

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS TO MEDIA PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONALISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

It was against the background of attempting to demystify and explicate the socio-political constraints that inhibit media practices and professionalism in Nigeria that this conceptual research was undertaken. The paper maintains the position that no society is independent of certain constraining factors imposed upon it by social and political conditions, situations, circumstances or environments. The Authoritarian Media Theory was set as the theoretical base for this paper. The theory explicated the idea that there are certain restraining, constraining or inhibiting factors exerting considerable pressures and forces on the media, media institutions, media industry, and media practitioners, to the extent that they affect and 'colour' media practices, contents, and professionalism. The socio-political constraining forces the authors identified as exerting excessive pressures on media practices and professionalism in Nigeria include the political economy of Nigerian journalism; the murky nature of Nigerian political culture; governance-induced constraints; corruption-induced constraints; financial-induced constraints; social insecurity; outdated communication education curricula; ethnicity & ethnocentrism; gender-related constraints; heterogeneous population; urbanisation and press regulation. These socio-political constraints, in the estimation of the authors, limit media practices and professionalism as a result of the level of media interaction, interdependence, reliance, and exchange with social and political structures within the society they operate. It is maintained in the paper that as the media-society interaction, interdependence, reliance, and exchange continue unabated and become even mutually entrenched, media activities, practices, operations, and functions also become inversely influenced by the socio-political factors inherent in society which makes a constant attempt to condition media practices in line with their whims and caprices.

Keywords: Socio-political, Constraints, Media practices, Nigeria, Professionalism

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1. INTRODUCTION

No society is free from complications, complexities, forces, dynamics or matrices imposed upon it by social and political conditions, situations, circumstances or environments. Hence, the social and political milieu, contexts, environments, or ambience of a society influences to a large extent, the functioning of

composite structures and institutions tenable in a society.

The media, being critical social structures and institutions, whose existence and survival depend on the level of interaction they maintain with other social institutions, cannot operate or function in isolation of

some socio-political complications, complexities, forces, dynamics or matrices besetting society per time. These socio-political complications, complexities, forces, dynamics or matrices are considered socio-political constraints. They are called 'constraints' because of the kinds of pressures, influences or impacts they exert on the media as social institutions and as the embodiment of processes which include journalistic practices, media operations, and media professionalism. The socio-political constraints also affect, guide, and shape the activities, perceptions, and worldviews of media people called journalists, professionals or practitioners in terms of how they go about their duties within the confines of society.

It is worth noting that the term 'constraints' is considered in a negative sense considering the negative influences or impacts they exert on the media. The negative connotation of the term is not in doubt when one is in consideration of the extent to which their negative pressures, influence or impacts affect, hamper, hinder or obstruct effective and efficient media practice and professionalism.

That media practices and professionalism are constrained is consequent upon the perceived level of interaction, exchange, and interdependence that exist between the media and socio-political structures and institutions. As the interaction, exchange, and interdependence continue unabated and become even more deeply entrenched and more pervasive, media activities, practices, operations, functioning, and existence are inversely affected, massaged, impacted, and conditioned in line with the social and political realities of the society. Hence, the socio-political constraints rub off on media processes and professionalism by defining how the media should or must organise their functions and conduct their practices.

As the media cannot overgrow society's influences and complexities in terms of their practices and operations, they are bound to become vulnerable and susceptible to the overwhelming pressures and influences exerted on them by some constraining factors within the social and

political realms. Though the nature and influences of socio-political constraints on the media vary from society to society, their contributions to media practices and professionalism can only be attributed with connotations characteristic of 'inhibitors', 'stumbling blocks', 'obstacles', 'hindrances', 'limitations', and 'insulators' to what media practices and professionalism ought to be in an ideal sense and situation.

But a realist's conjecturing of media practices and professionalism in a typical social and political setting presents recurring imageries of the media being caught in the web of a social and political quagmire. The resultant effect is that the media (including their practices and professionalism) are shaped, twisted, insulated, defined, coloured, decorated, and panel-beaten by the constraints and limitations placed upon them in the social and political realms. The imaginative picture of the media one may see is not media ideally thought to be free and independent but the media that are overwhelmed, choked, and depressed by socio-political dynamics or forces. It is in this context that Oso (2013) sees the recent development in the Nigerian mediascape as undermining the credibility of the liberal media perspective.

The socio-political dynamics or forces palpable in the society constrain the media in four major ways. First, they decide what parameters the media institutions should meet before they are set up. In this light, they enforce the legal, social, technical, political, environmental, and resource-based constraints on the establishment, ownership, operation, and proliferation of media institutions.

Secondly, they exert undue pressure on how the media institution should organise themselves in terms of carrying out their journalistic responsibilities to the society (whose trust and mandates they are bestowed given their watchdog assignments). In this instance, rules, regulations, codes of professional practice and etiquette for standard ethical behaviour as well as policy framework are put up to regiment the media from their practices, and practitioners to professionalism.

The third way the socio-political constraints influence the media is in the area of quality control and sanctioning when the media fall out of line. Hence, the socio-political constraining forces, in themselves, serve as regulatory instruments for enforcing discipline when the media err on the side of practice or fall short of the expectation in their professional standard.

The fourth and last way socio-political constraints influence media practices and professionalism is in the process of media production. These forces dictate how the raw materials for media productions should be sourced, secured, processed, produced, packaged, and distributed as well as to whom they should be targeted (given the explicit/implicit nature of the contents). In this case, socio-political constraints dictate, overtly and subliminally, the kinds of content the media should inject into society. Thus, the media are constrained in practising independently of the social and political forces that tend to guide, control, direct, and in extreme cases, discipline or sanction their operations, practices and professionalism.

In all these, the socio-political constraints are there to provide checks on the perceived excesses and power of the media. It is in providing these checks on media practices and professionalism that Senam and Udoakah (2018) refer to as watching the watchdog.

That the media cannot operate freely and in isolation of some socio-political forces or dynamics which serve as constraints to media practices is true. As far as society exists, socio-political forces or dynamics co-exist with society. As the media are critical components, structures, and institutions within a society, the interaction of forces or dynamics in the political and social spheres of the society is going to have considerable impact, influence or pressure on the media and on how the media operate, function, and manage their affairs. This is to say that there is no media practice or operation, irrespective of society, without constraining forces in the social and political spheres.

However, it is in view of attempting a critical discourse on the pressures, influences, and impacts that social and

political forces exert on media practices and professionalism in Nigeria that the burden of this paper is anchored. The paper, in all intents and purposes, attempts to demystify the constraints that social and political forces or dynamics imposed on the media to the extent that they tend to influence their practices and professionalism within the Nigerian mediascape.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The idea that there is certain restraining, constraining or inhibiting factors exerting considerable pressures and forces on the media, media institutions, media industry, and media practitioners, to the extent that they affect and colour practice, content and professionalism, is deeply rooted in the ideology or philosophy of the Authoritarian Media Theory. In an authoritarian media system, the media are bound to be stampeded by vast arrays of factors orchestrated by the state as made evident in the social and political realms. These factors act as constraints to effective or efficient media practices and professionalism. This forms a sort of social or political control and serves as a template for guiding the practices or activities of media practitioners.

In buttressing this viewpoint, Udoakah (1990, p. 289) notes that:

Media control in the authoritarian system takes several forms, namely, legislation, taxation, economic sanctions, and enforceable code of practice ... where legislations do not outlaw the existence of private media, they provide conditions which scare those who would have contemplated one... Some of these repressive laws were exported to Nigeria ... where outright censorship is not employed, administrative and political controls are ready options... Politically, sources disloyal to the system are arrested and detained...

However, the mere fact that certain social and political constraints stand in the way of free, objective, dispassionate, and efficient media operation, practice, and professionalism justify the suitability of

Authoritarian Media Theory as the theoretical underpinning for this paper. As Nigeria's political culture, anti-media political system, gender bias, anti-media laws, media owners, etc. influence media practices and professionalism in Nigeria, the Authoritarian theoretical input provides deeper explications, footholds and expositions on how the media practitioners and their profession are restricted or constrained within such repressive media system.

Media Practices and Professionalism in Nigeria

The landscape of Nigerian media practices and professionalism is dotted with traces of politics. From the advent of Nigerian media practices and professionalism in the pre-colonial era to their subsequent proliferation in independence and post-independence Nigeria, politics has always defined the objectives of setting up media institutions. Hence, media practices and professionalism were necessitated by political expediency. This is why Udoakah (2017) argues that media practices in Nigeria and what is considered media professionalism are fraught with political economy.

The current state of media practices and professionalism in Nigeria have not changed from their inglorious early days but have also metamorphosed into an econo-centric and politically-oriented adventure where money and power dictate practice and professionalism. This is to say that Nigerian media practices and professionalism are necessitated or influenced by economic and political considerations. This is to say that the economic and political environments besetting media institutions in Nigeria exert considerable influences on the nature or quality of media operations, practices or professionalism. In this view,

Udoakah (2017, p. 54) avers that:

The journalists in league with their employers have made journalism a form of theatre played out for the benefit of the highest bidders... Many of them are not committed to the profession and are living on the politicians. The result is that they do

what they can to protect their benefactors and raise issues about those they cannot benefit from.

In addition to the political and economic colouration of media practices and journalism are other socially-inhibiting factors such as culture, ethnocentrism, cultural bias, social variations, audience segmentation, politics, political culture, political affiliation, sentiments, social stratification, partisanship, society's changing nature and audience's varying sociological indices. These sociological issues exert enormous influences on the behaviour of journalists and how they gather, treat, respond to, and report social events.

As journalists cannot be free from these social and political entanglements, they, therefore, bring these issues to bear in the way they report and present media content. This means that these social and political issues affect media professionalism and practices. This is to say that journalists bring their social and political worldviews, sentiments, biases, and perceptions into consideration in their line of professional practices (Shahzad & Yousaf, 2019).

Society and Media Practices: Social Expectations of Media Practitioners

The media and society interdepend in a symbiotic and mutually-beneficial manner (Obong, 2019). This is the sole reason it is hard to see the media operate functionally without the enabling triggers or factors from society. The influence and impact the media wield on society corroborate with those the society wields on the media. The influence is mutual; the relationship is symbiotic (Obong, 2019). But the mere fact that all the raw materials, elements and ingredients needed to produce, manufacture, package and distribute media contents are taken from the macro-social environment (society) further underscores the place of society in media operations and practices. It is at this juncture that it is safe to say that there is no media practice that is independent of society. Thus, social structures, elements, and institutions shape media practice to the point of deciding the kinds of media content that should be made available to the society.

The other way in which society and its composite social forces influence media practices is in the consideration of where media people (practitioners, professionals or journalists) emanate from. As media people are the products of society, there is no way they can function or operate beyond the standards, values, and parameters set as an acceptable pattern of behaviour in the society. Hence, media people are foisted with the laid down societal norms, values, mores, traditions, codes, and conditions to mould their professional conducts, practices or activities after. This is to say that what the society considered unacceptable and taboo is likely to be abhorred by the media people while working in line with what is considered socially acceptable. The social norms, values, traditions, and conditions influence media people and how they practice. For the fear of being considered deviants, media people conform to what is considered an acceptable social order, standards, conditions and patterns.

Such conformity influences how they gather, process, and disseminate media content. This idea is validated in view of the fact that any media content that tends to debase or deprave acceptable social standards is likely to be boycotted, rejected or turned down by the audience. The expectation and drive to give society the kind of content it would like to consume, shape the media people's professional practice. This kind of social expectation and drive are conditioned by the dictates of the society.

However, the media and their allied professionals or practitioners (media people) are domiciled in society. They are considered as being part and parcel or kith and kin of the society. Their activities must conform to the tenets of the society. When they fall out of line, their existence and operation are considered discordant and detrimental to the core of the society. To maintain social order or equilibrium, there is an expectation for media practices to be functional to the society and its composite structures and institutions. It is against this backdrop that media practices are influenced and shaped by social conditions inherent in a society over time. Hence, the media and the media people cannot thrive without society and cannot operate or function in isolation from the social forces, complexities and

dynamics palpable in the society.

Politics and the Political Economy of Nigerian Journalism Profession

In Nigeria, it is practically hard to separate politics from journalism practice and professionalism. It seems journalism practice and politics are two faces of a coin: at one end one is seeing the politics of journalism and on the other end, journalism of politics or say 'political journalism'. The trend that seems to influence this development is what is considered the political economy of Nigerian journalism.

Political economy, according to Udoakah (2017, p.16), is “an approach to studying the ways in which media products are produced, distributed and consumed, rather than on analysing the interpretations of the signs and symbols found within text.” This is to say that by Nigerian journalism having traces of political economy, it is expected to see the profession and its professionals being entangled in the course of reporting politics, politicians, power struggles, power structures, devolution of power, and power management within a sociological meta-system called society. The intricacies, complexities, and political forces that tend to annex media practices to entirely political affairs and the colouration of media products that come to the public sphere after the media-politics romance are critical concerns of the political economy of Nigerian journalism. It seeks to answer the question bothering on whether or not the Nigerian journalism profession is a political megaphone of the ruling political elites. It is also concerned with the controversy shrouding the politicisation of journalistic practices and the burden of whether or not the Nigerian journalism profession can be absolved of the blame of partisanship or neutrality in the reportage of politics, political struggle, political power broking, and power relations.

Given the concern that media contents are often produced within specific systems which are ideologically laden, there is no way the media can perform in neutrality, especially when political, economic, social, cultural, legal, technological, and

bureaucratic factors influence their contents and practices (Taffel, 2013; Udoakah, 2017). Hence, the political economy, as McChesney (2008) and Udoakah (2017) noted, creates the nexus between media and communication systems and then provides the bridge to ascertain how economic and political systems work, and how social power is exercised in society. Noting the aforementioned ideas succinctly, it behoves the mind to interrogate whether journalism in Nigeria is a conduit pipe for power relations between the powers that be and the citizen or merely a political propaganda machinery.

Going by the antecedence as deeply reflected in the colonial heritage of Nigerian journalism, it is evident that politics expedited the need for journalism. Nigerian journalism was birthed because of political expediency. In the pre-independence era, journalism was political in intents and purposes which aimed at achieving independence and self-governance at first sight, then evolved into nationalists' political propaganda tool. The many newspapers at the time were set up by politicians who were nationalists in outlook. The same situation is tenable in the post-independence period in Nigeria where the tempo has been sustained.

Politics drives journalism and journalism thrives in politics. That politics engineer's journalism practice in Nigeria is true. The political forces or dynamics has and shall continue to set the compass and arrange the coordinates of Nigerian journalism. So many factors account for this, but the most obvious are the ones that concern the political system, political culture, political orientation, and the level of political development in place. When the political system is free, liberal and open, the media have the freedom and liberty to report at will to feed the society with information but when the system is harsh towards the media, it hampers and stampedes the media practices and political growth. Free views of the media engender social engineering. When the media are critical of the political system or process, social engineering is fast-paced but when the media become lap dogs, megaphones, and propaganda mouthpieces of a political system, social engineering is slowed down, stampeded or hampered.

Udoakah (2017) identified two issues that are sacrosanct to understanding the political economy of journalism practice in Nigeria to include: the relationship between the journalists, their employers, and society and the relationship between journalism practice and the government in power. As journalists can hardly be detached from ownership interests, ideology, and ideals, whether political or economic, it becomes very difficult to detach their professionalism from the propaganda and sentiments of the media owners. In this perspective, it is more evident that the journalists in advancing the interests, propaganda, and ideology of the owners may as well be advancing the political ideology of the ruling political class. In this instance, journalism, has, from the beginning, been closely linked to political parties, commercial interest blocs, and partisanship to the government in power (McChesney, 2008; Udoakah, 2017).

On the nature and characteristics of Nigerian journalistic professionalism and political economy, Udoakah (2017, p. 40) observes that:

Despite the introduction of professionalism into journalism practice, it has still been difficult to divorce it from the political class and the economic interest of the proprietors of the media of mass information. Frequently, these groups mask their political and economic class character and parade as popular fighters for the oppressed or the common man and their welfare. But when the chips are down, it becomes evident that the media have no choice but to serve the long-run interests of the dominant classes, however much they may pretend.

Socio-Political Constraints to Media Practices and Professionalism in Nigeria: A Critical Discourse

That some socio-political forces or dynamics inhibit media practices and professionalism in Nigeria is true. These forces or dynamics act as constraining factors that shape media practices and professionalism. Senam and Edor (2020, p. 85) corroborate this view by saying that "the socio-political and ideological milieus in which the media operate colour their perspectives and to

some extent, dictate the style and language of the media." This makes it seem that it is practically difficult for media institutions and professionals to practice or operate without some constraining factors within the social and political spheres.

The following are some of the socio-political constraints to media practices and professionalism in Nigeria:

i. **The Nature of Nigerian Political Culture:** "A nation's political culture is a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provides the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system" (Senam & Edor, 2020, p. 85). By implication of the foregoing, the political culture in place exerts a considerable constraining force on how the media operate within a political environment. This has a way of limiting media operations, practices, and professionalism to the confines and precincts of operating norms of a polity. To wit, megaphones for political class and instruments for political control.

As the media are hardly detached from politics, political actors, and political processes, the idea of them operating in isolation from the existing political culture is unthinkable. The media are manipulated, exploited, and manoeuvred to conform to the dominant political orientation, creed, ideology, and ideal and are sanctioned when they fall out of line.

The problem is worrisome given the checkered nature of Nigerian political culture which is riddled with smears of pseudo-democracy: democratic tyranny, democratic-authoritarianism, despotic political leadership, and para-political authorities, institutions, ideologies, and structures. Okeke and Chukwuka (2013), referring to the Nigerian political culture as a creation of militarism, aver that the present political culture in the country has failed to reflect the true features of democracy as human rights abuses by political leaders continue unabated and the constitution itself still containing attributes of the military culture.

One can hardly comment on the true nature of Nigeria's political culture and maintains truism. Hence, what is

considered Nigerian political culture is shaky, dynamic, undefinitive, complex, complicated, militaristic, uncertain, and above all, evolving. As the nature of Nigerian political culture is yet to be ascertained with a certain degree of universality, it makes it difficult for media practitioners to know the standard of operation to be adopted across board.

Hence, as regimes and governments keep changing, political culture also changes to reflect the positions, ideologies, and modus operandi of the powers that be. This justifies the position made by Senam and Edor (2020) that the political and ideological milieus in which the media operate colour their perspectives and dictate how they should operate in society. The lack of will to act independently of the political forces constrain how the media operate, function, and practice.

ii. **Governance and Government-Induced Constraints:** The nature, style, and approach of governance and the body language of government in place constrain media practices, operations, and professionalism. The implication is that (good) governance marked by certain degrees of liberalism, pluralism, and libertarianism is likely to encourage the free press system where the media are allowed to operate freely without interference, trepidation, intimidation, and frontiers. Operating in such governance, the media are likely to bloom as their operations proliferate and leverage on the profundity of the free marketplace of ideas, expressions, and sentiments where dissenting and alternative voices are tolerated. This idea of a free press is underscored by the inalienable fact that "press freedom is strongly connected to the freedom of speech" (Ekwunife, Agbo, Ukeje, Agha, and Nwachukwu, 2021, p. 1).

The reverse is the case in Nigeria where governance is stuck between mediocrity and tyranny. Udeze (2012) notes that whether in a military or democratic government, the media (institutions, practices, processes, and practitioners) are still gagged by the political powers that be where judicial and extra-judicial measures are adopted to put the media in check. The press is far from being free in Nigeria as sanctions,

lawsuits, license revocation and denial, fines, physical assaults, assassination, seizing of working equipment, demolition and proscription of media houses, and mysterious disappearance of media persons are still very common within the Nigerian mediascape (Udeze, 2012; Ekwunife, *et al* 2021).

In a draconian and despotic governance, the media are not expected to have a voice, opinion, sentiment, view, position, etc. of their own. Hence, their practices, professionalism, and operations should kowtow to the state and serve as propaganda machinery or risk being sanctioned. In most cases, independent private media organisations are threatened with revocation or withdrawal of operational licences. In this case, lily-livered media institutions, to avoid the troubles of repressive government, often join the bandwagon to sing the praises of the government or remain silent in criticising its pitfalls. This "praise or shut up" kind of media practice hampers or hinders media professionalism in Nigeria. It makes the media blind to socially-conscious and relevant issues while promoting propaganda, advertorials, and trivialities in the name of professionalism.

iii. **Anti-Media Political System:** Closely linked to political culture and government-induced constraints discussed above is the issue of the anti-media political system. All through the checkered history of Nigeria and her attendant leadership and administrations, there has never been any administration or government regime that is 'pro-media' in outlook, intents, and purposes. The cat-and-dog relationship between the media and government in Nigeria is a long-standing issue and is older than Nigeria's independence. Onyedike (1984, p. 91) noted that:

The government-press relations in Nigeria have been turbulent. From the inception of the Nigerian press in 1859, there has been a continuing conflict between it and the successive administrations the country has had. This is evidenced by frequent government punishment of newspapers and journalists that practised the

watchdog role. Journalists have been jailed and in some instances flogged; newspaper offices have been searched and occasionally closed: and harsh laws specifically limiting the abilities of journalists to perform their duties have been passed. All these have been deliberate attempts to control and muzzle the press.

Hence, the media and media practitioners have been served different dosages of anti-media/press laws, policies, regulations, frameworks, and sanctions. Even in democratic dispensations, the media are still grappling with how to be free, independent, and liberated from excessive control of the government, the political elites, government agents, government appointees, etc.

Hence, laws, edicts, decrees, Acts, bills, by-laws, etc. promulgated by successive governments often assume new dimensions when invoked to sanction or curtail the perceived freedom of the media. Where due process will act as a cog in the wheel of extraditing the media, physical assaults are launched on media houses and media practitioners. This situation was the preoccupation of the military regimes. But it is surprising that what is touted by many as 'democratic governments' are also in the exclusive lists of governments that physically, ideologically, and politically stifle, brutalise, and abuse media establishments, media practices, media freedom, and media professionals.

Some politicians, law enforcement agents, paramilitary forces, military men, etc. are still in the habit of beating up media practitioners, seizing/destroying their work tools, destroying their contents, razing their media outfits down, assassinating media practitioners in their line of duty as well as endangering the lives of their families, relatives, or loved ones. These inactions affect media practices and professionalism negatively.

In the face of escaping or avoiding daunting challenges and hazards of this nature, some media practitioners,

sometimes, succumb to pressure by engaging in practices that when considered holistically, fall short of what is expected of them as media professionals. In this light, professionalism is sacrificed on the altar of safety, comfort, and convenience from politically-motivated harassment, maiming, demotivation, and destruction of the lives and properties of media practitioners.

iv. **Corruption-Induced Constraints:** As corruption is endemic in Nigeria, it has also crept into media practices unnoticed and thereby, threatening their so-called “professionalism”. As a result of the festering nature of corruption in Nigeria, Oyebode (2017, p.34) is of the view that “some of the Nigerian press and electronic media practitioners are also guilty of corrupt practices.” This abnormally has created a critical concern on the morality of the media practitioners and their level of perception of corruption palpable in the society they find themselves.

v. As corruption has been considered a norm in Nigeria, the media practitioners, nevertheless bring such worldviews, sentiments, mindsets, and idiosyncrasies into the media organisation. As this continues to happen, sharp practices, fraud, and unprofessional etiquette have become normalised and have presumably beclouded media practitioners' sense of duty and as well, influenced how their moral behaviours are conducted.

Corruption breeds some trends of unprofessional practices such as 'Naira and Kobo' reporting, cocktail journalism, brown envelop syndrome, paid reporting, propaganda, paid defamatory campaigns, unprofessional news commercialisation, editorialising, excessive news commodification, nepotism, bribing to be posted to 'lucrative beats', shortchanging, advanced fee fraud, embezzlement of funds, diversion of operational funds, substandard content production to save money for personal aggrandizement, blackmail, extortion from culprits, threats or appeal for funds in exchange of dropping damning stories, money-induced courtesy visits, fundraising, etc. With these corrupt and fraudulent practices in full glare in some media organisations in Nigeria, one has no option but to accept

the position of Adeyemi (2013, p.119) who posits that:

Regardless of the efforts being made by various stakeholders in the media industry, it was discovered that the media was largely corrupt. Even though over 64% of those sampled believed that acceptance of any form of gratification was unethical, over 75% of the journalists engage in corrupt practices with impunity.

There is no way that media practitioners who are complicit in corrupt practices can be ethically-sound in the discharge of their duties. Though the media practitioners supposedly gain materially in their corruption-induced charade, professionalism cannot be guaranteed.

vi. **Poverty-Induced Constraint:** It may sound so ridiculous to say that Nigerian media practitioners, especially the so-called journalists are poverty-stricken. Most of them cannot boast of take-home pay that can take them home and afford them the conveniences, comforts, and leisures of life as enjoyed by their counterparts in developed economies. This situation is made worse as most media organisations do not pay media practitioners in their employ salaries at all. Presumably, they are to 'chop from the mugus' or 'collect something' after they cover events or conduct interviews.

The poverty-stricken media practitioners, most times do not have transportation fares to and from events they are mandated to cover. So, it is common to see them hang around organisers of events to ask if there is 'anything for the boys?' after their supposed day's job is done. The problem with this is that if their requests are turned down, they also 'turn down' the desire to publish the story. In this case, hunger and the drive to meet life's basic needs decide what should be published and what should not be. In this instance, lack of or low payment of media practitioners can breed varied unethical practices within the profession (Cushion, 2007). This issue of no or low payment of media practitioners has institutionalised a kind of practitioner-beneficial angle:

a situation where a media practitioner devised means of livelihood in the line of his/her professional duty other than from his salary especially through asking for freebies or making demands for monetary offers before stories are published. This development, as it affects objective reportage of issues, also affects media professionalism in Nigeria and as well, gives the profession a very bad name and reputation.

Unemployment-Related Constraint: The unrepentant drive to address the discomforts that come with the state of unemployment has pushed massive people who have no media training but presumably know how to read and write into the journalism profession. This mass exodus into journalism has witnessed so many quacks who are deficient in the professional, legal and ethical knowledge of media practices or journalism touting about as journalists. The wanton entrance of the unqualified and the unprofessionals into journalism practice has made Olajide, Benjamin and Ogundeji (2012) say that the journalism profession, especially in Nigeria, has been hijacked by quacks to the detriment of professionals in the noble profession. The sad reality is that their inactions, unethical and illegal practices, and professional errors are attributed to the entire journalism community. This has created a negative impression in the minds of the public about professional journalism and to a large extent, professional journalists who have cut their teeth in the profession.

Hence, quacks make their way into journalism and media practice just to make ends meet. Their exodus into the profession poses a great threat to the standardisation, reputation, credibility, and perception of journalism as a profession. Here, professionalism is sacrificed on the altar of quackery which is occasioned by unemployment.

vii. **Social Insecurity:** As evidenced in other countries of the world, the biggest threat to media practices and professionalism in Nigeria is social insecurity. Media practitioners in Nigeria are not immune to security threats. From 2016 to 2020, there have been 400 killings of journalists which represents a

20% decrease from the previous five-year period and yet, unabated levels of impunity for these cases correlate with increases in imprisonment and other attacks on journalists and the journalism profession (UNESCO, 2021). According to a report by The International Women's Media Foundation (2016, pp. 6-7):

Journalists regularly endure threats, intimidation, and abuse in the course of their work. This is meant to frighten, harm, and ultimately silence them. Several kinds of threats endanger journalists' safety, including assassinations, physical attacks, material risk, threats and intimidation, digital harassment, and sexual harassment and violence. Frequent perpetrators include government actors or militant groups who dislike what a journalist is reporting.

However, in a country where the lives and properties of the citizens are at the mercy of merciless militants, bandits, terrorists, secessionists, religious fanatics, and political assassins, the media practitioners as well as their media organisations are potential targets. To be on the safe side, most media practitioners have no choice but to avoid social, political, religious, and culturally sensitive issues that may be considered by these dissenting quarters as controversial. Perhaps, in situations where media practices may be misunderstood as heating up the polity, media practitioners should, presumably, guide against publishing some sensitive stories (Dare, Bamidele & Oluwasanmi, 2020).

This affects how social, political, religious, and cultural issues are covered and published/reported. In the long run, the professionalism traits of the media profession are strained to a weakening point.

viii. **Outdated Media, Journalism, and Communication Education Curricula:** There has been a series of arguments, debates, and ferments about the current state of journalism, media or communication

education in Nigeria. The majority of these arguments, debates and ferments stem from the critical observation of the curricula used for training and moulding the would-be media practitioners as being outdated, moribund, and falling short of the 21st-century industry expectations, demands, and skill sets. As industry demands, expectations, and skill sets keep changing and the curricula for training prospective media practitioners remain inundated and moribund, the media professionals, upon entry into the industry, are likely to practice, operate, and profess with outdated ideas, expired mentality, primordial approaches, obsolete techniques, skewed tactics, and moribund knowledge. When this happens, the industry suffers and the profession is neck-deep into a state of quagmire and stagnation.

As the media landscape becomes more dynamic and evasive with the proliferation of new forms of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), big data analytic resources, social listening gadgets, etc. it, therefore, behoves on the media, journalism, and communication schools to update their curricula to address the dynamic changes. This approach is to equip media practitioners with industry-required skills to practice efficiently. But as the challenges of the inadequacy of modern journalism facilities, absence of good journalism institutes, the doctorate syndrome, inadequate curricula, few hands-on opportunities for teaching and learning, poor funding, and negative students' attitude toward research as noted by Ayodele and Olisa (2017) as besetting quality communication education in Nigeria are yet to be addressed, media practice and professionalism are in a state of mediocrity and jeopardy.

There is a wide margin of entry-level mass communication and journalism graduates that are still struggling with how to gather, process, and disseminate media-based content with the latest tools, resources or materials. The majority of practising journalists are not computer-literate and cannot engage in computer-assisted reporting. Some are yet to experiment with big data, artificial intelligence (AI), social listening, ethnography, aerial, space, precision, policy alert,

online, multimedia, health, population, digital, science, and technological reporting or journalism. This is a result of the paucity of these journalistic genres in the curricula of media, journalism, and communication schools in Nigeria. When some of the students graduate and gain entry into the industry with shallow, outdated, and moribund ideas, perceptions, knowledge, and attitude, the profession is greatly constrained by unqualified and unprofessional personnel or manpower supply. Corroborating this idea, Ayodele and Olisa (2017, p. 76) say that despite the popularity and entrenchment of communication education in Nigeria “recent studies have shown that a significant number of graduates in the discipline do not possess the requisite skills for employment.” This has made virtually all the media organisations in Nigeria conduct interviews and requisite on-the-job training to enable these crops of entrants to fit into the specified job roles, descriptions, and specifications.

ix. **Ethnicity and Ethnocentrism:** In Nigeria, there is a plethora of ethnic nationalities, ethnicities, ethnic groups, and ethnic affiliations. The media practitioners are products of these diverse ethnicities. The affiliations they have with their ethnic nationalities influence their worldviews and perceptions and at times, becloud their sense of objectivity when discharging their professional media duties, services or functions. The subjectivity, sentiment, bias, and perspective that define the media practitioners often find their way into the media practitioners' professional media practices.

In the course of official and professional discharge of duty, most journalists suspend ethical and professional codes of practice while adopting ethnocentrism as the bases for their discharge of duty. Supporting this viewpoint Alegu, Maku and Onu (2020, p. 53) argued strongly that “...the media fail to 'de-ethnicise' themselves and be dispassionate in their reports, an act which translates to championing ethnic agenda and promoting disunity among the constituent parts of the country.” In this instance, the media practitioners are poised to adopt their ethnic sentiments, creeds, ideologies, and ideals as the centre of the universe in

their discharge or duties. Any sentiments, ideals, ideologies, and creeds that fall out of the ethnic purview of the media practitioners are discarded, rejected or discouraged. This serves as a constraint to professional media practices and professionalism in Nigeria in that, it discourages objective, fair, balanced, and factual media practice and professionalism in situations in which ethnic prejudices, stereotypes, and biases are encouraged, proliferated, and promoted by media practitioners.

Ethnocentrism, as a constraint to professional media practices, is made worse if those proliferating it are gatekeepers of media processes and owners of media establishments. It often extends beyond bias in content creation or production to include nepotism, tribalism, favouritism, and clannishness in the selection and employment of the 'qualified' media practitioners to the industry or profession. Merit, in this case, is often sacrificed for favouritism, quota system, nepotism, ethnicity, cultural bias, and tribalism. At the end of the day, mediocres, quacks, and unprofessionals are recruited into the profession at the expense of the qualified. One can only imagine the charade of journalism practice and professionalism those crops of people would churn out and how the journalism profession will be fair in their hands.

x. **Gender Bias:** It is not surprising to note that mass communication, journalism, and media schools are often overpopulated by the female gender. The surprising thing is that this population hardly translates into professional practice after graduation. The few that get to practice journalism are often segregated or discriminated against based on gender. The worse is when the segregation and role discrimination are self-inflicted (that is, when the female media practitioners are the ones that reject media roles on the bases of their gender).

The reality is that there are some journalistic beats, genres, and roles considered endangered to female journalists while such is being marked as the exclusive preserves for male journalists. In situations where female journalists manage to practice in the profession, few become editors or hold directing or managerial

positions and even when they do, they rarely have the opportunity to take broad decisions (Nwagbara, 2005).

In many radio stations, disc jockeys are still predominantly males, although there is no proof that men are better informed in the area of music. Males still also dominate at some desks in the media, such as sports, politics, foreign affairs and the military. Women are considered not ideal for such beats (Nwagbara, 2005, p. 61).

Such gender bias affects professional media practice in the sense that experienced, knowledgeable, exposed, creative, dogged, sound, and highly qualified female journalists may be dropped from undertaking sensitive reportorial assignments on the grounds of being considered weaker vessels while male counterparts who do not measure up to the requisite skill sets may be prepped to take up such roles. In the end, there is a drop in the quality and professional standard of the practices embarked on by this crop of media practitioners.

xi. **Evolving and Changing Nature of Nigerian (Heterogeneous) Audience:** The heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian audience overstretchers media professionals or practitioners in terms of coming up with media content that meets the varied needs of the diversified audience. This stresses the media practitioners and their institutions in undertaking needs assessments of the audience whose media needs keep changing over time.

On the changing and evolving nature of the audience, Ayo-Obiremi and Adelabu (2020, p.90) maintain that:

Media audiences over the years have evolved from passive receivers of information to active receivers and participants of media content. This progression has earned them the title 'consumers' who receive content and consume for various reasons-satisfaction,

entertainment, social interaction, education, etc. The evolution from 'audience' to 'consumers' can be attributed to various factors like background, exposure, emerging conglomerates, audience fragmentation, and advancement in technology among other factors. As consumers, the audience dictates what they want to consume, how they want it and on specific platforms depending on their backgrounds, individual differences and pre-existing beliefs and values.

Hence, the media are overwhelmed in terms of huge financial burdens, demanding material resources required as well as manpower/personnel shortages to meet up with the varied research and development, audience analysis, and media production/presentation demands of the population. Dearth and paucity of funds, manpower, and material resources to meet up with these demands serve as a major constraint to media practices and professionalism in terms of content creation and delivery.

xii. **Urbanisation:** The wanton migration and exodus of people from rural to urban areas has created great concern for media practices and professionalism. Urbanisation breeds overpopulation which is associated with poverty and crime and a depreciation in the standard of living (Olaguaju, 2002). With this development comes rising social vices such as high rise in crime rates, soaring unemployment, prostitution, drug peddling, drug abuse, corruption, scarcity in essential commodities, high cost of living, overstretched social infrastructures, overwhelmed social amenities, etc. The media practitioners as constituents of the society are first affected by these social conditions and secondarily, caught in the web of these social inadequacies, which in the long run, affect their practices and level of professionalism.

The media institution are also affected in the face of daunting challenges and difficulties orchestrated by the

devastating effect of urbanisation. They are made to struggle over limited resources with other social institutions that also surge as a result of migration to urban centres. Inflation, high cost of living, and social insecurity that come as a result of urbanisation constrain the media institutions, media practitioners or professionals.

xiii. **Media Ownership and Management-Related Constraint:** The capital-intensive nature of obtaining, securing, and servicing media operational licences and the corresponding huge financial demands required to set up, operate, manage or run media establishments in Nigeria have discouraged true professionals in establishing and managing media outfits. This has swung the door of the media profession open to whoever has the financial prowess to run a media enterprise.

In this instance, true media professionals end up being employees of media owners who have no professional background in media or journalism practice. The implication is that a novice ends up giving orders and directives to professionals. The directives or orders, however despicable, unethical or unprofessional, must be followed, observed or complied with to the letters or the media practitioners face a reprimand which may manifest in many forms ranging from query to layoff. As Apuke (2016, p.12) notes:

...media managers are often faced with the dilemma of balancing the media owner's interest and the public's interest without infringing on the laws of the land or the ethics of the profession. Whether media ownership is private or public, the interest of the owner plays a dominant role in determining what media managers do or fail to do. Hardly can an owner tolerate a manager who operates contrary to his interest.

This becomes a major constraint to media practice and

professionalism as media professionals are confined and restricted to the whims and caprices of their employers rather than to serve the public good. The social responsibility thrust of the profession is superimposed by the media owners' pecuniary interests which are seldom detached from the abusive use of the media as instruments for economic, social, and political exploitation.

xiv. **Laws Regulating the Profession:** The need to regulate media practices and professionalism comes with the idea to curtail their perceived excesses. In this fashion, laws, decrees, edicts, by-laws, and Acts of parliaments are often put in place to address the excesses of a free press. These legal instruments, in themselves, are restraining factors to the vagaries of media practices and professionalism because where they are not targeted at the media industry and professionalism, they are targeted at the activities of media practitioners or professionals. They are often invoked to bring media professionals to their knees thereby slowing, hampering, truncating, stampeding, stifling or inhibiting their mandate to practice freely.

xv.

Conclusion

This paper was preoccupied with the burden of unearthing some constraining factors to media practices and professionalism within the Nigerian sociological and political spheres. The paper has established and maintained a valid position that media practices and professionalism in Nigeria are cushioned by the political economy. Hence, politics, political culture, governance, and the activities of politicians within the sociological milieu called society exert considerable influence on how media practitioners/professionals organise and should organise themselves in the course of their duty. This is established having considered that Nigerian media practice or journalism is hardly detached from the residues of politics.

In attempting to maintain this valid position, the paper maintains the claim that the nature of Nigeria's political culture, anti-media political system, corruption, poverty, unemployment, social insecurity, outdated curricula, ethnicity/ethnocentrism, gender bias, heterogeneous population, urbanisation, media

ownership, and anti-media laws are some of the socio-political constraints exerting pressure on the Nigerian media practices and professionalism.

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