



## **EXPLORING THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*This article seeks to compile an understanding of the role of media in sustaining democracy and national development. The media place the public agenda and act as the caretaker of public issues. The need to belong to a common national life has changed with the inception of modernization and democratization processes. The media is also said to be an aggregation of all communication channels that use techniques of making a lot of direct personal communication between the communicator and the public. The mass media constitute the backbone of democracy. Many multi-cultural and multiethnic countries have adopted democratic values, institutions and processes to hold their societies together. Media are particularly important in facilitating nation-building, especially of post-colonial societies and those experiencing ethnic and religious diversities. The real influence of the media in national development depends on the media themselves, the societies in which they function, and the audience they accomplish.*

**Keywords:** *Media, Democracy and National Development*



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### **1. Introduction:**

The media, with specific reference to the combined entity of newspapers, radio, television and the Internet, play a very vital role in national development. The media place the public agenda and act as the caretaker of public issues. They play a crucial role in the function and change of any society. For the last half-century, television has been the crucial tool for getting the masses. Still today, the majority of the world gets its information from the television. The issue of whether a free press is the best communications solution in a democracy is much too important at the close of this century and needs to be examined dispassionately.

The works of Lerner (1958), Schramm (1964), McClelland (1961), Pye (1963) and Rogers (1969) have molded the early theory and practice of utilizing mass media for national development. These scholars, with their dictum of modernization, believed that mass media are powerful agents of change. Numerous observers have emphasized that a free press is valuable for democracy, for good governance, and for human development. Amartya Sen in his famous argument states that in independent and democratic countries, the free press

encourages government responsiveness to public concerns, by highlighting cases of famine and natural disasters. The news media functions as an agenda-setter, providing information about urgent social problems and thereby channeling citizens' concerns to decision-makers in government. Besley and Burgess (2001) examined the Indian case, and established that regions with higher levels of newspaper circulation proved more active during an emergency in responding to food shortages.

Possibly the vital factor in the functioning of a democratic system is a democratic attitude. This means a belief that all men are equal, and a feeling one might call a sympathetic understanding of people. Such sympathetic understanding of others, their joys and griefs gives rise to an equal recognition of human personalities. The value of "myself" ceases to be essentially different from the value of another's "self". And so a democratic attitude becomes a basis of impartiality. **C. Znamierowski (1888-1967)**. Certain factors are basic when media operate. Every medium of the media has a message; a target audience; aims a change; influences attitudes, perceptions and decision making; and ultimately influences behavior.

## **2. Mass Media**

The word "media" comes from the plural of the Latin word medium, and it is used as a collective noun to refer to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, films, the International Network (Internet), etc. (Busakorn Suriyasarn, 1998). By definition, mass media is any medium used to transmit mass communication i.e. a message created by a person or a group of people sent through a transmitting device to a large audience or market at the same time. Mass media can be called as the function in communication that is apparent through a carrier of signals to multi point destination: such as, language, design, facial expression, print, radio, television, mobile phone, billboards and musical instruments etc. (Berger, 2002). The media is also said to be an aggregation of all communication channels that use techniques of making a lot of direct personal communication between the communicator and the public. In the broadest sense, the media embraces the television and film entertainment industries, a vast collection of regularly published printed material, and even public relations and advertising.

## **3. Media And Democracy**

Democratisation can be best understood as 'a complex, long term, dynamic, and open-ended process it consists of progress towards a more rulebased, more consensual and more participatory type of politics' (Whitehead, 2002: 27).

The mass media constitute the backbone of democracy. Studies which have addressed the relationship between the media and politics in democratization contexts usually have two major concerns: (1) democratisation through the media and (2) democratisation of the media itself (**Hackett and Zhao, 2005; see also Salgado, 2009**). It is the role of the mass media in a democratic setting to keep the citizenry well informed. Unless citizens have adequate and accurate information on all the issues and problems confronting them, they will be unable to take enlightened decisions on them. Without such information, they will be unable to comprehend the day-to-day working of the government and to participate in it. Nor will they be able to hold those in authority responsible for their acts of omission and commission. Ojo, E.O. (2000 ). Many multi-cultural and multiethnic countries have adopted democratic values, institutions and processes to hold their societies together. Khalid, Ahmed, Mufti (2015) describes the role of media as in the political sphere, media's role can be found in areas of democracy and good governance, political transparency, foreign policy, human rights, war on terrorism, and public relations. In the economic sphere, media can play their roles in the areas of economic policy and growth, economic empowerment, advertisements and tourism, business and investment, etc. In the social sphere, media's role cover social issues, such as corruption, criminal violence, communal conflicts, prostitution, war on drugs, population control, education, food security.

The recognized role of the independent media in sustaining democracy is that of providing the public space for a wide range of societal opinions to be expressed, and supplying the population with objective information about government performance. Thus, it can facilitate the holding of the government to account, create constituencies and shape the political agenda. Yet, in practice, Africa, like the West, faces problem of limited ownership, partisan reporting, political connections and the partial representation of public views (Baker, 2000: 25).

“The worldwide web has created the conditions for more advanced or a more effective form of democracy. With the networks in place and interactive technology to hand, people will be able to vote on issues, inform themselves on government policy and interrogate their representatives. The can become the active, effective citizens of the democratic dream” (Street, 2011). The reality, however, is that the media in democracy do not always live up to the ideal. They are hobbled by rigorous laws, monopolistic possession, and sometimes, the

risk of brute force. Ideally, the media should keep citizens engaged in the dealing governance by informing, educating and mobilising the public.

#### **4. Media and National Development**

“People define themselves in terms of ancestry: religion, language, history, values, customs and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations and at the broadest level civilizations” (Huntington, 1997:21). The need to belong to a common national life has changed with the inception of modernization and democratization processes. Citizens are seeking new rationalist values, life-styles, communication and positivist spirits for both adaptation and progress. National Development involves changes or progression in a nation aimed at humanizing the political, economic and social lives of the people. It is a multidimensional process of action, organization and communication and involves economic, political, social and cultural factors. Dudley Sears (1985), posited that development involves the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentialities.

The targets of national development are the people. The overall object of national development is human development, the purpose of which is to enlarge people’s choices for: ...greater access to knowledge; better nutrition and health services; more secure livelihoods; security against crime and physical violence; political and cultural freedoms; and a sense of participation in community activities...UNDP Human Development Reports (2002),

Media are particularly important in facilitating nation-building, especially of post-colonial societies and those experiencing ethnic and religious diversities. Biases, sensationalism, misinformation, and media vices are adverse to media role in national development. The real influence of the media in national development depends on the media themselves, the societies in which they function, and the audience they accomplish. None of these factors are the same everywhere, at all times, or all conditions.

#### **5. Conclusion:**

In this article, we have explored the role of media in the process of democratization based on reviews of communication literature. According Dalton (2008), “the current crisis of democracy is really just another stage in the ongoing history of democracy’s development. Democracies need to adapt to present-day politics and to the new style of citizen politics” (258). With rise of populist movements proving the effectiveness of online activism, changes can’t be far off. Media must construct the aptitude to think critically about development

ideology and practices and encourage the masse to participate in national development. Media thus, helps in the emergence of public opinion and in building up of images through news reporting, expressing views, informing the public and thereby facilitating public discussion on issues of wider concern. We are still in the premature stages of the Internet era and it has only been a few years that admission to the Internet has been available on a global scale. There are wrinkles to work out and systems to rejuvenate, and we still have yet to see a government to completely move to evoting.

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