INFLUENCES OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP PATTERNS ON MEDIA FREEDOM AND PROFESSIONALISM IN NIGERIA

By

Michael O. Ukonu

Abstract

This paper examines the patterns of media ownership in Nigeria. It analyzes the impacts of ownership patterns on media freedom and professionalism. It argues that the media ownership climate in Nigeria is very cloudy, and not conducive for optimum operations, especially for private media. Government uses its regulatory agencies to frustrate media freedom. The scenario is not a lot different from centralized control. Government is urged to encourage free enterprise and allow a level playing field for private and public media firms.

Introduction

Mass media are a creation of technology. They have moved on for ages spurred by technology. New media technology herald each age in human history ever since man perfected the art of writing. As creations of technology, mass media have become an integral as well as an indispensable aspect of human society. A society without the mass media is unthinkable. The world owes the mass media great gratitude for making social, worldwide interactions possible. The place of the mass media in modern mass society is easily clear.

Interestingly, most societies have spent huge amount of time and resources to work out effective system for using the mass media. Some societies have, however, left the media at the whims of rulers as they come and go. The mass media will remain a useless lot unless there is an effective system to harness and use them as instruments of social communication.

The concern therefore is examining and analyzing patterns of media ownership in Nigeria in a bid to draw useful conclusions. This will help establish a correlation among media ownership, media freedom and professionalism.

Newspapers

Media ownership in Nigeria started in private hands ever before government got interested in mass media. Reverend Henry Townsend, an Anglican missionary, established the first newspaper in Nigeria, Iwe Irohin in 1859. Other newspapers followed suit to tap the gains of the growing interest in reading and western education. Additionally, the urge for self government spurred Nigerians to organize mass movements to challenge colonial repression. Mass media appeared as a second tool used to challenge colonialism. In British colonies of the East, West and South Africa, the promise of eventual
independence led the people to organize nationalist movements. The growth of these movements led directly to the birth of small newspapers.

Therefore, before any media ownership laws were enacted, colonialism and the struggle for self-governance triggered private ownership of the mass media. It is believed that colonialism, Christianity and nationalism worked together in shaping the nature of the media in Nigeria. Early press owners were Christian missionaries.

The British government also went into publishing, though it did not float a full-fledged newspaper. “Part of their communication structure in Nigeria was in form of colonial information handouts. In Southern Nigeria, the colonial administration effectively used its periodical, the Nigerian Gazette, which was established in Lagos immediately the government took shape” as from 1900 during which such publication became popular (Bramoh 1990, p.135). The Gazette was published in bond volumes like weekly or monthly magazines. It was therefore not a conventional publication.

While the British government wanted to spread information about its administration with its publication, mercantilist and nationalistic motives propelled the private press. The pungency of the early private press thus earned it the haughty eyes of government. The latter quickly responded with gagging laws. The Newspaper Ordinance of 1903 and the Seditious Offences Ordinance of 1909 were among such early laws.

To date, the driving force of private press remains opposition to government misrule, ensuring the accountability and responsibility of government to the people. As such, countless laws of sorts have been churned out to terrify the press in Nigeria, in addition to innumerable cases of assault on pressmen and press freedom.

The quest for independence, additionally, led many nationalists like Herbert Macaulay, Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe, to name a few into establishing papers. Macaulay formed the first party paper, the Lagos Daily News in 1925 to champion the cause of his party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP).

This trend sparked off an era of party papers – the Daily News, 1925; Daily Service, 1933; and the West African Pilot, 1937, were effective party organs. Party papers continued to exist up to the post independence era. After independence, three regions – North, West and East– had ethnic-based political parties and the private press aligned with the trend. The Pilot and the Zik’s chain of papers, the Nigerian Tribune and the Nigerian Citizen became the mouthpieces of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC)– East; the Action Group– West; and the Northern Peoples Congress – North
respectively. And with the creation of 12 states in 1967, each state established its own newspaper. This practice continued as state creation continued.

The newspaper industry in Nigeria has, no doubt, gone through trying times and has become very strong and audacious and has built itself a great name. The reason is that newspapers fought hard to liberate society from the shackles of oppressive leaders. It is believed that newspapers constitute the only potent opposition to government in power in Nigeria.

However, the influence of government press with government support and monopoly of government information is still noticeable. In 1975, government acquired 60% of the *Daily Times* shares, making the paper reflect the spirit of government in its content. *Daily Times*, formerly a very powerful and influential paper, started to dance to the tune of government.

Government extends its influence over some media (especially government media), as well as over the federal ministries and state ministries of information. The audience often alleges that these media organizations and ministries have become government tools of propaganda, and official misinformation and deceit.

**Broadcasting**

Broadcasting demands a more complex system as well as daunting financial involvements. The airways were once seen as public property that should be managed by government. Perhaps, that is why broadcasting in Nigeria started in the hands of government.

As from 1932 when broadcasting reached the Nigerian landscape, it remained the preserve of government until 1992 when former military head of state, General Ibrahim Babaginda (rtd), liberalized broadcasting via Decree 38 of 1992. However, the 1979 Constitution had allowed individual ownership of mass media of communication. But it took 13 years afterwards for the provision to be effected.

Twining *et al* in Ume-Nwagbo (1994, p.7) note that “Europe’s overbearing political posture in Africa, especially since the Berlin Conference (1885), which sanctioned the partitioning of the continent, was especially significant. Without exception, all former British and French colonies and dependencies in Africa modeled their broadcasting systems after their respective colonial master’s metropolitan broadcasting policies. In Nigeria, colonial government pioneered wired-radio system before radio developed further”.

The political current of the 1950’s also shaped broadcast ownership in Nigeria. In 1954, the Action Group party (AG)- the opposition in parliament-
walked out of parliament protesting the adoption of the debate of the McPherson constitution, which the AG had termed unworkable.

The Governor-General, Sir John McPherson, went on air and poured the vitriol on the AG, charging the party with what he called perfidy of the Action Group. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the AG leader, sought airtime on the government-owned radio station (National Broadcasting Service), to reply to the governor’s charges. He was turned down. Following this, he established the Western Nigeria Television in October 1959. The Western Nigeria venture sparked off a desire for radio-television establishment in the regions. Eastern Nigeria established its own station – the Eastern Nigeria Television (ENTV), in 1960, and so did Northern Nigeria in 1962 with the establishment of Radio-television, Kaduna (Ukonu, 2006).

In 1977 and 1979, the federal government established the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN, respectively and vested them with powers to control television and radio broadcasting. The 1979 constitution removed the exclusive powers. Federal and regional (now states), stations thus operated side by side. State stations maintained appreciable independence, but were required to hook up to the federal (network) stations for network programmes, such as news.

Heads (1976, pp.347-348) notes that “government interest in broadcasting in Africa extends well beyond total ownership of the system and management of airwaves to substantial capital investment. In general, the situation is that in developing economies, emphasis has always been placed on the transmitting end and hardly ever on the receiving end of the system”. So far, broadcasting remains essentially a government monopoly. Therefore, as Tom in Uche (1989, p.67), observes: “broadcasting became priority project and state monopoly, mainly for its immense potency as means of social, cultural and political influence and power”.

**Government surrenders**

Protracted economic constraints over the years led to government’s inability to continue funding broadcasting. As a result, government, first, allowed commercialization of both radio and television services. This helped the financial situation of the stations especially for those operating in large commercial centres such as Lagos, Ibadan, Jos, Kano, Enugu and Port Harcourt. But although some of these stations were able to raise up to 70 percent of their annual operating cost, commercialization harshly affected programming and public service broadcasting –programmes of sorts came on air.
By the early 80s, it became clear that government failed completely in the trusteeship (paternalistic) rule of managing broadcasting media in public interest. As Agbe (1994, p.114) puts it: government monopoly became “a major constraint to the rapid development of the nation’s media and democratization process”. Politicians used the media at their whims. Members of the audience, disenchanted as they were, turned to foreign stations for succour. Added to the fast changing media climate worldwide (the trend towards free market), government came under intense pressure to privatize broadcasting. Furthermore, political developments in Nigeria had posed serious challenges to Decree 24 of 1976 and Decree 8 of 1979, that vested broadcasting on NTA and FRCN. When the military government of then Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo that centralized radio and television handed power to a civilian government in 1979, it became clear that the situation must be reversed to achieve harmony.

The 1979 elections made the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) the ruling party. NPN had seven states out of the then nineteen. The other twelve states shared by the other four political parties, could not have their programmes and policies spread through the electronic media. The Senate as a result introduced broadcasting into the concurrent legislative list of the 1979 constitution. Consequently, the twelve states in opposition applied for allocation of Ultra High Frequency (UHF) channels for TV broadcasting. As from then, the federal-controlled NTA stations existed side-by-side with state-owned TV stations in such states.

Next, government chose to privatize broadcasting to allow individuals to own broadcast media as profit making venture and this has, to a reasonable extent, resuscitated quality programming, responsibility and professionalism. Privatization as achieved in 1992 via Decree 38 (as amended in Decree 55 of 1999), also led to the creation of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to regulate the broadcast industry (both Decrees are now Acts 38 and 55). The federal government through broadcast privatization dumped its paternalistic model of orientation, wherein the airwaves are seen as public property that must be managed by government on behalf of the people.

By 1997, NBC had licensed nine independent private television stations, two private radio stations, two direct broadcast satellite and 40 re-transmission stations. There were 262 government-owned broadcast stations as at 2003, comprising federal, radio and television as well as state-owned broadcast stations. They are grouped as follows: Voice of Nigeria, (VON) 1; NTA, including satellite outfits, 135; FRCN national stations, 8; FRCN FM stations, 37; State Broadcasting Corporations (radio & TV, including Aso FM, Abuja) 81; Udeajah, (2004, p.342), reveals that as at 2003, there were 88 pulsating
broadcast organizations that are privately owned. Of these, 84 are private transmitting and re-transmitting institutions in Nigeria’s electronic web. Four of these are specialized stations, namely, Atlantic FM, French; Brilla FM, Sports Spectrum FM, News; and UNILAG FM, Academic.

The aforesaid 84 private stations comprise 14 Private Terrestrial TV (PTTV); 8 Private Terrestrial Radio (PTR); 2 private satellites - Global Transmission (PSGTx) ;60 Private Cable Satellite Re-Transmission Stations (including sub-stations). Added to the 262 stations earlier noted, the number of broadcast organizations in Nigeria comes to 350 as at 2003 (both federal, state and private).

**Implications of ownership structures on media professionalism**

The foregoing shows that the nature of media ownership in Nigeria is principally dual- there is private ownership and government (public) ownership. The mixed ownership (government and individuals managing one media firm) is, at best, not pronounced.

However, government is unwilling to let go of its characteristic dominance of the media. Government exerts choking control by the regulation of both the private and public broadcast media. Laws are readily churned out to gag the press. Nwachukwu (1998, p.46) writes: “these pernicious laws and decrees against the media gave government officials legal backing to persecute, fine, detain, and imprison journalists, and to proscribe media houses”.

Aside from government control of the media through laws, Uche (1989, p.32) adds that government uses certain preferential treatment to “buy” the most influential journalists in the media to top posts within the government. When Tony Iredia became “notorious”, or is it popular, with his “Point Blank” on NTA network, asking his guest (who were mostly government officials) fiery questions, the federal government quickly responded by first appointing him Director-General of the National Orientation Agency and the Director-General of NTA. That ended its knack for asking too many hard questions.

Nwachukwu writes further that in addition, regulatory bodies set up by government can be a source of negative or positive control of the media. Where there are defects or loopholes in the Decree that set up such regulatory bodies, this can be for repressing freedom of expression. It is thought that government may intentionally leave loopholes to exploit in silencing any opposition. It is widely believed that one pitfall in the Decree that set up the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is the power given to the commission to revoke the licence of stations which do not operate in accordance with the code and in the public interest. The Decree did not specify either how to seek redress...
or to what the public interest is as in the American Federal Communication. The decree (now Act 38) allows the NBC to provide licence in perpetuity only to withdraw them at whim!

In October 2005, the premises of African Independent Television, AIT, was arbitrarily sealed off for over 24 hours by NBC officials, who alleged that AIT unethically beamed gory visual signals from the crash site of the Bellview plane. But, in fact, prior to AIT’s intervention, Nigerians, and indeed the families of victims of the crash, had waited in vain for three days to see if any Nigerian station or government agency could locate and report the crash.

In May 2006, the federal government cancelled the network licence of AIT and gave the media house a 21-day ultimatum to dismantle its transmitters and relocate its operational from Asokoro, Abuja, Nigeria. According to Aziken and Ayodele (2006, p. 15): ‘Noting the increasing intimidation of opponents of the third term proposal, Senator [Uche] Chukwumerije said: this is first harassment and intimidation of a major TV station, AIT, solely on the ground that it is performing its constitutional duty of remaining dispassionate and professional in its coverage of all activities pertaining to the on-going third term controversy.’ The ‘sin’ of AIT was that it beamed live coverage of the House of Representatives’ debate on the third term agenda. Government must have been irked because proceedings from the debate on May 9, 2006 revealed that more members opposed third term (on day one (May 9), 18 members were against, while 11 were in support).

Still on AIT, Akunna and Nweze (2006, p.1) write: What could be described as a renewed clampdown on the media over President Olusegun Obasanjo’s ailing third term ambition came to the fore yesterday [May 14, 2006] when State Security Service (SSS) operatives raided the Asokoro, Abuja station of African Independent Television (AIT), ordering the stoppage of a documentary on tenure elongation. The security operatives who raided the station yesterday afternoon were said to have carted away a master tape of the documentary after stopping its transmission. AIT was trying to portray the history of efforts at tenure elongation in Nigeria in a documentary which succeeded in showing the faces of a set of incurable sycophants who, many
times across regimes, always tried to goad incumbent rulers into tenure elongation.

The result of government’s hostile stance is that the media are forced to remain government stooges, especially government media. Even the private press finds itself in the same trouble when owners have political interest. Such owners may force their workers to do the wish of government to curry political favour from government. In 1992, Moshood Abiola asked his editor (of Concord newspaper), Bayo Onanuga, to tender an apology to president Ibrahim Babagida, (over a publication) as he then was. The editor refused, however, choosing to resign, alongside three others. Abiola later apologized to Babangida.

**External forces**

Private broadcasting, nay national media systems, are also prone to the manipulation of the global media giants and the global capitalist system. The IMF and World Bank (key global players in capitalism) were part of the factors that led to broadcast liberalization in Nigeria. The two bodies had coaxed the Nigerian federal government into liberalizing broadcasting if it (federal government) would continue obtaining loans. The IMF has a way of supporting the interest of capitalism and the global capitalist media. Clearly, global trends in political pluralism and international market economy are spurring interest in decentralization of trade including broadcast communication.

This is the newest world order championed by Western Industrialized countries of Europe and North America. This has been called the doctrine of free private enterprise or the *liberal model*. Liberalization will allow foreign interest opportunity to sponsor the establishment of local private media organization and thereby open doors for unrestrained ferrying of culturally unsuitable foreign programmes into Nigeria. A lot of literature and research have been done on the development implications of cultural invasion of, and media imperialism in Africa as a whole. See Ukonu (2008): *Perspectives in international communication and global media system*.

Worse, private cable/satellite stations are often affiliates of foreign stations and their contents jump national boundaries straight into homes. “The rise of cable and satellite channels has radically changed the face of the broadcast industry, opening up national markets to scores of new channels and revenue streams” McChesney (1998, p.3). The rise of the global media system is closely connected to the global capitalist economy. The global media system is the direct result of a sort of ‘neoliberal’ deregulatory policies and agreements that have helped to form global markets for goods and services.
The emerging global communication system thus rubbishes the pride of national systems. Mergers, cross ventures and the web of ownership structures make the global media system more of a cartel and oligopolistic market than a competitive enterprise. The system, therefore, works against the very essence of free enterprise and democracy which it purports to uphold. New media firms (that may have opposing ideology) cannot enter the market since they can not thrive alone. National systems must be linked to the global giants like the *Time Warner/AOL* group, *Sony, Bertelsmann*, etc, before they have access to the global market. And national systems may be losing control over their own cultural identity.

The WTO in 1997 ruled that Canada could not prohibit Time Warner’s sports illustrated from distributing a Canadian edition of the Magazine. A High Court in Australia ruled against the legality of the Australian domestic media, content quotas in April, 1998, maintaining that international treaty obligations supercede the national cultural objectives in the broadcasting Act (McChesney, 1998).

Globalization pressures though seem to make it imperative that nations must trade in the international media marketplace. Yet, it is important to protect local media and cultural industries. “Nations ranging from Norway, Denmark and Spain to Mexico, South Africa and South Korea for example have government subsidies to keep alive their domestic film production industry” (McChesney, 1998, p.4).

**Arguing against privatization**

Following what have been perceived as the shortfalls of privatization, some opponents of privatization (proponents of paternalism) such as Mvendage Jibo, a political scientist have raised a number of points to support their position.

Privatization, Jibo (1997, p.19) notes, “will further empower the rich to own broadcast media and further subjugate the lower class in the society. The permissive effect of broadcasting makes it a danger in unscrupulous hands. This is especially so in cases where the rich became wealthy dubiously”. Jibo says this point is worth emphasizing because we do not have enough journalists who are so committed to the ideals of democracy that they will be prepared to walk out of their jobs if they were compelled to defend ill-gotten wealth or were placed in a situation which compelled them to hinder the emergence of a culture of accountability in public office. Jibo further agrees that some of the rich who own private stations are religious fanatics who will use their stations to fan religious violence and ethnic strife. And Nigeria is a notorious case of ethnic and religious uprisings.
It is also feared that privatization will not guarantee equal access, especially when the enemies of the owners of a given station are involved. Thus, stations may be partisan and injure some national interests. And if too many stations were established, foreign earnings will be channeled to the purchase and maintenance of equipment.

Uche (1999, p.536) sees sense in the fears of Jibo about privatization. Uche observes that the granting of licenses to money bags means “the hijacking of democracy in Nigeria and the perpetuation of exploitation, slavery and feudalism”. Although political parties and religious groups are not allowed to own broadcast media in Nigeria, it is still feared, as Rodney (2005, p.6) notes that “media pluralism is jeopardized by the risk that the main channels of public access may eventually be controlled by a small number of strategically placed and minimally accountable gatekeepers”. In 2002, critics charged that some licences were granted to broadcast stations, which were believed to be stooges of government.

Instead of granting licences to perceived government lackeys, “the granting of licences to community interest groups would guarantee their participation in the political and economic development of Nigeria and ensure democratization of the broadcast media” (The Guardian February 18, 2002, p.76). Jibo advises Nigeria to wait until Nigeria’s economic and politics improves. He may not be entirely wrong. But the privatization experiment in Nigeria to a large extent defeats the fears expressed above. Yet, there is need for better planning to save local media from harsh foreign influences.

Gains of privatization
An emerging society, no doubt, needs to set the basis for growth. Privatization is one such basis/system to harness the instruments of communication. Additionally, press freedom is highly priced. The little more freedom privatization allows helps the Nigerian society a good deal. Experts believe that it is often helpful to allow absolute media freedom even with the dangers involved in it.

So far, Nigerians are enjoying a culture of much more purposeful programming and meaningful newscasts as against the former government say-so-news. Some government media are being forced to be more audience oriented. For instance, this writer found that in Lagos, the audience believes that NTA 2 Channel 5 does not operate in the fashion of other NTA stations in Nigeria. Reason? The stiff competition posed by a deluge of other private media in Lagos offers NTA 2 Channel 5 no option but to offer interesting programmes, not just government information.
The following is a list of other arguments in favour of liberalisation.

- There would be equal access for all citizens so that people will participate in social governance and interaction to enrich their lives in participatory, complex, dynamic and conducive society.

- There would mean and interesting acceleration in the choice of stations for the audience.

- The situation will engender the spirit of enterprise, which will translate into quality programming.

- There would be a “a new interpretation of social responsibility and challenge”.

- The electronic media will provide “a new interpretation of social responsibility and challenge both journalists and media owners to adopt the tenets of new journalism that emphasize both profitability and community service” (Uche 1999, pp.534-535).

- There will be civil society’s active participation in communication audits control. That is, the participation of groups of people, communities, outside and separated from state power means, united and organized to achieve different aims or enforcement of interest in the political and economic development of the society. (Idoko 1999, p.9).

- Hamellink (1995, p.18) adds that in genuine democratization “the individual becomes an active partner not a mere object of communication and broadcasting becomes less an urban and elite phenomenon and those of a rural and populist phenomenon.

**Private Broadcasting is Threatened**

The gains of broadcast privatization in Nigeria are threatened by the unfavourable operational climate in Nigeria. This is worsened by calculated attempt by government to stifle private broadcasting outfits. Without doubt, apart from technical problems (power), certain economic and legal measures are used to choke private media. Jika (1990, p.171) believes that the press (mass media) in any given society is controlled and influenced by the ruling class and that the ruling class uses the media to entrench and disseminate its own values and ideas. Conversely the dominant class utilizes the instrument of communication to subordinate the values and ideas of the subordinated class.
Rising official charges and fees threaten the future of private broadcasting in Nigeria. Rodney (2005) presents a review on the unhealthy operational situation of private media in Nigeria. Quoting The Guardian, January 27 (1997, p.5), he notes that the NBC increased renewal fees of private operators “from N400, 000 in 1993 to N3 million for those in Lagos and Port Harcourt and N2.25 million to those in Benin, Ibadan and Kaduna” and suspended operations of several private air and cable channels in 1997, for “non-payment of fines raging from N50,000 to N100,000”.

Private stations are required by law to pay 2.5 percent of their gross annual income to the NBC as part of their obligation to the broadcast industry to operate legally (The Guardian, October 26, 1998, p.51). “These levies and fines appear unilaterally and are arbitrarily fixed without some form of dialogue, negotiation or consensual agreement with, or without taking cognizance of the economic background or peculiar financial constraints of private owners” (The Guardian, June, 16, 1998, p.37). These condition makes it very difficult for private stations to operate optimally. Many of them have already laid off large number of staff.

The Guardian April 15, (1996, p.25) reports that Channels TV owed station salaries of three months and laid off unspecified number of staff. DBN laid off 25 staff, while African Independent Television (AIT) and Ray Power laid off over 100 staff for various reasons. Galaxy TV owed up to N3 million in debts by January 1996, two years after it began transmission.

Indebtedness of DARR Communications forced the closure of AIT, Ray Power 1 and 2 for one year by a consortium of banks on account of “breach of a N600 million loan syndication” (The Guardian, October 26, 1998, p.5). But government funds both the FRCN and NTA. The Guardian, January 19, (1998, p.40) reports:

Government funding rose from N 4.5 billion in 1999 to N 20 billion in 2001 budget. The NBC exempts public stations from renewal fees, which were increased from N 400, 000 (for private stations) in 1993 to N 3 million for those in Lagos and Port Harcourt and N 2.5 million for those in Ibadan and Kaduna. By law, private stations are required to pay 2.5 percent of their gross annual income to the commission as part of their obligation to the industry to operate legally.
In 1997, the NBC divided stations into zones and categories as follows: for Category A market, which included Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, Onitsha and Aba, the cost of registration and licence was ₦1.8 million, while survey was ₦1.2 million. Category B which included areas like Abuja, Sokoto, Abeokuta, Benin, Kaduna, Enugu, Jos, Umuahia, Ibadan etc, would attract ₦1.3 million for registration and license, while for survey it would be ₦900,000. For Category C, which have places like Yenogoa, Maiduguri, Otukpo, Lokoja, Okene, Zaria, Makurdi, Jalingo etc, the cost of licence and registration was ₦900,000, while for survey it was ₦600,000.

The NBC, in 1997, suspended five cable stations for inability to pay levies (The Guardian October 26, 1998, p.51). Yet both NTA and FRCN compete with private media for advertisements, yet they enjoy government subsidies. By January 2001 not only did the commission increase rate, the parameters used for delineations were also changed. For instance, Category A became ₦20 million, Category B to cost ₦15 million and Category C ₦10 million. Apart from the zonal classification, if your survey goes beyond the state be ready to cough out double. However the cost of application form remains ₦50,000.

Following a request by private stations (Association of Independent broadcasters, IBAN) at the 2002 meeting of private broadcasters and the NBC, which was called to review the NBC code, the president of IBAN and Chief Executive of DAAR Communications limited, Dr. Raymond Dokpesi, had argued that there should be disparity in system of licensing fee being paid by private and public stations.

**Conclusion**

As a result of the scenario painted above, one commentator offers this explanation: although private stations have strong points, they have been found wanting in a number of areas, especially in broadcasting violent films and ambitious miracle cure claims by pastors during religious broadcasts. The NBC however has always come up with regulations that could be interpreted to be aimed at killing investment spirit in private broadcasting. Asking private broadcasters to pay 20 million license and survey in Lagos does not encourage investments in that regard. Though the fee lasts five years before it is renewed, there is no guarantee that it would not be increased again after five years. And this is worsened by the fact that public stations most times sustained with public funds are not made to operate under such stifling conditions (via www.nbc.nig.org/contact.htm).
Rodney (2005, p.12) says that experts are of the view that the stature of licencing and registration fees is “destroying deregulated broadcasting business and pushing private owners out of businesses. Government uses its huge network monopoly to tamper with the growth of broadcasting standards and values, prevent market forces from putting broadcasting with highest and best use - profit maximization according to free market demands”.

Government should begin to show impartiality by making both NTA and FRCN real commercial enterprises or run them as true public chartered corporations, which are not under direct influence of government. If the stations are to be run totally with public funds, they should be out of the advertising market, or have a percentage of advertisements they can take, perhaps, government advertisements aimed at projecting the image of Nigeria. Therefore, government should cease massive budgetary allocations to NTA and FRCN and run them like real business enterprises or like authentic public service stations.

One is forced to accuse government of being anti- private media. If not government would have yielded to pressures to create a conducive atmosphere for private media to thrive. The new policy document as submitted by the committee set up by Chief Chukwuemeka Chikele, former minister of information and national orientation should have been adopted to change fortunes for the private media in Nigeria. And the national assembly should have stopped its pretences over the freedom of information bill lying waste on its shelves since 1999.
REFERENCES


