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Watching the Watchdog: An Analysis of Nigerian Media Performance during the 2011 General Elections

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Abstract:

The general elections in 2011 in Nigeria took place amidst local and international skepticism about the competence of the ruling party to organize peaceful, free, fair and credible election. The election ended up being universally acclaimed as credible. The mass media played very important role in covering and reporting the election. Most of the media coverage was however concentrated on urban locations while the rural areas and the grassroots were largely neglected. The new media played prominent role during the election. Social media were adequately exploited by the electorates to share information and prevent irregularities that could have smeared the election. This trend largely contributed to the success of the election. Nigeria media appears to be maturing and gradually assuming its responsibilities in nurturing democracy, its institutions and practices in the country. With the assistance of the civil society, the media could divest itself of the ulterior influences that prevents it from providing appropriate leadership in growing democracy. The extent to which it could sustain its independence and improve the quality of its human resources would however determine how relevant and credible it would continue to be in the political firmament.

Keywords: Civil society, Democracy, Elections, Nigeria mass media

1. Introduction

The 2011 general elections in Nigeria took place in an environment of skepticism and doubt about the credibility of another election in a country that had witnessed faulty and dubious elections in the recent past. The wave of international criticisms that accompanied the 2003 and 2007 elections in the country had fuelled the skepticism on whether the same leaders who had benefited from the previous dubious elections could organize a free, fair and credible election devoid of violence. This skepticism was deepened by an environment that had been ravaged by poverty and loss of confidence among the citizens in the prevailing inept political leadership. Fortunately, the political leadership accepted that there was a credibility problem with past elections that had thrown most of them into leadership and they seemed determined to make amends, at least for once. The 2011 election eventually turned out to be one that was popularly appraised to be free, fair and credible by local and international observers. The amount of violence during the election also appeared to be lesser than in previous elections. A number of factors were however perceived to have been responsible for the eventual outcome of this election. Personal integrity of the leadership of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was popularly acknowledged as a major contributory factor, while the reformation of the electoral laws was identified as reinforcement to this factor.

In a growing democracy like in Nigeria, a number of other factors are bound to have contributed to the success of this election. The mass media in Nigeria has been indicted as a contributor to the failure of previous democratic elections in Nigeria since independence. The media was accused of inappropriate, unprofessional and unethical reporting of previous failed elections. Top on this accusation was that the media exhibited partisanship in reporting election matters having been

corrupted by the political class to report false results during and after elections. Insensitivity in the style of reporting the conflicts that accompanied elections, which fueled electoral violence, was also salient in the myriads of accusations against the media during past elections. From the intellectual point of view, the media in Nigeria also failed to set the appropriate agenda for public discussions on elections which could have contributed to the success of past elections. In addition, the media was seen not to have displayed sufficient commitment to ethical standards and social responsibility which dictates exhibition of fair, adequate and balanced coverage and reporting of election matters.

It is generally acknowledged that the mass media is vested with a big responsibility during any election in a democratic context (McQuail, 2000). As a fourth estate of the realm, in addition to the surveillance duty of ensuring that the games are played according to the rules during an election, the media also has the responsibility of educating the electorates, ensuring accurate reporting of the electoral processes and the outcome of an election, and exposing misdemeanors, criminal activities and other extraneous factors that could work against the success of an election.

The focus of this work is to assess the performance of the Nigerian media coverage of the 2011 general elections against the expected role of the mass media in nurturing a democracy. In essence, the work is guided by a number of posers which could enhance a robust analysis of the performance of the media during the 2011 elections in Nigeria. Attempt will be made to provide answers to the following queries: What is the extent and depth of coverage and reporting of 2011 elections in the mass media in Nigeria? Was there any trace of partisanship and compromise in the coverage and reporting of the election? To what extent did the media set appropriate agenda and direct public discourses on issues that contributed to the success of 2011 general elections? What is the level of social responsibility and commitment to ethics displayed by the media during the general elections? These questions will provide an insight into the extent to which the mass media in Nigeria has contributed to the success of the election under review or reveal whether the election had actually been successful in spite of the low performance of the media. The ultimate is to draw lessons from the analysis that will benefit future elections in Nigeria in her precarious and turbulent democratic journey.

2. Media in a Democracy: A Theoretical Perspective

The performance of the mass media during an election, couched within the role expected of the media in a democratic context provides the appropriate theoretical framework for assessing media performance during the 2011 national election in Nigeria. The principle of public sphere which involves the provision of a platform by the mass media for all shades of political opinions to espouse their ideas and project their views in a free environment is the first major responsibility which the media owe to nurturing any democracy (Habermas, 1989:49). The media has the responsibility of providing an all inclusive content for the audience and assist them in making informed choice among the political party options and candidates competing to provide leadership which could impact their social and economic comforts and improve their wellbeing as citizens. Even though in reality, the effective performance of this function is constrained, sometimes due to ownership and commercial influences (McNair, 1998), the media is not expected to be in alignment with any political groups or shades of opinions but to remain neutral and loyal to the interests of the people who form the bulk of its audiences. The extent to which a medium is able to restrain itself from political influences will however determine how credible and successful it will perform as a neutral arbiter on prevailing political issues and how favourable its perception would be in the public arena.

Bryant and Thompson (2002: 306) identified other responsibilities which the media owe the democratic environment. Such responsibilities include the surveillance of the prevailing political environment, provision of incisive analysis of contemporary events, policies and actions of the ruling class to ensure that the interests of the citizens are adequately protected so that democratic tenets are not breached. In confirmation of the unofficial recognition of the mass media as the fourth estate of

the political realm, the media is also expected to scrutinize and checkmate the three official arms of government to prevent excessive use of power. In essence, while the legislature is officially structured to check the excesses of the executive arm and the judiciary acts as adjudicator of disputes between the two arms, the mass media are expected to monitor the three arms. It should equally be responsible enough to check itself and ensure that it adheres to the code of ethics and tenets of its functions to ensure its freedom and prevent unnecessary interference with its performance by other forces in the democratic environment which could prevent it from efficiently performing its responsibilities.

Scrutinization of government institutions and bodies put in place by the executive arm extends to monitoring of the performances of electoral institutions since the other arms of government often face the temptation to exert undue influences on such bodies. Therefore, in relation to electoral activities, it is the role of the media to monitor the established electoral body and to constantly evaluate the methods of organizing the electoral processes in order to ensure that the electorates are not disenfranchised. Such evaluation extends to monitoring whether the adopted methods in an election could guarantee free and fair polls in violent-free environment. The media further has the responsibility of educating the electorates on the established voting processes to ensure that no voter is deprived of their rights to perform their civic responsibilities during an election. This educational and enlightenment responsibility is even more important in an environment where literacy level is very low and where the likelihood of political marginalization of a huge portion of the population due to ignorance looms very large.

The agenda-setting role of the media should also come under focus during an election. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) extends this responsibility to the monitoring of 'priming' pattern, whereby the media deliberately draw public attention during electioneering campaigns to some aspects of the social and political issues that are considered crucial to the development of the people. Political office aspirants are forced to address such issues during electioneering campaigns while the electorates are encouraged to form their opinions and attitudes based on such issues to determine the fates of contestants during elections. In the Nigerian situation, such issues as the collapsed social values, debilitating health systems, deteriorating infrastructures, insecurity of lives and properties and provision of basic necessities of life should loom large on such agenda set for public discourses during an election. The extent to which these issues are brought into focus in the media and the strength of the platform provided for politicians to address such issues during campaigns could be a yardstick for assessing media performance during the election.

Ethics issues in the coverage of an election are also critical as a yardstick for assessing the performance of the media during an election. These issues loom large in an economic environment where the media engage in constant struggle to sustain itself. The income of an average journalist in Nigeria is still very low when compared with other democracies. Several media organizations sometimes owe their employees months of salary arrears and allowances. Many reporters are in journalism practice because they could not get employment in other lucrative fields. As such, they are exposed constantly to temptations, especially the ones thrown to them by politicians who attempt to compromise them with financial inducements. In past elections, such inducements had tempted journalists and editors to publish false election results with dire consequences on the political environment. The social consequences of this trend were instability in the political system and election violence when wrong candidates were thrown up to occupy public offices (Isola, 2010). The pervasive influence of politicians who established media organizations and employed journalists to serve their political purposes have aggravated ethical problems in the media during past elections in Nigeria (Sobowale, 1985). Happily however, lessons have been learnt over time that after using such media firms and hired journalists to achieve electoral goals, politician owners of media outfits dumped the journalists, who then found their way back into the job market, thus compounding their professional and ethical problems.

These highlighted issues provide the framework within which the media performance during the 2011 election in Nigeria will be assessed. In essence, the extent to which these issues came to play in the elections, the approaches adopted by the media in covering and reporting the election and the contributions of the media to the success or failure of the aspects of the elections are the main focus of this work.

3. Role of Civil Society and International Organizations in Supporting the Media for 2011 Elections

The civil society and international organizations played very visible roles in preparing the media in Nigeria for the 2011 elections. This role was borne out of the concern to prevent the 2011 elections from going the way of the past elections and in recognition of the fact that the mass media contributed immensely to failure of earlier elections. Towards this end, a number of training activities were organized for journalists on election reporting across Nigeria by media related non-governmental organizations with the support of international donors. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the British Department of International Development (DFID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) contributed immensely to support these training programs while INEC officials were available to support the initiatives.

A network of media-focused NGOs under the auspices of Democratic Governance for Development (DGD) project established six regional media centers to support the media in the coverage and reporting of the election. The centers, established in Abuja, Gombe, Lagos, Kaduna, Owerri and Port Harcourt offered services and field assistance to journalists in collecting and processing information related to the 2011 elections and transmit such information to newsrooms where it was further processed and disseminated. The centers also monitored media performance in the coverage and reporting of the election and allowed media practitioners to have access to reports of evaluation of their performances in order to adjust appropriately where there were glaring deficiencies. The monitoring services tracked the reporting and analysis of the election news on both private and public media organizations and encouraged conflict sensitive reporting initiatives by making the result of such analysis available after each round of election.¹

Other services that the media centers provided included the provision of a cyber room where journalists and correspondents could have access to the internet and other online services to process and transfer information to their newsrooms and other locations. A legal hotline was provided where journalists could have access to lawyers to seek advice on coverage and reporting of stories and events that may benefit from such advice before they were reported. The media centers monitored the interaction of journalists with election administrators and security agents to ensure that the rights of the journalist were adequately protected while covering the elections. There was a help desk within each of the media centers which journalists could approach to seek information or receive assistance while covering the elections. To a large extent, these initiatives went a long way in enhancing the performances of journalists covering the elections and it must be acknowledged that it contributed to the success of 2011 election reporting.

4. Assessment of Print Media Coverage of the Election

In the contemporary times, the print media are largely owned by private individuals in Nigeria. The few government owned print media are restricted to states where governments support state-owned newspapers. However, many of such newspapers are published at best epileptically. The influence of print media looms largely during elections in Nigeria because their contents form substantial part of the history of elections. Unlike the broadcast media whose contents are fleeting, it is easier to keep

¹ See *Punch* newspaper, April 1, 2011 for a detail description of the functions of the regional media centers established by Democratic Governance for Development Project (DGD) and the services it offered to journalists and media staff during the election.

printed reports of an election in private custody for future references and tender such reports as evidence during election disputes. These and several other reasons accounted for the greater attention paid to the print media by the electorates during elections. Print media organizations in turn benefit from boosted circulation figures during election periods.

Many of the newspapers and magazines in Nigeria were at the forefront of the advocacy for the review of the electoral law in Nigeria which commenced and was concluded before the 2011 elections. The publications provided the platform for all shades of opinions and contributions into the revised (2010) electoral law which guided and provided the regulation for the 2011 elections. Through adequate coverage of the processes of the passage of the electoral law in the national assembly, editorials, incisive analysis and enlightened opinions in newspapers such as *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard* and magazines such as *Tell*, *The News*, *Newswatch*, etc. provided sufficient intellectual and political platform to ensure that the new electoral law conformed to the minimum standard required to conduct a civilized election in Nigeria in 2011. It is also to the credit of the print media that it directed attention to some of the pitfalls that could derail the holding of the 2011 elections, most prominent among which was the security situation of the country and some of the intrigues of the political class that could contribute to a failed election. Also, the INEC was put under sufficient pressure by the media to recognize its responsibility of holding a free and fair election as a sacred one which could nurture or destroy the extant fragile democracy². More importantly, the media lauded the appointment of a new head of the INEC, who was perceived as a credible individual but also put him under sufficient pressure to ensure the organization of a credible election in order to protect his image and credentials in several editorials and news analyses.

Many of the newspapers dedicated special pages to the coverage of the 2011 elections. Specifically, the *Punch* went further to open a special on-line portal dedicated to the elections. The portal provided regularly updated stories, analysis, commentaries, statistics and charts on the election results, which not only informed readers of the directions of the voting but also provided avenues for predicting the winners and losers in specific elections. Such special initiatives not only informed but also educated readers on voters' behaviour during the election. It could be deduced that this contributed largely to the reduction in electoral litigations which in the past accompanied such general elections.

The print media was also at the vanguard of protecting the rights of the electorates and curtailing the excesses of the security apparatus during the election. For example, it was initially envisaged by the joint security agencies' top officers that the use of GSM phone would be prevented or restricted during the election in order to prevent the circulation of false election results. The media vehemently opposed this proposal on the ground that it would infringe on the fundamental right of freedom of communication of the electorates. This initiative was subsequently dropped by the security agencies.³

Another noticeable display of social responsibilities by the print media was the consensual vehement disapproval of the attempt by INEC to reschedule the botched national assembly election for sometime during the following week days instead of rescheduling it for a weekend. In an editorial published by *Punch* on its front page titled "Rescheduled Election Should Not Hold on Monday", the newspaper echoed the discontentment of the electorates and indeed the Nigeria public on the proposal of INEC about the postponed April 2 election.⁴ Part of the editorial which jolted INEC to stand up to the initial challenges during the election reads:

² Several editorials were written in *Guardian*, *Punch*, *This Day*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust* and other prominent newspapers in Nigeria, which placed emphasis on the responsibility of the INEC to conduct a credible election in order to move Nigeria democracy forward prior to the April 2011 elections.

³ See *Punch*, April 1, 2011; *Guardian*, March 31, 2011 and *The Nation*, April 1, 2011 for opposition to this proposal displayed by the print media.

⁴ See *Punch* Editorial, April 3, 2011.

...With a confused INEC, Nigeria may be flying blind into an uncertain future...Notwithstanding the disappointment, Nigerians should not despair. Though there are grounds for skepticism, there is still plenty of room for improvement. There is no doubt that few African countries have more opportunities than Nigerians...

The editorial went on to offer valuable advice to the electoral body on the disadvantages of the fresh plan and the need for adequate logistic preparation for the rescheduled national assembly election. The same opinion was echoed by other publications in editorials, news analyses and commentaries. Eventually, the INEC took to the various advices and rescheduled the election to the convenience of the electorate while taking time to make appropriate logistics arrangement for the election. This single event contributed largely to the success of subsequent elections and it afforded the INEC to learn valuable lessons which was applied to other elections in the series.

The display of commitment of the print media to conflict sensitivity in reporting violent incidents during the election was quite remarkable. The media provided sufficient early warning signals to security agencies and INEC by providing information on the security hotspots during the elections. The media also tempered their reporting of criminal and violent incidents but gave adequate coverage to the activities of security agencies in stemming the tides of election related criminalities during the election. Headlines such as "Army Chief Reads Riot Act to Thugs" were very common in newspapers and such stories sent signals to vote riggers and thugs that all security agencies were in concert to prevent election rigging and criminalities.

It is also to the credit of the print media that there were robust contents of political campaign advertisements during the 2011 elections in mass circulating newspapers. There was virtually no report of any newspaper or magazine denying any political group, who can afford it, the opportunity to advertise their party manifestoes and candidates. Although there were preponderance of some political parties preferring to patronize certain newspapers because of the political leaning of their ownerships, there were however no report of any newspaper denying advertising patronage to any political party or individuals.

In spite of the fairly good performance of the print media coverage and reporting of this election, however, a number of lapses were noticed in their performance. Many of the coverage and reporting of election events were concentrated in the urban areas. The rural areas were largely neglected in spite of the fact that the bulk of the electoral activities took place at the grassroots. Perhaps because of inadequate number of reporters and insufficient resources to send correspondents to local communities, many of the events that took place in rural communities went unreported or were under-reported, while coverage was concentrated mainly on collation centers in major towns and cities across Nigeria. Media attentions were directed mostly to coverage of activities of politicians resident in capital cities while those in the local communities were largely ignored. Unfortunately, experiences in previous elections have revealed the trend that politicians in local communities were largely influenced by party big shots in the cities. This makes some of the election atrocities not easily traceable to the big men in urban centers unless adequate attention is paid to the grassroots. Moreover, most of the election rigging took place in rural communities from where bloated figures were forwarded to central collation centers.

It is also observed that many of the reporters and correspondents were not adequately equipped with the baseline information about the areas they were covering. One would have expected that before a reporter could report an election in an area, he should be familiar with the features of the electorates such as the number of registered voters and the history and trends of party politics in the area. Some of the reports about the election even relied very much on information dispatched by foreign news services and some editors never bothered to verify such information before publishing them in their

newspapers. These glaring deficiencies are noticed in some of the reports published in some of the newspapers during the election. It also appeared that some publications still align themselves with certain political interests. Even though political parties and candidates endorsement has become a norm especially in the developed democracies, newspapers such *The Nation* glaringly displayed alignment with one of the major political parties in Nigeria which is considered to be unhealthy for the election and for the newspaper itself.

5. Broadcast Media and 2011 Elections

The influence of the broadcast media during the Nigerian 2011 elections was also very pervasive in the political environment. Now that private broadcasting stations have truly established their influences and credibility in the polity, they appeared to be more trusted than the public owned broadcast media organizations, many of which are controlled by state governments. Unlike in the past elections when state-owned broadcasting media ruled the air waves, their activities have been tamed by the multiplicity of privately owned media organizations, many of which were neutral in their coverage and analysis of the 2011 elections. While it was reported that some state-owned broadcast media denied access to the opposition parties in some states⁵, private broadcasting media made access possible for all shades of individuals, groups and political parties who could afford the cost of their airtime.

Several broadcast media organized live public debates for political party candidates before the elections.⁶ These debates contributed immensely to the knowledge base of the electorates about candidates and it went a long way in shaping voters' opinions about contestants. It is also to the credibility of the Nigerian broadcast media that analyses and commentaries on social issues and the election made by experts and laymen were carried in abundance during the election. Scholars, professionals and politicians were invited by radio and television stations to participate and offer opinions on salient and relevant issues before and during the elections. Many of the broadcasting stations specifically designed new programs to address issues coming out of the elections while it lasted. These informative and educative programs went a long way in preparing the electorates for the elections. Many of these programs were broadcasted live which provided the opportunity for audience participation. Members of the public were encouraged to air their voices by contributing to discussions on public matters and they took up discussions on issues that they disagree with during such political discussion programs.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) was also at alert during the election. It wielded the big stick on a number of stations during the elections. In reaction to petitions received from the public, the NBC compelled some broadcast stations to discontinue with certain programmes that were considered volatile and inciting before and during the elections. Several news programs on both private and public stations were monitored and stopped because they could contribute to political tension occasioned by the elections. In addition, the organization issued warnings to public broadcasting stations to allow access to their platforms by all parties, especially those considered as opposition and this seemed to influence the attitudes of the management of a number of state-owned stations who had hitherto prevented access to opposition parties to project their manifestoes and programs. It encouraged others to modify the extent of the coverage of the activities of the ruling parties in their states and to moderate volatile utterances that were capable of leading to conflagration or influence public attitudes negatively during the elections.

⁵ For instance in Oyo state, the state broadcasting outfit, BCOS was blatantly partisan and operated in favour of the ruling PDP in the state in spite of several protests by the opposition parties in the state against this attitude.

⁶ Governor Fashola of Lagos state, for example, participated in not less than four of such public debates with opponents from other political parties. Many other governors and contestants to National and State Assemblies equally participated in such debates on radio and television stations across Nigeria.

International broadcasting networks covered the elections extensively. Local reporters and correspondents of CNN, BBC, Al-jazeera, France 24 and other networks were on hand to cover the elections. It is remarkable that the reporters of the foreign networks sampled the election situations widely in Nigeria and their reports served effectively to counter-balance the reports of the local media. Above all, there appeared to be a consensus among the foreign broadcast network that the election was fair enough in comparison to previous elections in Nigeria. Moreover, where the local networks appeared to favour particular political parties in their coverage and reporting during the election, the international broadcast reporters maintained neutrality by making effort when they could to interview various leading party officials about their perceptions of the elections.

On the low side, the quality of some of the broadcast programs on the election on some local radio and television stations during the election was below expectation, especially with the regard to technical issues. Several of the advertised debates and discussions on political issues during the elections were marred by technical hitches, ranging from in-ability to air such programs at the advertised time to poor networking of different studios of broadcasting stations in different locations, even within Nigeria. In addition, the quality of some of the presentations and programme anchoring during public debates on some broadcasting stations was below industry standards. It was noticed that sometimes some of those deficiencies occurred because of poor staff technical skills, limited exposure to political issues by program presenters and anchors and lack of enough preparation before programmes are aired. On several programmes, the salient issues that could have enriched political discussions and debates were left out while less relevant issues were elevated in debates that involved party candidates.

Many of the state owned broadcasting stations were influenced in their coverage of the elections by incumbent governors and state authorities. At the federal level, in spite of the efforts by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to serve as neutral arbiters among the various political parties, there were glaring evidences that the station used its network to further the interest of the incumbent President and the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Permanent reporters were not only attached to the campaign train of the president but also to that of his wife. While the national television gave extensive coverage to the party primaries of the ruling parties, it hardly did the same to other political parties which contested in the elections. Part of the excuses of the NTA management was that some of the other political parties could not afford the cost of the kind of coverage given to the PDP campaigns, but they failed to publish the amount of funds generated from the PDP to the stations. Sensitivity to equity and social responsibility demands that adequate reporting of events that took place during the campaigns of other registered political parties should have been reported by a public-funded station like the NTA even where they could not cover such events live.

6. Influence of Social Media and Internet Networks

The influence of the social media and internet based networks was very pervasive in the Nigerian 2011 elections, in comparison with previous elections. Some reports actually dubbed the election as "The Facebook and Twitter Election". For the first time in election history in Nigeria, the public witnessed adequately the voters' accreditations, counting and compilation of votes, and in the process monitored the number of accredited voters in each polling station, the voting procedures and events in polling locations. Observations recorded were circulated through Blackberry messengers, Facebook and Twitters, while pictures taken in various voting locations were circulated through Youtube, Skype and other social networking facilities. Blog sites and various internet discussion networks contributed to the knowledge base of the electorates before and during the elections. Global Satellite Mobile phones (GSM) and Short Message Services (SMS) were used extensively to transmit and exchange information during the election. The INEC also joined the social media fray by creating a Blackberry messenger group and a space on the Twitter to circulate information on the election.

One influence that the social media had on the 2011 elections is that it was used in detecting and frustrating criminal attempts to derail or disrupt election procedures. Through the SMS and mobile phones, electorates were able to exchange information about events and happenings in various polling booths and alerted security agencies about threats. For example, in a particular polling location witnessed in Ibadan, southwest Nigeria, some thugs were threatening voters and party representatives with violence and disruption to the electoral process. While this was going on, a truck load of police and soldiers appeared and promptly arrested the errant thugs. The commander of the security detachment later disclosed that their prompt arrival at the scene was as a result of an SMS received from someone at the polling booth. He confirmed that such made their assignments easier to accomplish. It saved the day on that particular election.

Electronic versions of print media also contributed immensely to providing cheaper access for the populace to obtain news about elections. Many of the popular newspapers maintained and constantly updated their websites on information about the election while it lasted almost on hourly basis. Several individual blog sites opened by Nigerians within the country and in the diasporas contributed by furnishing information that established media were unable to publish sometimes for legal reasons. However, it was observed that some of the blog sites were unreliable and information obtained from them had to be cross-checked from other sources. For instance, the *Sahara Reporters* blog site published some bizarre expose on the antics of politicians and their associates to influence the outcomes of elections. Electronic newspapers such as *234 Next* appeared to be more reliable because they have a more organized news coverage and reporting structure. Nevertheless, information obtained from established newspaper websites appeared credible and were comparable to information obtained from any other print and broadcast media during the election.

The reliability and credibility problem of the social media and private blog sites was fueled by the fact that many of them operated in an unorganized form during the election. Many of the bloggers merely struggle to gather information from other sources without verifying the authenticity of such information. Their information was sourced mostly from personal networks, which may or may not be reliable and credible. Moreover, they operated from mysterious locations while their operations rely on donations from voluntary and sometimes anonymous sources. While this gives them immunity from legal liabilities, it could also make them pliable to political influences. Lack of monitoring framework and control mechanism for what is published on the social network sites and on internet blog sites are still a problem which has caused limitation to the extent to which information circulating on the social networks could be trusted. However, there was no major goof on these media during the 2011 elections.

7. Conclusion

There is no doubt from available evidences that the media is trying to catch up with the tempo of democracy in Nigeria. The media contributed immensely into the success of the 2011 general elections and it appeared to have learnt from the past pitfalls in its performances during previous elections, which had not only constrained the growth of democracy, but also stunted the development of the media itself. The challenge before the media is to find means of detaching itself from political influences which could prevent it from performing its social responsibility of nurturing accelerated growth of democracy and strengthening democratic institutions rather than individuals. It also must face the challenges of strengthening its commercial and human resources base by training and constant retraining of media personnel to meet the challenges of a dynamic media industry in a democratic environment. This will enable the media to free itself from outside interferences while building intellectual structures that could nurture its credibility in the public arena as a watchdog against arbitrariness and excessiveness of the political class and to champion the cause of human development.

Author's Biography

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