

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the relationship between mass media and society from the standpoint of the primary functions of mass communication postulated by pioneer scholars in communication, Herrold Lasswell and Charles D. Wright. With hindsight the paper says the mass media can serve both good and bad purposes in the society. The paper backs up its claim with examples within and outside Nigeria.

There is hardly any society or sovereign state that can function properly today without the news media. The news media are important because they help us keep up with what is going on in the world. Everywhere, news media inform the public of important affairs, they transmit government policies and actions for the information of the people, they also provide information on which many readers form opinions. Our daily newspaper reading undoubtedly affects our attitudes, our conduct, and even our fundamental moral value. As a matter of fact, news media have shaped culture, influenced politics, played important roles in business, and affected the daily lives of millions in the past centuries. The news media are useful; they are equally dysfunctional to the society.

The relationship between mass media and society can be examined from the point of view of the functions of mass communication in every society. These functions were

postulated by Harold Lasswell (1948), a political scientist and one of the pioneer scholars in mass communication and Charles Wright (1960), another pioneer scholar in mass communication studies. Schramm simplified Lasswell's postulation as: 'watcher, forum and teacher'. Indeed, there is hardly any society without its watchers; the primitive societies inclusive. The watchers survey the environment and report on the threats and dangers as well as on the good omens and opportunities. Such watchers may be the elders in the tribe who complain that the younger generation is showing less and less respect for elders or as Rivers, et al (1971) would say, could be foreign correspondents who report political tension in other countries. The watchers therefore provide other members with information and interpretation of events.

On many occasions, Nigerian media have alerted the citizens and government of the dangers inherent in a policy being pursued by government

or the dangers the actions of a group or a country could cause. One can recall vividly here the advice of the media of communication in Nigeria especially the print media to the danger inherent in obtaining loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1985 under the General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida military regime. The possible effects of the loan were published in various forms including hard news, features and editorial to warn the government of the consequence of such action. Against the advice, the government obtained the loan. Today, we are all living witnesses to the devaluation of Nigeria's currency, inflation and some other negative effects. Nigeria has since then become a dumping ground for all sorts of second hand goods.

Communication needs are many. These needs have been there since the period of our ancestors and they will continue to be there after us. Ever before the emergence of mass media of communication in Nigeria, there were elders who surveyed the environment and reported dangers to the king who, as the head of a given town, mobilized his strong men to prepare for war or be at alert. As a result of this, there were many war heroes particularly in Yoruba kingdom of that period. They included *Ogun*, *Ogedengbe*, *Fashola* and the host of others. During this period there were town criers who passed the message across to the entire town or village. There were also storytellers and jesters who functioned to entertain the people. When I was a toddler, I can remember vividly that the elders in the family treated the rest of us (the young ones) to folklore during moonlight. Different

types of stories were narrated and songs of the past were recited to entertain and indirectly to socialize us to the values, customs and rules of the society.

As time passed, the society began to grow in size and civilization. In 1859, the first newspaper was printed at Abeokuta, the current capital of Ogun State. The newspaper and those that followed began to serve as sentinels, scanning the society and warning the populace of dangers imminent. In 1932, the colonial masters brought radio to Nigeria and by 1959, the then Western Region government under its premier Chief Obafemi Awolowo (of his blessed memory) brought television to Nigeria. The presence of these media of mass communication changed the position of things. Individuals no longer performed the functions of surveillance of the environment. The role and militant standpoint taken by the press during the colonial period attracted many people to her. It served as the eye, ear and mouth of the people and acted as the forum for ventilating opinion. It molded the opinions of the people on topical issues. The print media became so popular with the people that those who ran foul of the government laws, when fined by the court, the public contributed money to pay such fines. Again, the information in the print media were taken hook and sink by the public. The attitude of the public to messages communicated by the print media became a matter that bothered the then Governor-General, Lord Frederick Lugard to the extent that in one of the many letters to his wife in England in 1913, he complained about this matter. Surveillance refers to news and information role of the media. From 1859, the media have taken over

the role of sentinels and watchers. Correspondents within and outside Nigeria, especially of the wire services and media giants such as CNN gather information for us that we couldn't get by ourselves. Dominick (1996) says this information is funneled back to mass media organizations that in turn produce radio or TV newscast or newspapers or magazines. Today, Nigeria has as many as 100 newspapers either as private, State government or Federal Government owned and each of the 36 States in Nigeria has a radio and television stations. Added to these are foreign stations such as CNN, BBC, Voice of America and several others that one can tune to get news of importance almost immediately.

There is no gainsaying that the role of surveillance being played today can no longer be played by individuals because of the size, population and the complexity of modern Society. The surveillance function has further been divided into two (Dominick *supra*). There are warning or beware surveillance and instrumental surveillance. Warning surveillance is similar to the one postulated by Harold Lasswell in 1948. This occurs when the newspaper, radio or television inform us about imminent threats, erupting volcano, drought or other disaster such as the Tsunami flood disaster of December, 2004; depressed economic conditions; possible attacks in the Bakkasssi Peninsula; insurgency and counter insurgency in the Niger Delta area. Instrumental surveillance is concerned with the transmission of news and information that is beneficial to the people such as news of new film or video in town, new fashion in vogue, new products, recipes, stock market

prices etc.

One of the beauties of the modern media of mass communication especially, the electronics is that news travels faster than imagined in the traditional setting. An event can be relayed live almost simultaneously as it is happening. A good example was the Persian Gulf War, which was relayed live in 1990. The same thing happened in 1998 when the Nigerian Head of State, General Sani Abacha died. In less than 24 hours, the news had been broadcast, first by *Channel* television station in Lagos and later by others. As mentioned earlier, the first function, surveillance of the environment, refers to the information and news-providing function of mass communication. Events at the national and international scenes are beamed to us on daily basis. In times of national crises (a national drought, for example) one of the important functions of the media is to inform people what is expected of them, thereby minimizing confusion and contributing to social order. The reporter's main duty is to inform us through a structured, clear and concise straight news story, starting with the who, what, when and where of an event and proceeding toward the end, placing factual details in descending order of interest and importance. "He is to hold a mirror up to an event to show its surface". A few reporters also interpret news, explain and clarify complex events. The information function requires that the media should provide a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context, which gives them meaning. As information media, radio and television are primarily useful in signaling events,

making the immediate and usually sketchy reports that announce a happening. Newspapers place more emphasis on information. Hence the abundance of news stories, interpretative articles and editorials, photographs and other material in their content. Newspapers also advise, guide, persuade and influence their readers by means of advertisements; and editorials.

This would not have been so if an individual would have to pass such information across the length and breadth of the country. Much as news travels faster in the mass media much more than that of town crier or someone standing at the sentinel could do for imminent dangers, many scholars including Joseph Dominick (supra) have discovered that the speed leads to problems. The problems take the shape of inaccuracies and distortions of news, because mass communication relay information without taking the pains to check their facts as required by the code of conduct of journalism. Misrepresentation in the news is often the result of hasty reporting or misinformation. Yet, such well intentioned stories can quickly spread serious falsehood. On the other hand, sometimes effort to misinform are deliberate, as was true in Nazi Germany when lies were spread about people of certain races and religion. In the Persian Gulf war of 1990, a lot of inaccurate report were broadcast. For example, it was reported that Iraqi cud missiles, which contained nerve gas, had attacked Israel whereas no such attack had occurred. Another report said that Israel had mounted a retaliatory raid against Iraq (Dominick,

1996) whereas no such thing happened. Objectivity cannot but be crucified in journalism sometime especially when journalists refuse to carry a story just because they are prevented for security reasons in times of war.

One would recall for example the hullabaloo raised by the press during the Persian war being discussed in 1991 that they were not allowed to fly in the bombing aeroplanes to see things for themselves, or accompany the soldiers to the theater of war to witness the war by themselves. They complained of having to be briefed by the military information bureau. At one time during the hostilities, the French journalist threaten to boycott reporting news from the war zone to their home news media for the fact that they were not allowed to see things for themselves. Whereas the journalist were prevented to witness the war base on the conventional law that when one's country is at war or its security is threatened one should bow to the will of national interest (Egbon, 1995).

Another consequence of the news coverage by the mass media is that the world has grown too big that no single person can watch or survey it. We therefore rely on the mass media to relay information to us. Unfortunately, however, there is no opportunity to verify the information by ourselves, thus we take for granted what is read in the newspaper, heard over the air and seen on the screen without bothering about the veracity and authenticity of such reports. For instance, human beings were allegedly reported to have walked on the moon. Millions saw it on TV but not many saw it in person but

we took the word of network as a fact. Most of the time we go through other people to confirm information read in the newspaper or heard over television and radio. Since it is difficult to verify the news we read, hear or see on TV, we rely on what others tell us. This goes to confirm the importance of the two step flow theory and n-step flow theory of communication wherein people rely on opinion leaders for information and opinion leaders also have opinion leaders whom they rely on for information. Beside this, the issues of credibility is also in question when we are talking about mass media in our society as a whole. We have to put certain amount of trust in the media that do our surveillance. This trust determines which medium people find the most believable. Prior to the inauguration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari's democratic government in Nigeria in 1979,

many people held *Daily Times* credible and took whatever they read for granted.

The newspaper began to lose credibility when reader noted that its stories were being slanted to favour government.

On the dysfunctional side, media surveillance can result in needless anxiety. In 1992, the Nigeria media reported a likely breakup of the country following the annulment of the presidential election believed to have been won by Social Democratic Party candidate, Chief M.K.O. Abiola of Yoruba tribe. The print media coined many words and beat drums of war. The fear created then led many people of other tribes particularly the

Easterners to flee the North and South West for their home land for possible reprisal attack, the irony of it is that many of the people perished in automobile accident on their way.

More needless anxiety was created in 2002 when the media publicized the emergence of a killer disease in China, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and its spread to other nations of the world. Figure of victims were inflated and the news was carried as if the disease originated in Nigeria or has caught up with all Nigerians. This news created a lot of anxiety and sleepless night for many Nigerians. On November 16, 2002, *ThisDay*, a Nigerian newspaper published on page 50 of the edition a story that infuriated the muslim community in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria concerning the upcoming Miss World beauty contest in Abuja. The news story was a prologue to a cover story which linked the Holy Prophet Mohammed to the contest. Also, cannot but remember a press war fought on the pages of the newspaper before the actual physical firing of the first shot, which precipitated Nigeria's civil war, between 1967-1970.

Historians equally say newspapers have instigated, supported, and justified wars. they cite the 1870-71 FrancoPrussian war, the Spanish America war of 1898, and the Vietnam war of 1955-75. Many businessmen, scientists, entertainment stars, and politicians have come to grief over a scandal publicized in newspaper. In the famed Watergate scandal of the mid-1970's, investigative journalism set off a series of events that forced U.S President

Richard M. Nixon to resign. Yes, for good or for bad, the press can be a mighty power to reckon with. Beside, in the year 2004, media publicity given to *Indomie Instant Noodles* that the product killed a customer, Mr Oluyemi Moritiwon who ate it late night nearly sent the manufacturers of the product, De-United Foods Industry Limited parking from Nigeria. The report was over bloated that it created anxiety and panic in parents especially those with children in boarding schools. Many parents had to travel very far to warn their children against eating or buying the products. The National Agency for Food, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) closed down the two factories of the company in Nigeria, one at Ota Ogun State and the other at Choba in Portharcourt, Rivers State. The Special Adviser to the president on Manufacturing and Private Sector Alhaji Ahmed Abdukadir visited one of the factories at Choba Portharcourt for inspection. It was discovered after investigation and laboratory test that the product did not cover all the manufactured *Indomie* but the batch that was produced within a particular month. The factories were later re-opened. But the Nigerian media did not consider the impact of such reports.

On the international scene, in 1993, the media publicized the charges of a man who sued two cellular phone companies because he claimed that cellular phone use caused brain cancer. The publicity frightened the several millions of people using mobile phones even though there was no scientific proof. Many subscribers besieged the manufacturers with questions. The stock of *Motorola*, the

largest maker of cellular phones, dropped considerably in the wake of the scare {Dominick (supra)}.

However, journalists must contend with unreliable news sources. At times, hoaxes are fed to the press. In 1999, a prankster planted a fake news story about "a cemetery amusement park," backing it up with an eye-catching Web site of a phony development company and a phone line for interviews, which the deceiver used to pose as a company spokesman. The Associated Press wire service failed to detect the ruse, whereupon many daily papers in the United States carried the story. The secret of successful hoaxes is said to be "a provocative story with great visuals that's outrageous yet plausible."

The media can also raise false hopes. Sometimes in the year 2003, it was widely reported that, a possible cure for AIDS had been discovered in Nigeria. A Nigerian medical doctor, Dr. Jeremiah Abalaka was said to have developed a curative drug. The news media gave so much publicity to this story, which had given many Nigerians succour and hope of a cure to the dreaded disease. The Federal Government later debunked the claim as lacking scientific proof.

The Mass media are supposed to report facts but many times, the media engage in rumour mongering and gossiping. A case in point was the rumour in many Nigerian soft magazines before the death of Chief (Mrs.) Stella Obasanjo, wife of the president that she did not have a child or that the only child she had was an imbecile. Nigerians got to know the truth during the death and funeral of

the first lady (October 23-27, 2005) when her child appeared handsomely on the screen and spoke intelligently at the federal executive council meeting.

Another interesting aspect of mass media in the society is the assumption that mass media do and can make a less important person become important by constant coverage of such a person. A theory was developed around this claim. In mass communication, we call this status conferral theory meaning that the media can make a person a celebrity. The audience also believes that if one really matters in the society, he will be a focus of mass media attention. As a result of this, many individuals and groups go to extreme measures to get media coverage for themselves and their causes so that this status-conferral effect will occur. This is exactly what politicians and aspiring political candidates do in Nigeria. Prior to election, politicians look for media men to launch them into limelight. Many of these people are unaware of the power of the media to build and destroy, to make and unmake people. The Nigerian media made General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), former military president of Nigeria popular. In 1993, when the general appeared to be vacillating on the handing over plan to a democratically elected government, the media began a campaign of calumny against him. He was no longer the fine IBB of yester years, he immediately became to the media, an evil genius and dictator. Media can also confer status on dead persons. A good example was the six Igbo traders believed to have been murdered by the police in one of the

extra-judicial killings by the force in Abuja in July 2005. The deceased were immediately turned heroes by the media. The various examples above are a testimony to the power of the press to build or tear the society apart.

INTERPRETATION

On Lasswell's correlation function, the mass media select and interpret information about the environment. The mass media do not supply just facts and data but provide detailed analysis on information already relayed. The mass media provide information on the ultimate meaning and significance of those events. Interpretation, comment and opinion functions are performed by the mass media through articles, editorials, features, and cartoons, to shed more light on issues and discussion on radio and television about political, economic or social events. Our attitudes and opinions about political figures, for instance are often influenced by the impression we receive from the mass media. The media serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism of common carriers in the reaction of public discussion on the few stories carried among several selected by the gate keepers in the mass media. The interpretative function is done to add to the repertoire of knowledge of readers, listeners and viewers. Thus, columnists and newsmen use the opportunity to explain why events occurred and what facts meant. Apart from straightjacket news in newspapers and magazines, a great deal of information in the print media is devoted to interpretation. They clarify,

explain and place facts in a meaningful context. As a matter of fact these are the *raison d'être* of thousands of articles and editorials in newspapers and magazines. Magazine's interpretative function is greater. Magazines place events in a national perspective. Magazines are chiefly devoted to fleshing out the information and carefully analyzing stories treated in passing in the broadcast media and newspaper. Because of the wide-spaced deadlines to fashion articles, magazine writers are able to interpret events in the best way possible. The long periods that go into the writing of magazine articles afford it opportunity to perform interpretative function.

As earlier mentioned, interpretation is not confined to editorials. Articles devoted to analysis of the causes behind a particular event or a discussion of implications of a new government policy are examples of the interpretation function. On many occasions the government has increased the price of gasoline (petrol) in Nigeria. On each occasion there has been national strike called by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). The mass media have not stopped to shed light on the increase of fuel to make government realize the impact of such increase on the cost of living particularly transportation, prices of food, house rent and consumption. When the president or a state governor makes a state broadcast, commentators either in the form of scholars or public commentators are called to comment and shed more light on what the president 'said' or the governor really meant! At special events such as sporting activity,

political conventions and elections, commentators are on hand to interpret for us the meaning behind what is going on. After the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, radio and television stations in Nigeria brought in scores of experts to analyze the consequence of the action of the government. In Lagos (Nigeria) Ray Power radio and AIT television (both private stations) are noted for always consulting experts to shed light on topical issues as part of interpretative function for further discussion on government policies in a programme popularly known as *KAKAAKI*. Beside editorials and articles, editorial cartoons are another popular means of interpreting issues. *The Punch*, a Nigerian front line newspaper is famous for its *Omoba* cartoon, which comes out daily with enlightening cartoon on topical issues. Same goes for other Nigerian newspapers. Some media also employ critics to rate motion pictures, films, books, and records. Some newspapers and magazines review restaurants, cars, architecture and even religious services. Campaign managers and public relations campaigners work towards garnering favourable interpretation either for their candidate or a product.

C O N S E Q U E N C E O F I N T E R P R E T A T I V E F U N C T I O N O F M E D I A

One positive function of interpretative function of mass media is that the individual is exposed to a large number of different points of view, probably far more than he or she could come in contact with, through personal channels. As a result, a person can

evaluate all sides of an issue before taking position. Additionally, the media make available to the individual a wide range of expertise that he or she might not have access to through interpersonal channel. At the inauguration of the National Political Reform Conference held in Nigeria between February and April 2005 the broadcast media held so many discussion programmes on the national question in Nigeria. Different type of experts such as political scientists, economists, sociologists, communication specialists, geographers, war veterans and politicians were brought together to further enlighten the public on the issue at stake. A negative aspect of this function is that any criticism, of an individual, organization, or group may also affect the views of others about the media or mass medium involved. Sometimes in the year 2004, the police discovered a shrine in Okija, a town in Anambra State (Nigeria) where human beings were sacrificed to a deity. The news was regularly splashed on the pages of newspapers that it became agenda of discussion for a long time. Notwithstanding the enormity of this act, people of Igbo extraction in the Eastern part of Nigeria began to view the media publicity as people who did not understand the culture of Igbo people and for that stigmatized the media as south west media. Another serious negative aspect of the interpretative function is that an individual may find it difficult to form his own opinion on any issue. Where such a person relies heavily on media messages, he or she soon loses his or her critical thinking ability. Our

colonial Governor- General, Lord Lugard in 1913, had long identified this as the problem of Nigerian readers. It is still the same thing today. At many newsstands, it is common to see a group of free readers debating topical issues, citing what one mass medium or the other has carried on the issue as the basis of argument. Anyone with contrary view outside what the medium publishes is not respected or considered not to be abreast with issue of the moment.

LINKAGE

One function that the mass media perform today is linkage function. By linkage, the mass media are able to join together by interpersonal channels different elements of society that are not directly connected. One of these is the mass advertising "attempts to link the needs of buyers with the products of sellers". Legislators in Abuja read newspapers and tune to local radio stations to know the feelings of their constituencies and share in their feelings. Before the year 2003 presidential election, one of the budgetary allocations passed by members of that National Assembly was constituency project. The president was initially reluctant but he was later forced to dance to the tune of parliamentarians after several months of face-off between the legislature and the executive. Voters, in turn, learned about the effort being made in the year 2002 by members of House of Representatives under the leadership of Alhaji Ghali Na'aba, the radical speaker of the House to impeach the president through newspapers, TV and radio. Effort by the defunct **Comet**

newspaper in Nigeria to raise money for the *Tsunami* 2004 survivors in Asia in January 2005 is another example of this linkage function. The needs of the survivors of the wave matched with the desires of others who wished to see the homeless survivors back to normal condition. Dominick has also identified another linkage, which he says occurs when geographically separated groups that share a common interest are linked by the media. He cites the outbreak of hostilities in the Persian Gulf in 1990 as a good example. He says media coverage of the war linked together a whole world concerned about the safety of their friends and relatives in the armed forces. Media usage, says Dominick, reached record levels during the war as people turned to TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines to read and hear about the latest war news. The same thing happened towards the end of year 2004 when Nigerian newspapers began to carry reports of deliberate killing of people in the Darfur region in Sudan. The news reports linked Nigeria to the region to the extent that Nigerians began to call for end to the genocide. The call of the media attracted President Olusegun Obasanjo, who incidentally was the chairman of African Union (AU). The president brokered peace and got the matter resolved in a round table.

The various message boards on the Internet or commercial online companies such as America online and Prodigy have all served the purpose of linkage. Interested members could open the Internet, and also leave message for others to see. One of such boards as noted by Dominick is

Relictnet, a site that links potential charitable donors to charitable organizations looking for help. There are other sites that can link interested subscribers to concert and entertainers. The mass media can also create new social groups by linking members of society that were not previously recognized with others that have similar interests. Dominick says this is "public-making" ability of the mass media. In the movie network, for example, renowned newscaster, Howard Beal was cited as urging people to stand up for their rights by shouting. The people responded to the call by throwing open their windows and shouting throughout the night. Subsequently, an organized "I 'm-not-going-to-take-it-any-more" movement grew out of the protest. Thus, a new group has been formed, with the media as linkage (Dominick, 1996). Similarly, the media in Nigeria were instrumental to the formation of many social right movements at the wake of the annulment of 1993 presidential election in Nigeria.

The linkage function of the media is also noted at another level. Certain fashion or dresses put on by people are done to advertise feelings so that others with similar concerns might 'link up' with them. People who wear T-shirts and ladies who wear trousers, mini skirts, 'jumper', 'body hog' are believed to have copied this style of dressing from foreign films watched on television. Such ladies have been 'linked up' by the media.

One positive consequence of the linkage function is that societal groups can be mobilized quickly. But again, it has negative impact. In 1983, Ondo

State radio was used to incite the people against the election result that nullified the incumbent governor. The protest match led to killings, arson and destruction of life and properties of political opponents in Akure, the state capital and elsewhere. Similarly, persons with anti social interests can be linked easily. Women and girls of antisocial interests on television copied the type of dressing mentioned earlier, which is in vogue in Nigeria today. Some ladies are almost appearing naked and some are known to have enticed men with this type of dress. At a point, right-thinking members of the society began to criticize the mode of dressing. Many institutions of higher learning had to design a code of dressing to stop the debasement of societal value. Media attention to violent films, terrorists, and other extremist groups might prompt others in the same direction, too.

TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Lasswell (1948) has noted that one of the functions of mass communication is the transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to the next. This refers to the media's ability to communicate norms, rules and values of a society. The media provide cultural guidelines and help teach the citizens of a society how to live, how to behave and what is expected of them through various programmes that are put before the public (Egbon, 1995). As a teacher, society uses the mass media to pass the social heritage. Indeed communication systems are a force for bringing about cultural change as pointed out by

Harold Adams Innis. Communication systems make for stability, since they always tend to purvey the values and beliefs of the society in which they operate. Media content in Nigeria as in the United States is coloured by traditional values. On the other hand, communication systems also bring about change, since they are one means by which the existing order is challenged. Thus, on the one hand, they tend to maintain the *status quo*, on the other hand, they disrupt it.

Just as the media can be compared to the council of chiefs, elders council in the village environment, so it can be compared to the institutions of home, church and school in its task as a teacher. This role is the socialization function in which an individual comes to adopt the behaviour and values of a group. The mass media present portrayals of our society, and by watching, listening, and reading, we learn how people are supposed to act and what values are important and permissive. Most of the time the mass media, especially television, show men and women who dress in the local attire, appearing decent, cheerful and colourful. Sometimes certain drama may be shown where children clearly demonstrate that they have etiquette in form of greetings, and the way they attend to visitors, elders and the type of dressing they put on. In the primitive age, there were storytellers, and singers who taught societal values, customs, mores and norms. But today, the mass media are the equivalents of the storytellers and singers who were the earliest media of information and entertainers. Television, in particular,

is a critical force in the socialization of children in most societies. This is more so in the United States, Canada, Britain and other advanced countries where children spend more time watching television than schooling. Schafer and Lamm (1997) have noted that apart from sleeping, watching television is the most time-consuming activity of young people in the United States of America.

Mass media transact values by enforcing social norms. Media coverage can ensure that acceptable values of the society are highlighted and upheld by what they choose to emphasize. Not quite long, a mass medium showed a marriage ceremony held in a church where the church minister protested the way and manner the bride dressed to the altar half-naked and warned that such so-called civilized way of dressing will not be condoned in the house of God. This is in consonance with the belief that the media present and clarify the goals and values of society. As a result of wide exposure to television by children, several authors and scholars have warned of possible dysfunctions that might result if television becomes the most important channel of socialization. Violent acts of children have been attributed to violent films, movies and programmes watched on television. There is the belief that such films depicting violence could prompt youngsters to want to believe that what they watched on the 'tube' is real. In 1985, the government of General Muhammed Buhari banned foreign films that tended toward violence on the Nigerian television stations.

During the 1970's the media was always showing leading female

characters in prime-time TV as housewife and law enforcement officers. No other occupation came close to these two in frequency of portrayal. If she had no other sources of countervailing information, a girl growing up in the subsequent decades might have been socialized into believing that the two career choices available when she grew up were to get married or to become a cop [Dominick (supra)]. In Nigeria, television shows such as family '*Ile-Alayo*' meaning 'Good home' is one of the programmes that promote values such as etiquette and family harmony. Many children's programmes are also designed to encourage behaviours, which are considered appropriate in a given society. The media are educational instruments, perhaps the most powerful one we have. Though there is divergent opinion about the matter but the media meet this requirement quite naturally. In general, most news columns, editorial pages, magazine articles, films, radio and television shows and feature, films tend to support and reinforce the accepted goals and values of the society. However, in countries like United States of America, questions have been raised as to how much should the media concern itself with the private life of people. Dominick reported that when newspapers reporters kept presidential primary candidate Gary Hart under surveillance and revealed his relationship with a young woman, questions were raised about how much of a politician's private life should be open to scrutiny. Same happened over media reports concerning the private life of Virginia Senator Charles Robb

(1991-1992) and again in 1993 over media reports of sexual indiscretions on the part of President Bill Clinton of USA when he was still governor of Arkansas. These allegations of sexual indiscretions will not mean anything in the Nigerian society because it is part of our culture to marry more than one wife. For president of a country like Nigeria to show interest in a girl many families would wish to offer their daughters to the president as wives, if he so wish.

ENTERTAINMENT

The entertainment function according to Wright (1960) refers to the "communicative acts primarily intended for amusement irrespective of any instrumental effects they might have". It refers to the media's ability to present messages that provide escapism and relaxation. Apart from information and news-providing function of mass communication among other things, the media in any society serves the purpose, which the storytellers and jesters of yester years perform. Motion pictures, sound recording and some books are devoted primarily to entertainment. Similarly, newspapers include comics, word puzzles, games, advice, gossip, humour and general entertainment feature in their content to amuse readers or to task the brain of readers in solving crossword puzzles. Television ranks the highest in terms of entertainment media. In the evening, television entertains viewers with drama, play, films with which one is able to relax the tension of the day. Some of these dramas entertain as well as teach new value system.

Newspapers and magazines are more informative in nature. Magazines are more into serious information. Movie making and broadcasting are commonly referred to as entertainment industries, amusing the public is their acknowledged primary function. Through entertainment the media are capable of creating folk heroes. Although many of the media stations have been blamed for being parasitic in the sense that whatever succeeds in on medium is often taken over by others e.g. *Superstory* which is being aired by almost all television stations in Nigeria now. Entertainment also has a powerful appeal; majority of the broadcast audience expects television and radio to entertain. Entertainment is necessary to provide the relief to enable human beings to face the demands of life in general. People need to relax. Television is a medium of escape.

Some observers believe that media entertainment offers a safety valve for "pantry aggressions and aberrant impulses" and consequently performs a useful social function. Others yet believe that comic books will serve the emotional needs of children. It has equally been argued by other researchers that entertainment has persuasive powers. It is believed that entertainment can influence the minds of men and this is the major reason for censorship fear. There is great fear that entertainment could lead to corruption of mind at least going by the violent films on the television. Many also believe that entertainment on the media threatens allegiance to the state, corrupt morals and disables the natural good taste of the public. Radio

and television content affords a variety of lures. Social contact, counsel in daily living, self-glorification, escape from boredom are some of the menu served by the broadcast media. In the 1980's the Nigerian Television Authority network was filled with many dramas such as 'cock crow at dawn' 'village headmaster' and a host of others. All these appealed to mass audience and teach a lot of things about Nigerian culture.

Critics have however, argued that entertainment provided by the mass media encourage passivity on the part of audience. The argument is that rather than allowing people to develop the habit of entertaining themselves, the mass media make them on lookers or spectators without allowing participation. Rather than learn to act drama, narrate stories or engage in moonlight folklore, many of us now prefer to listen to records of someone else playing or flick on the TV set, watch entertainment, which does not require any effort on our part. As a result, critics say the mass media will eventually turn modern society to societies of watchers and listeners instead of doers.

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