, compromising the essence of journalism. If the media privileges the elite as this study has shown, what does it say of its role as a public sphere? Is there hope in the new, digital-born newspapers which have been receiving generous donations from foreign donors, and are, therefore, more able to sidestep advertising pressures? It would seem that it is difficult to answer the last question in the affirmative as the perception that they afford ordinary people more access to participate might be overstated.

There is overwhelming evidence though that new media platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable have become hubs for citizen journalism and have altered political communication. Arising from this are questions of journalists and media organisations being involved in activism and advocacy, as well as ethical issues regarding crossing the line from reporting to advocacy.

**Citizen journalism and advocacy**

On the significance and impact of the emerging phenomenon of citizen journalism, there is general agreement that the new, digital-born news platforms have transformed ordinary Nigerians from just news users into publishers and editors in their own rights. Thus, making information more easily accessible and giving people more control over how they engage with content (Salawu, 2011; Oso & Akanni, 2018). The interviewees also agreed that this shift has allowed many more people to become involved in political communication. It has also eliminated the controls that traditional media had on the news process. This, they agreed, has two implications: (i) there are new spheres of influence around the more prominent platforms and 'influencers' who have created a large online followership; and (ii) the growing influence of ordinary Nigerians, who place no premium on fact-checking, is also affecting credibility. The implication here is that there is increased participation by more ordinary Nigerians in the communicative process but there is still an appearance of a few people playing dominant roles even in the new media space.

One of the more noticeable uses for the new media tools is for advocacy, where ordinary Nigerians are becoming more involved in monitoring of and demanding accountability from the government. Interestingly, most of those interviewed insist that this was not an exclusive preserve of the citizen journalist. They maintained that advocacy cannot be divorced from journalism and that it was necessary for the media to be sensitive to the environment and act for public good because the professional code demands it. However, while it is acceptable that people can push back against the government's intolerance using new tools; there was overwhelming support for journalists to use their positions and platforms for advocacy when circumstances demand it.

When those occasions arise, most of the interviewees agreed journalists and the media should: (i) be critical but not adversarial; (ii) take positions but not lose their independence; (iii) confront government but be retrained; and (iv) stand with the people and for justice. It appears from the findings that there is some form of advocacy in every piece of journalism whether or not they are intentional (Fisher, 2016). It is reasonable to agree with Ingram (2018) that advocacy has added value to journalism, but Zúñiga and Hinsley (2012) urge caution when assessing what is considered 'good journalism'.

Opinion is divided on when a journalist or media organisation crosses the ethical line both with regards to whether a journalist or a media organisation can cross from reporting into advocacy and exactly what it would take for that line to be crossed. While the majority of the interviewees agreed that there is a line that should not be crossed, they differ on their definition of what it takes to do so. Among others, they suggest that a journalist or a media organisation would be crossing the line when: (i) they stop being objective; (ii) they become confrontational; (iii) they leave out facts and don't verify; (iv) they cross from being passionate to being partial; (v) they consistently descend into advocacy; (vi) opinion and news are not separated; (vii) using words that can ; (viii) they fail to see anything good in the government; and (ix) the language use is suggestive of advocacy.

For those who insist that journalism and advocacy are two sides of the same coin, the journalist and the media organisation would be performing their roles as long as their actions: (i) aim to keep the government in check; (ii) are in order when it helps to accomplish the ends; and (iii) if the journalists are responding to occasions when there is bad governance. Baker (2020) and Day (2006) make the point that there is only a thin line that exists between ethics and advocacy, and that practitioners can cross the line when they take actions that jeopardise their independence. What this suggests is that all newspapers and their organisations still struggle with ethical questions in some form.

**Useful features from New Media Ecosystem**

One of the most recurrent issues that emerged from the qualitative interview is the belief that the new, digital-born newspapers have brought something new into Nigerian journalism and have inspired positive changes across the entire industry in the process. The most frequently mentioned of the positive changes include: (i) more democratic and participatory news

processing models; (ii) speed; (iii) investigative reporting; (iv) collaboration; and (v) innovative use of technology like social media. All of which are being replicated to different degrees and effect by the traditional print media in an attempt to be more competitive.

Notwithstanding the positive impact that citizen journalism has had in Nigeria, the belief within the industry and among the general public is that it's more open nature, and relatively lower barrier of entry for non-professionals is eroding public trust in the media. Its more open ecosystem is seen as one of the reasons for declining quality of journalism and as a result public trust in the media. In summary, the responses showed an overwhelming belief that public trust in the media is at the heart of journalism that can perform its normative role in Nigeria. However, the crowded citizen journalism space and the relatively lower quality of journalism produced by majority of practitioners means many within and outside the media industry still consider the print media as more dependable. In addition, there is a consensus of opinion on appropriating the more useful features of citizen journalism into media practice in Nigeria as this would enhance more public access and participation. Responses from the qualitative interview conducted indicate three ways that doing this will eliminate the features of citizen journalism that are more open to abuse and therefore ultimately strengthen the media.

First, the there is an overwhelming support among interviewees that the more participatory nature of the citizen journalism platforms is one of the reasons their influence in the country has grown withing a relatively short time. Accordingly, to remain relevant the print media must embrace some of the distinguishing features of new media platforms by investing more in new technology that transforms their online presence and makes it more robust. As the findings suggest, the digital-born newspapers have grown their overall online community faster than the print media, hence the print media must also invest in conscious management of their digital spaces. One of the ways to do this is investing in training for journalists to tell compelling stories with multimedia tools including video and infographics.

Second, all the interviewees agreed that the media ought to be a watchdog but that there are constraints inhibiting journalists from performing that role effectively. One of the bright spots of the last few years has been the more aggressive approach of digital-born newspapers which are reviving the tradition of investigative journalism in the country. There is an agreement among all the interviewees and respondents that the media must return to that tradition which enables it to hold people to account irrespective of their clout in business or politics as this is

the one of the ways to win back public trust. To do this, the media would have to overcome issues like how to fund investigative stories at a time when many of the organisations are struggling financially; as well as the lack of capacity within most newsrooms for investigative reporting. In addition, the media would have to overcome the impact that the divisive politics of the fourth republic is having on the media and the tendency for media organisations to align with public officials and institutions considered as friends of the media. Despite the odds, there is an acknowledgement that the technological advancement such as fact-checking tools and data analysis has strengthened the journalist's ability for investigative reporting.

Third, there is a consensus that misinformation and disinformation are serious threats to media practice because it erodes public trust in the media, hence the overwhelming support for some regulation of citizen journalism. However, the government's proposed regulations to do this is still regarded as an attempt to control the media and curtail free speech, especially because of the belief that existing laws had provisions that could deal with the excesses of citizen journalists. Nearly half (41 percent) of all the interviewees, for instance, strongly believe that existing laws were adequate to regulate the new media segment of the media. To address the excesses without new regulation, two ideas were proposed: (i) a third (33 per cent) of all interviewees believe that working with the big new media platform owners like Google and Facebook will help in the fight against misinformation and disinformation because it will close the space for the distribution of fake news (ii) a third ( 33 per cent) recommend the training of citizen journalists to reduce the spread of misinformation and disinformation but such capacity building should be conducted in ways that does not make it the qualification needed to practice in the new media space.

**Access and Participation in the media**

The findings from this study reveal a general acknowledgement of the impact of new media and citizen journalists on political communication. The change comes from the improved access into the communicative space by more ordinary Nigerians, who have embraced new media in order to have their say. Unlike the traditional, print media, where access is more controlled by the editors and media managers, ordinary people can have instant access into the media space once they have the right tools. The fact that the new tools instantly transform users into publishers, enhances their capacity for empowerment, information and education. The improved access should be qualified because, as Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) argue, it is best when it allows participants to have a say in the news production process.

Regardless, ordinary people are now involved in pushing alternative narratives, something that hitherto was the exclusive preserve of traditional media. Additionally, findings show that access and participation in the media space are relatively easier because the new, digital-born newspapers have a less-limiting funding model. Also, more people can participate in political communication because the elite domination that makes print newspapers inaccessible is more difficult to maintain in new media.

However, the overwhelming view is that other factors are still limiting the participation of certain classes of people because most newspapers will privilege those with social capital over ordinary people. For instance, all senior journalists interviewed said that advertisers often used it as a tool to influence the media and that it is a threat, against which there are no quick fixes. This is in sync with the argument by McNair (2011), Stiglitz (2017) and Atal (2017) that factors such as economic incentives like advertising, censorship, ownership and cultural beliefs can all corrode the media's independence.

One of the major issues assailing the media is advertising funding model that opens it up to compromises. The research conclusively found that critical newspapers were less likely to attract advertising patronage from governments and businesses who require preferential editorial treatments in exchange. The practice of withholding advertising patronage from critical media is seen as subtle forms of controlling the media thereby turning it into a lapdog rather than a watchdog. As most newspapers are built on the advertising revenue model, the practice hampers their operation, hence the obvious lack of interest in investigative reporting. One way out of this is to develop other revenue streams and management capacity, which is proving difficult for most Nigerian media organisations.

Some of the media organisations are conscious of the corrosive influence of advertising on editorial independence and are, therefore, finding creative ways to limit its impact. Led by the digital-born newspapers, Nigerian media organisations are embracing donor funding, which in a way enhances their editorial independence. However, while accepting donor funding may immune them from the kind of editorial compromises that the advertising revenue model entails, the models is fraught with its own shortcomings. Most obvious of those shortcomings, the findings show, is the tendency for foreign donors allocate funds to causes that fit into their own agenda or that of their countries of origin. Half of all the interviewees agree that donors

would only push their own agenda and that this in itself threatens Nigeria's sovereignty, while a third strongly believe that donor recipients may be freeing themselves from advertising control (from advertisers in Nigeria) but embracing another form of control (from foreign donors) that if far more insidious.

As most of the interviewees acknowledge the contributions that donor funding is making to media development, the challenge is in using the model without compromising the Nigerian media to the point where it is unable to carry out its normative role. For instance, more people (58 per cent) believe donor funding has enhances training and quality of journalism in the country, providing the much-needed funds for investigative reporting. However, while they acknowledge that this could ultimately help to enhance democratic practices in the country, this comes with ethical issues that must be carefully negotiated for the media to retain public trust. The most obvious ethical issue is related to the risk of recipient media organisations breaking their social contract with the people in the ways that Scott, Bunce and Wright (2019), Gadzekpo and Paterson (2019) highlighted. The challenge then is for recipient media organisations to continue aggressive investigating reporting that holds the government and its officials to account; and balance their commitment to supporting causes dictated by donors with the reporting of issues that do with the needs of their Nigerian readers.

From the findings, it seems that how the digital-born newspapers are able to balance this need to satisfy foreign donors and their Nigerian readers will determine whether they fulfil their potential as alternative channels for political communication. Opinion is divided on whether they represent viable alternatives with a third of all interviewees (33 per cent) unsure about whether they are viable alternatives as against the 41 per cent (or five of twelve) who believe the digital-born newspapers can be viable alternatives. However, as Benson (2003) argues, the real question is how alternative are the alternatives? Do the digital-born newspapers offer substantially more to Nigerian media users that the print media? From the findings, this would seem far from settled as the shortcomings associated with citizen journalism and which is already highlighted limit their overall impact and limit their potential to upstage the print media.

Among other reasons cited to support the claim that new media platforms are realistic alternatives to traditional media are the speed with which they deliver news, the control they place in the hands of news users, as well as the fact that it enhances the media's ability for

investigative stories. Three (25%) believe that the digital-born newspapers are not viable as alternative channels and that traditional, print media still retain the edge as the most influential. One of the reasons cited is the traditional media's more guarded approach to news reporting. However, the same factors undermine their claim of being viable alternatives.

New media's impact has been both positive and negative, according to the findings. Among the positive impacts of the digital disruption, there is general agreement that new media practitioners are more creative in their use of technology, their lean operations, and their aggression in holding the government to account. As noted, the new media ecosystem holds advantages over that of the traditional media but is open to abuse chiefly because of its relatively lover entry barrier and the tendency to rush to publish without verification. Opinion is divided as to what this represents to the Nigerian media though, with half of all those interviewed believing that the relatively lower entry barrier obviously enhances wider participation, ultimately widens the communicative space, and improves the quality of Nigerian journalism. The other half, however, believes that the easy entry and exit is damaging and many of them are of the opinion that this has the potential to diminish the influence that journalism on Nigerian democracy as well as affect its ability to perform its normative role.

The findings showed that the industry fully understands the potential damage easy entry and exit is causing to the media. The industry also appears to fully understand how this relatively lower entry barrier connects to the growing problem of misinformation and disinformation. There is a general agreement that misinformation and disinformation is damaging but some divergence on how exactly new media ecosystem is fostering fake news. The findings showed a general understanding that the new media ecosystem is (i) fuelling the penchant to ignore verification and instead rush to publish (ii) allowing non-professionals to come into the new media and become influential (iii) encouraging some practitioners to exploit the affordances of new media to commodify fake news (iv) empowering ordinary Nigerians to join the conversation and have their say (v) allowing propagandists on both sides of the Nigerian political divide to exploit the affordances of new media to further their agenda.

The findings showed also that the while the affordances of new media have widened the communicative space by allowing more ordinary Nigerians to join the political debate, this has so far failed to register in terms of improved participation in the political process. The interviewees agreed that the country continues to experience voter apathy as it happened in

2015 and 2019 with the improved communicative space so far failing to bring people out to vote. In addition, they believe that the pace of electoral reform lags behind the changes that have taken place in the communicative environment, hence the low voter turnout during the elections. One possible reason why there has been no impact on the political process is because elite voices are still dominating communication even in the new media environment.

In analysing the media and how they facilitate access and the public's participation in the media, I have taken note of McNair's (2000, p.1) assessment of the role of the media in a democracy. His argument that "any study of democracy in contemporary conditions is therefore also a study of how the media report and interpret political events and issues; of how they facilitate the efforts of politicians to persuade their electorates of the correctness of policies and programmes; of how they themselves (i.e., editorial staff, management and proprietors) influence the political process and shape public opinion," suggests that a careful and more critical evaluation is required when issues of access and participation are discussed. One of the most cited advantages of new media is its more participatory nature, which allows more people to access the media space and be involved in political discourse. Going by the data from the online survey of media users, this is a widely-held, but questionable view.

As shown in the presentation of data, the perception is inconsistent with the findings from the content analysis of the stories that showed all six newspapers mostly referenced the same voices. With access and limitation limited to sharing and commenting on news stories published on their platforms, it would be too flattering to suggest that the new, digital-born newspapers are significantly different from their print counterparts and or their online editions. This position is supported by two strong arguments.

First, Dean (2008, p.109) alludes to the tendency for people who have access to platforms that allow them to contribute to believe that they are involved in some communicative action. "Contributing to the infostream, we might say, has a subjective registration effect. One believes that it matters, that it contributes, that it means something…precisely because of this registration effect, people believe that their contribution to circulating content is a kind of communicative action" (Dean, 2008, p.109). Dean (2008, p.109) goes on to suggest that the "frantic contributing and content circulation, may well involve a profound passivity, one that is interconnected, linked, but passive nonetheless" and that it amounts to "circulation of contributions that fail to coalesce into actual debates, which fail as messages in need of

response". So, whereas people agreed that they have access and engage more on the platforms belonging to the new, digital-born newspapers, it would appear that, according to Dean's (2008) argument, their participation might be contributing nothing of value in shaping discourse in any meaningful sense.

Second, Peacock, Scacco and Stroud (2017), in their study titled 'The deliberative influence of comment section structure' found that, the way comment sections are designed and the arrangement of the information before it could potentially encourage more user participation and thereby enhance the section's claim to being more deliberative. In other words, as Reich (2011, p.96) asserts, the comments section still leaves the power to shape the discourse in the hands of the professional journalists. Of the comments section, Reich (2011) states, 'they appear at the tail end of the news production process, at the interpretation stage after most if not all of the journalistic decisions have been made and tasks performed' (see p.96). His suggestion that the comment threads on online news platforms were more inclusive than the older participation formats of channels like print media may be overstated. For instance, similar to the way that letters to the editor were selected based on the judgment of the gatekeeper, all six online platforms reviewed during this study still required registration before participation. Five of them, The Punch, The Guardian, Nigerian Tribune, Sahara Reporters and Premium Times, require their readers to either register through Disqus, a third-party application that facilitates online commenting, or login through their existing Facebook, Twitter or Google accounts. The Cable requires the reader to provide at least a Nickname and a valid email address, subject to confirmation by CAPCHA[41], to be able to comment. Sahara Reporters allows its readers to comment as a guest but only if they also provide a Name and email address.

Anonymous commenting is viewed with suspicion mostly because it allows people to hide behind it to propagate questionable positions (Wolf, 2016; Shanahan, 2016), and they raise ethical issues (Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011). However, as Mollen (2018) shows in her study 'Digital Spaces in Civic Communication', platform owners ultimately exercise control over how people comment and what they can do. She distinguished between three forms of control, restrictions, options and guidelines, all of which potentially, and to varying degrees, limit what people can do.

[41] CAPTCHA, or a challenge and response test, is a computing plugin that allows online platforms to determine whether the user is human.

**Recommendations**

1. **Future Research**: This study has extensively examined the phenomenon of citizen journalism and how it is being practiced on platforms like Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and The Cable. The idea was to determine how and why they have grown in influence in the fourth republic; and the nature and significance of the shift that their emergence on the Nigerian political process. This study found that the new platforms have attracted substantial followership through: (i) their more participatory approach to journalism; (ii) more creative use of new technology; and (iii) more critical and investigative reporting. However, the study found that, like The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune, these new platforms also privilege elite voices over the voices of ordinary Nigerians. The study also found that in spite of their relatively more participatory approach, the new platforms offer their readers the same kind of controlled space within which comments are allowed. Taken together, these two findings suggest the new platforms have a lot more in common with the online editions of The Guardian, The Punch and Nigerian Tribune, leaving investigative reporting as the most likely point of difference. However, as Onyenankeya and Salawu (2020) suggested in their study of investigative reporting, that output has dropped in recent years. More studies may be needed to determine why. Such a study, which examines the connections between advertising and editorial influence, could provide insights into whether the new platforms are also succumbing to pressure from advertisers.

2. **Redesign of online presence:** One of the more obvious contributions of new media to journalism is making it easier for people to participate in discourse. However, and as this study has demonstrated, participation by ordinary people on platforms belonging to the digital-born newspapers and the online editions of print newspapers are regulated in similar ways and, therefore, offer nothing noticeably more democratic. The central aim of this study is to suggest ways to build in the features of citizen journalism, which everyone believes enhances the quality of deliberative democracies into media practice in Nigeria. Going by Outing's (2015) analysis of the '11 Layers of Citizen Journalism', there are many creative ways to ingrain more participatory practices into journalism in Nigeria, ways that truly involve ordinary people in the process of news reporting. Of

the eleven layers listed and what they require, the following three will enhance journalism practice in Nigeria:

a. Open-source reporting – It signifies collaboration between a professional journalist and his/her readers on a story. The news platform taps into the knowledge base of its readers by allowing them to contribute actual reporting
b. The stand-alone citizen-journalism site: Edited version - This involves setting up a stand-alone citizen-journalism website that relies on news reporting from ordinary people.
c. The hybrid: Pro + citizen journalism - this allows news sites to create a platform combining citizen journalism with the work of professionals like OhmyNews.com

News production, according to Hemida (2011, p.18), involves five stages including: (i) access/observation; (ii) selection/filtering; (iii) processing/editing; (iv) distribution; and (v) interpretation. The selection/filtering stage, he notes, was the most protected by professional journalism and platform owners. “The selection/filtering stage was by far the most closed of the five news-production processes to users at the time of our study, and we believe that has continued to be the case since. The notion of enabling readers to decide what is news was generally taboo for the journalists we interviewed,” he said (Hermida, 2011b, p.21). The opportunity, therefore, exists for Nigerian newspapers that genuinely desire to serve the public good to adopt more participatory practices like the one suggested by Hermida (2011b). They can do this by integrating ordinary Nigerians into the process of journalism and by exploring new layers of citizen journalism as suggested.

3. **More ordinary voices in news:** One possible explanation for the similarity in the voiced noticed in the content analysis of general stories published by all six newspapers is the tendency for so-called alternative platforms like the digital-born newspapers to embrace the corporate models of their more traditional counterparts (Couldry, 2015). Couldry argues that media platforms which claim to provide alternative communicative spaces are responding to commercial pressure by “promoting mainstream conventions, thereby limiting open-access participation and embracing commercial models of communication” (Couldry, 2015, p.73). This suggests that there is a need for consciously promoting ordinary voices. Such an effort, or what Chouliaraki (2010) calls

ordinary witnessing, will most likely help to redress the privileging of elite sources, as this study found in the content analysis. It will also allow more ordinary voices into the entire process of formation of opinion and agenda setting over which the media and elite hold absolute control.

4. Assessments like those of Ogbondah (2018), and Akpojivi (2018) have called attention to the vastly improved constitutional guarantees for the role of the media. However, they equally note the contradictions inherent in the application of the numerous laws that regulate media practice in Nigeria. The fundamental provisions for the role of the media are found in Sections 39 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, which states that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference" (1999 Constitution). In addition, Section 22 of the same Constitution spells out the media's role as watchdog by stressing that, "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people" (1999 Constitution).

   These provisions unequivocally guarantee the media and the practice of journalism in Nigeria, while in the same breath erect restrictions on the freedom allowed for the gathering and dissemination of information. For instance, Sub-section 3 (a) and (b) effectively nullify the Freedom of Information Act (2011), the one piece of legislation that was expected to enhance the media's ability to hold the government and its officials to account. The FOI is clear in its intention, that access to information should be unfettered.

   Regardless of the confusing legislative environment, and what it means for journalism, there are deep-seated problems within the industry which have more direct bearing on the ability of the media to discharge its normative role. The digital disruption is undoubtedly one of them, but, as this study has found, new media offers many tools and advantages. These include against those that can be deployed and move to regulate new media through the Social Media Bill and the Hate Speech Bill which nullify some of the provisions for the free speech. In order to guarantee the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution for free speech, the suggestions for strict enforcement of the existing laws

and the Cybercrime Act are likely to be far more effective. In addition, all the new associations for online media practitioners should be upgraded to operate at the same level with the Nigerian Union of Journalists in a co-regulatory framework. This has the potential to address some of the issues of ethical and unprofessional issues associated with journalism practice in the new media era and, ultimately, remove the strongest arguments for stricter official regulation.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

**INTERVIEWEES**

| S/N | NAME | POSITION HELD | NEWSPAPER |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Debo Adesina | Editor-In-Chief | The Guardian |
| 2. | Nike Sotade | Editor, Saturday | The Guardian |
| 3. | Alabi Williams | Editor, Sunday | The Guardian |
| 4. | Joseph Adeyeye | Executive Director, Digital Operations & Publications | The Punch |
| 5. | Demola Oni | Editor | The Punch |
| 6. | Sola Ayo-Adenrele | Project Lead, Punch Vertical | The Punch |
| 7. | Edward Dickson | Editor-In-Chief | Nigerian Tribune |
| 8. | Lasisi Olagunju | Editor, Saturday | Nigerian Tribune |
| 9. | Shina Oladeinde | Editor, Sunday | Nigerian Tribune |
| 10. | Omoyele Sowore | Publisher | Sahara Reporters |
| 11. | Dapo Olorunyomi | Publisher | Premium Times |
| 12. | Simon Kolawole | Publisher | The Cable |

## APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EDITORS & PUBLISHERS

1. What is your assessment of journalism practice in the convergent media environment?
2. What in your view are effect(s) of new media on the media business in Nigeria?
3. Do you think new media is a realistic alternative to traditional media as channels of political communication in Nigeria?
4. How is this ecosystem of new media different from that of the traditional media?
5. Does this ecosystem encourage more participation by ordinary Nigerians in the political discourse? If yes, in what ways? If no, why?
6. Does this ecosystem encourage more participation in the political process? If yes, how? If no, why?
7. What do you consider to be the effect of these on the quality of democracy?
8. How serious is the impact of disinformation and misinformation on journalism in Nigeria?
9. What in your view is responsible for the growing incidence of disinformation and misinformation?
10. What measures can best be adopted to counteract the spread of disinformation and misinformation?
11. What is the best approach to lock in the benefits of participatory journalism?
12. What is there in the ecosystem of new media that can be adopted by traditional media?
13. What are the implications of the easy entry and exit in the new media environment for the political process in Nigeria?
14. What is the outlook for watchdog journalism in Nigeria in the post-truth era?
15. As watchdogs, the media ideally aims to hold the elite accountable; does doing this in the post truth era make activists of some practitioners?
16. When does a journalist move from being a journalist to becoming an activists?
17. Advertising revenue is key to the media business, but one of the major manifestations of media capture (Joseph Stiglitz) is financial incentives; is this a real threat to the Nigerian political process?
18. Some new media platforms are benefiting from donor funding, does this enhance the quality of journalism or impair it?
19. Knowing that each foreign donor has ideologies it wants to push, what is the implication of a media funded with foreign donations to the Nigerian political process?

# APPENDIX C

# ETHICS CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**
R14/49 Olaniyan

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H19/05/25** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | From Iwe Irohin to Saharareporters.com: Hardcoding citizen journalism in Nigeria |
| **INVESTIGATOR(S)** | Mr A Olaniyan |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT** | SLLM/ |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 24 May 2019 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 19 June 2022 |
| **DATE** 20 June 2019 | **CHAIRPERSON** pp (Professor J Knight) |

cc: Supervisor : Dr U Akpojivi

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ Signature

_____/_____/_____ Date

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

## APPENDIX D

## PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET (EDITORS)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Dear Sir/Madam,

### PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Akintola Olaniyan, and I am a PhD student in Media Studies Department at Wits University in Johannesburg, South Africa. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating new media and its impact on the political process in Nigeria. The title of my research is, 'From Iwe Irohin To SaharaReporters.com: Hardcoding Citizen Journalism In Nigeria'. The aim of this research is to interrogate how and why new media is becoming increasingly as the channel of choice for political communication; what is responsible for the noticeable shift from traditional media; how this is impacting political process, as well as the nature and significance of this shift.

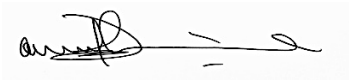
As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve answering questions during a face-to-face interview and will take around 40-60 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital tape recorder.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential, and I will only use your name in my final research report with your permission. The information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. If you experience any distress or discomfort, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you experience any distress or discomfort, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you upon request.

For any queries, concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical), telephone + 27(0)11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely





Mr. Akintola Olaniyan
(Supervisor)
+27632274242
1724603@students.wits.ac.za

Dr. Ufuoma Akpojivi
+27117174145
Ufuoma.Akpojivi@wits.ac.za

## APPENDIX E

## PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET (ONLINE)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Dear Sir/Madam,

### ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Akintola Olaniyan, and I am a PhD student in Media Studies Department at Wits University in Johannesburg, South Africa. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating new media and its impact on the political process in Nigeria. The title of my research is, 'From Iwe Irohin To SaharaReporters.com: Hardcoding Citizen Journalism In Nigeria'. The aim of this research is to interrogate how and why new media is becoming increasingly influential as the channel of choice for political communication; what is responsible for the noticeable shift from traditional media; how this is impacting political process, as well as the nature and significance of this shift.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an online questionnaire, designed to understand media use and preferences in Nigeria. This should take no more than 30 minutes. Clicking **submit** at the end of the questionnaire would be considered consent to participate in the survey.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The questionnaire will be completely confidential and the information you give to me will not be shared with anyone.

If you have any questions afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you upon request.

For any queries, concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical), telephone + 27(0)11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. Akintola Olaniyan

Dr. Ufuoma Akpojivi
(Supervisor)

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## APPENDIX F

## PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM




### CONSENT FORM

**Research Title**: 'From Iwe Irohin To SaharaReporters.com: Hardcoding Citizen Journalism In Nigeria'
**Researcher:** Akintola Olaniyan

I hereby confirm that I have been informed by **Akintola Olaniyan** about the nature, conduct and benefits of his postgraduate study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Information Leaflet and Informed Consent) regarding the study.

I Click or tap here to enter text…….. agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I agree that my participation will remain anonymous | YES☐ NO☐ | (**Please circle**) |
| I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his research report | YES☐ NO☐ | |
| I agree that the interview may be audio recorded | YES☐ NO☐ | |
| I agree that the researcher may take photos of me (but not my face) | YES☐ NO☐ | |
| I agree that my name will be used in the final report | YES☐ NO☐ | |

(signature) Click or tap here to enter text.……

(name of participant)Click or tap here to enter text. ……

(date) Click or tap here to enter text.……

## APPENDIX G

## ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you own a (i) Television (ii) Radio (iii) Smartphone (iv) Tablet (v) Other mobile device?
2. Have you used Newspapers, Radio, Television, New Media in the last one month to get (i) Political news (ii) Business News (iii) Sports News (iv) Entertainment (v) Others
3. Where do you often news from (i) Newspaper (ii) Radio (iii) Television (iv) new media?
4. How often do you buy newspapers? (i) Everyday (ii) One a week (iii) Ever month (iv) Once in a while
5. List your sources of political news in order of preference (i-iv)

(i) Newspapers (ii) Radio (iii) Television (iv) New Media

6. How much time do you spend on online everyday?

(i) Less than I hour (ii) Between 1-3 hours (iii) 3- 5 hours (iv) more than 5 hours

7. How often do you share news from online news sources?

(i) All the time (ii) Often (iii) Few times (iv) Occasionally (v) Never

8. How often do you comment on a news time published in new media?

(i) All the time (ii) Often (iii) Few times (iv) Occasionally (v) Never

9. How often do you contribute news stories or photographs to online publications?
10. I believe online news (i) All the time (ii) Often (iii) Few times (iv) Occasionally (v) Never
11. I have had course to disbelieve online news stories (i) All the time (ii) Often (iii) Few times (iv) Occasionally (v) Never
12. I can air my views through online publications (i) All the time (ii) Often (iii) Few times (iv) Few times (v) Never
13. Online publications provide a better check on government and its officials than traditional media (i) All the time (ii) Often (iii) Few times (iv) Few times (v) Never
14. Online publications are more reckless than traditional media in their coverage of government and its officials (i) All the time (ii) Often (iii) Few times (iv) Few times (v) Never
15. Online publications are realistic alternatives to traditional media (i) Strongly Agree (ii) Agree (iii) Not Sure (iv) Disagree (v) Strongly Disagree
16. The Nigerian media is better because of the operations of online publications (i) Strongly Agree (ii) Agree (iii) Not Sure (iv) Disagree (v) Strongly Disagree
17. Traditional media can improve by adopting some of the practices of online publications (i) Strongly Agree (ii) Agree (iii) Not Sure (iv) Disagree (v) Strongly Disagree

18. Online publications are responsible for misinformation and fake news media (i) Strongly Agree (ii) Agree (iii) Not Sure (iv) Disagree (v) Strongly Disagree