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CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION OF THE MEDIA IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF MALI AND NIGERIA

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Abstract

Media outlets in any country require a policy or a constitutional guide to regulate its operations so that both the media and government agencies as well as members of the society can work towards achieving a common goal. This underscores the importance of a national communication policy. Constitutional provisions of the media is an act of legislation which gives the media industries the right to freedom of expression, the right to information and opinions, without restrictions. Every country in Africa has its media policies which bind the operations of the media. This study tries to do a comparative analysis of the constitutional provisions of the media in Nigeria and Mali using the democratic participation theory. This study adopted the library research approach in doing the comparison. Findings show, that the media and security agencies possess a strong mutual distrust and there is no relationship between the two agencies. It was therefore recommended that there should be full recognition and implementation of the right of the press especially the right to information and expression in both countries and the press should be seen by security agencies as the watchdog.

Keywords: Constitution, Media, right to information, freedom of expression, communication policy.

Introduction

For growth, industrialisation, change, organisation, urbanisation and modernisation to take place in any society information dissemination and proper communication is the basic key that foresters the transformation and development in that society (Okpoko, 2010). In other words, for there to be development in a society or a country, then there must be the flow of information from the leaders or government with members of the society through the channel of communication that is accessible by all members of the society. In most African countries, the importance of the mediated communication cannot be detached from how the media was used as one of the major tools used to get their independence and liberation from colonial masters. To harness the different media outlets in any country, there is need for a policy or a constitution guide to regulate the operations so that the media and the government agencies

as well as members of the society can work towards achieving a common goal. This underscores the importance of a national communication policy.

Momoh (2003) affirms that, the basic purpose of a national communication policy and its code of conduct is to see how the mass media can be used to achieve accelerated growth and transformation of the society. Different spheres and at different levels of national life could only be achieved through deliberate and coherent use of the mass communication with a lay down policy that is important for the media. This document will play a distinguished role in the establishment and furtherance of a desirable new social order in post-colonial society. Therefore, the need for constitutional framework or a policy to guide the models of operation of the media within the African countries is very necessary to be put in place.

A constitution is a guiding principle according to laws/rules which a nation, state, organization or any of such like is being governed. It becomes the supreme law which states the regulations and the fundamental laws of the state or an organization. Ewelukwa (2004), see it as a charter or the blue print that defines as well as spelt out the way a people should be ruled. With the kind of constitution, one should be able to know the kind of government a country would have, the level of power and authority the government will exercised over and the right, privileges and duties of the citizens. The constitution gives the framework within which both the government and members of the society operates within that geographical location to which it could be referred to as a democracy state. Ekpo (2017) in his view assent that the constitution is the mother and bedrock of all laws, amending or changing some of its strategic provisions is more often than not as every polity for it is defined by the structure, system/form of government laws and demerit and external characters of the state.

Citing the quote of Machiavelli;

> *there is nothing more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous to carry through than initiating changes in a state's constitution. The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new. There support is lukewarm partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the existing laws on their side, and partly because men are generally incredulous, never really trusting new things unless they have tasted their by experience* (Ekpo, 2017).

Democracy has different definitions from the perception of scholars as a system of government where the citizens exercise power directly by electing or choosing their representatives from among themselves to discuss on issues relating to them in an organization or in form of a governing body. Democratic society can only flourish if the citizens fully enjoy the freedom that is associated with it, their basic rights and above all the freedom of speech and expression are not taken away but are subject only to some reasonable restrictions which has to do with the regulations of human conducts and reconciliation of the interest of the individuals within the member society to that of the community (Okon 2018).

The place of the media in a democratic society

According to the United States Agency for International Development (**USAID**) the media are parts of the civil society arena, connections and functional areas of national democracy. It

propagates the rule of law and as well as government policies to the society. For every support the media may give to government activities, the expected result always yield positive results as issues that are related to decentralization, anti-corruption, healthcare system and citizen participation in the policy process.

According to the International Media Support (2013) affirms that for the media to carry out its duties very well then the rule of law must be institutionalized, supporting the independence of the media that will keeps a check on the judiciary and have free right to reports on the courts. This will promotes a legal enabling environment suitable for press freedom and the people thereby bringing the judiciary closed to the people. Free and fair elections conducted through transparent processes require the media sector both private and government to gives all the candidates equal access, and reports the relevant issues on a timely base with an objective manner not with fault findings (Abayomi, 2003).

The access to information reach and information gathering is an essential point of democracy with the media ensuring that members of the society are responsible to the laws and as well as be informed of government policies rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation (Isika, 2018). Therefore, full right should be given to the media to plays the role of mediating between the society and the government. Serving as a checking point of the government as well as to ensure that the elected person uphold the oaths of the office and duly exercised the wishes of those that elected them. It is of very important that the relationship and constitutional provision as it relates to the freedom of the media is healthy in order to fulfils its fundamental functions in the society as the fourth estate.

Okpoko (2012) opines that for the society to survive and development to take place, the system of communication through which the people share and exchange symbols must be improved. The mass media must have some level of clarity on the day-to-day activities as the audience depends on the media to make their achievements. Adding that individual engaged in a deliberate attempt to depend on the media to know how to change, maintain and avoid conflicts areas such as traffic, war, etc. but fundamental, they connection to media in order to know the activities of the society they live in.

Statement of the Problem

The media is the linking that closed the gap between the government policies and the society (Daniel, 2017) through its functions of surveillance, entertainment, educating, correlation, etc and to achieve these fundamental objectives as the fourth estate of the realm. There is need for not only a constitutional provision but also a free hand of operation for the media in information gathering and information reach from government agencies or any individual as well as the privates sector. There has been argument on the access to information. The rich has been accused of hiding information from the poor. The inequality in information access has be devilled the society

The question is how true the freedom of speech or expression of the media in African media practices or it is just an act of constitutional document or an act of implementation, how free is the media to carry out its fundamental right to the society. It is based on these arguments that the study seeks to investigate the constitutional provision of the media in selected African states.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to examine the constitutional provision of the media, the right to true and correct information dissemination. The study sought to:

1. Determine impact of constitutional provision to media practice in Mali and Nigeria
2. Consider the right of the media as it is in Mali and Nigeria
3. Compare the level of difference in media operation and constitutional provision in Mali and Nigeria.

Methodology

The research method adopted for this study is the case studies research approach. This method involves the systematic method of gathering information either through the secondary sources or primary sources. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) are of the view that it is a systematic method of investigating individuals, group, organisation or events with a detail way of explanation of a phenomenon. Ndiyo (2010) affirmed that it is a detailed description and method of analysing a single person, events, institutions or communities as it is concerned with significant issues in the history development of a thing.

Theoretical framework

The Democratic Participant Media Theory

Dennis McQuail propounded this theory in the year 1987. The theory is said to be a response to the perceived failure of the liberal theory of communication. The theory advocates the right to communicate to all citizens either as individuals or as groups, and holds that the media must serve the needs of all its audiences. Okpoko (2012) affirms that this theory advocates for individual citizens and minority groups have the right of access to media, the right to communicate through the media and the right to be served by media according to their own needs. Furthermore, the organisation structure and content of the media should not be subject to centralised political or state bureaucratic control (McQuail, 2010). Essentially the media should be allowed to exert their powers without the responsibility of any political individual using it to shield the freedom of the press thereby not giving room for accountability.

Although the democratic participant media theory advocates the idea that media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for media organisations, professionals or the clients of media; groups, organisations and local communities should have their own media (McQuail, 2010). The real situation is that most mass media exist to make profit and are in the hands of a few individuals who own not only one medium in one country but tens of media in more than one continent. Hasan (2016) affirms that the theory represents a challenge to the reigning theories and merits separate identification. Adding that, the needs, interest and aspiration of the active the media receive in a political society. The theory is more concerned on the right to information reach and information poor, the right to reply and refute; the right to use all means of communication for interaction in the small-scale setting of the community.

The main tenets of this theory aim to achieve an effective participative democracy through information, giving people free access to the media, giving people's wishes and needs priority in media production, reducing the ever increasing professionalism which dilutes the content of the messages and hinders an effective communication process with genuine feed-back from taking place. Okpoko (2016) posit that democratic participant media advocates are of the

opinion that "small scale, interactive and participative media forms, are better than large scale, one way, professionalised media; certain social needs relating to mass media are not adequately expressed through individual consumer demands, nor through the state and its major institutions.

Freedom of Expression and Democracy

Many scholars believed that freedom of speech is a privilege to be enjoyed and on the other hand, the government sees it as a problem that needs to be dealt with (Ifedayo, 2003). Graber (1989: 27) cited by Daniel, (2018) has it that in democratic society official control of the content of mass media is deemed unnecessary for tight control of the media can deter the freedom of expression which is the key for the flourishing of democracy. If this be the case, the mass media business will be open to people that are representing a wide range of political views accepting that the mass media becomes the fountain of ideas of a few and will not enables public participation. This will not enhances competition among the channels, that is, newspapers, magazines, radio and television where each media generates various viewpoints. Nevertheless, if some media attack the government, other media will support it with positive and negative as well as right and wrong information in order to balance out. It will further implies that the government is for the people and by the people" is the function of the right to make one voices heard.

Ewelukwa (2004) postulates that, the right to freedom of expression and the democratic system has a directly proportional relationship. Based on this rights, one is able to speak out, get information, vote and be voted for, shape government policies and hold it to account, thereby influencing our environment. It is only in a democratic system that can provides the social, political and economic conditions for this right to be effectively exercised. When the society system is more democratic, it will automatically increase the effective capacity of individuals to exercise their right to freedom of expression, but if there is, an increase in the checks of what is being said and who say what then it might have a democratic society only in pretty proclamations. There cannot be democracy without freedom of expression and there is no freedom of expression where there is no democracy. In this sense, individual freedom of expressions' rights and democracy has fractal structures, where the micro and macro structures reflect one another. In a democracy state, the right for freedom of expression involves also the right of freedom of artistic expression, the mass media and academic freedom (Okpoko, 2012). This theory is relevant to our study in the sense that the constitutional policies only work in a democracy society and the need to break the boundaries not just proclamation but implementation. The importance of the study of Freedom of expression and democracy policies to the development of a country cannot be over stressed.

Constitutional provision of the media in African countries

Mali

The Mali Federation gained independence from France on the 20th of June, 1960 and the withdrawal of Senegal from the federation in August 1960 it became the Independence Republic of Mali on the 22nd of September 1960 with the independence day as September 22, 1960. The first original Malian constitution was abrogated on the 6th of December 1968 after a military coup d'état and replaced by a new fundamental law. A new constitution was later adopted in 1974 after a referendum on the 2nd of June 1974. The said constitution lasted up to 1991 after the overthrow of Moussa Traore by a coup d'état. In August 1991, a new

constitution was approve with 98% percent of voting by members by another referendum and signed in to law on the 12th of January 1992.

In the Constitution, the freedom of expression is guaranteed under Title 1 and covers rights and duties of human dignity. Article 4 states that: every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship, opinion, expression, and creation in respect to the law". While Article 7 recognises and guarantees the freedom of the media, Freedom of press is recognised and guaranteed. The right of access to information was not mention and Press freedom is subjected to conditions that are defined by the law. It gives cognisance to international law as well as a national media policy. It also gives power to the courts to assess constitutionality of media law with no right to reply giving accession to two international agreements relevant to media which is the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights accession 1974 and the African Charter accession 1983.

Laws and regulations on licensing media

Newspapers or other periodicals are required by law to be registered with the Court of First Instance. There are measures or scope for administrative sanctions against journalists and the media agencies that go against the laws. The Ministry of Territorial Administration is authorised to ban any media outfit that it deems or sees as an endangerment to national unity, but there are criteria for such bans. For television stations, the Minister of Communication and that of Interior are jointly responsible for granting authorisation for broadcast licensing and such decision is to be carried out within fifteen days from the date of the said application. Failure to respond to an application within 15 days equates to an approval of the license, which is renewable after three years (Article 7).

Laws on Ownership

In the year 2000, laws on who is to own a media outlet in Mali was signed into law giving only Malian the right of ownership (Article 11 of Law N°00-046/AN-RM of July 7th, 2000). Stating that, any publication that is published outside of the country is referenced as foreign. Therefore, only Malian can be granted with the license to operate a private radio and television stations. The law also has a framework for state-subsidy of private media and adding that government has a duty to assist media industries that contributes to the implementation of the right to information.

Nigeria

Nigeria became a formal independent federation on October 1, 1960 with Elizabeth II as normal head of state and Queen of Nigeria. Nnamdi Azikiwe was replaced as the Colonial Governor-General in November 1960. The federation was established a federation republic with Azikiwe as its first president and the first election held in 1965. In 1966 a military coups which was the first took place in January 1966. Nigeria over time has had different constitutions between 1914 – 1960 could refereed as the Colonial era right from the days of Lord Lugard to date. Uglagbe (2018) avers that in the era of Lord Lugard's constitution was between 1914 – 1922, with the provision for a single governor and commander in chief for the whole country. This era was followed by the Clifford Constitution of 1922 – 1946. This constitution was promoted and architect in by Sir Clifford who replaces Lord Lugard as the governor-general.

From 1946 – 1951 there was another constitution which was referred to as the Richard's Constitution which was also a brained work of Sir Arthur Richard who succeeded Sir Bourdilon as the governor of Nigeria. Uglagbe (2018) affirmed that although there was an area in the constitution that need reforms which the press was one of the major reforms for which Sir Bourdilon proposed to reform before he was removed as the governor. It was in 1951 to 1954 that Nigerians were giving the first opportunity to express themselves on the type of constitution that they wanted and this era was known as the Macpherson constitution of 1951 – 1954.

The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 to 1958 was mark with meaningful fair and was working smoothly and this constitution was the brain work of Lyttleton (Uglagbe, 2018b). Citing Joye and Igweike, Uglagbe (2018) affirmed that there was yet another constitution which was referred to as the Robertson constitution which was between 1958 to 1960 which was also known as the independence constitution. This constitution was based on a conference that was convened in London in the year 1958 with 114 delegates in attendance.

In 1960 another constitution was drafted by the British Order in Council with Queen Elizabeth II as titular head of government. The second constitution established the country as a federal republic and in October, 1963 on its third anniversary as a nation it was adopted. This constitution was based on the Westminster system, in 1979 the Westminster constitutional system and the American system of presidential system with a direct election with federal character of the nation but in 1993 another constitution was return to have a democratic rule but was not fully implemented because of military coup, taking over power till 1999 with another constitution that restored democratic system of governance with Olusegun Obasanjo as the president (Ekpo, 2017, Daniel, 2018).

The 1999 Constitution provides for a Bill of Rights which guarantees a set of civil and political liberties including the right to freedom of expression and the press. In terms of Article (391): Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.

Laws and regulations on licensing media in Nigeria

Section 22 of the Constitution states that the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people. Also, the Freedom of Information Act 2011 states that: Notwithstanding anything contained in any other Act, law or regulation, the right of any person to access or request information, whether or not contained in any written form, which is in the custody or possession of any public official, agency or institution however described is established.

Laws on ownership

Article 39 specifies: (2) Without prejudice to the generality of sub article (1) of this article, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions provided that no person, other than the Government of the Federation or of a State or any other person or body authorised by the President on the fulfilment of conditions laid down by an Act of the National Assembly shall own, establish or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever.

Furthermore, nothing in this section shall invalidate any law that is reasonable justifiable in a democratic society.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that there are constitution provisions of the media in African countries as all are practicing democracy system of government. This means that the press should be allow like other democratic state to operate as the fourth man. This answers research question one (RQ1) (**determine impact of constitutional provision to media practice in Mali and Nigeria**). Article 7 of the Malian constitution and section 22 of the Nigerian constitution both recognised and guarantee the freedom of the media, freedom of the press which includes both the print media, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media which shall uphold the fundamental of the press. This agrees with Balan (2010) that the access to information reach and gathering is an essential point of democratic society where information of government policies are been known by members of the community.

To answer research question two (RQ2) **(consider the right of the media as it is in Mali and Nigeria**). Generally, it is true that the constitution expressly prescribes the freedom and right of the media but it has apparently never been implemented in Mali. This agrees with the reports of International Media Support report of 2013 that both the media and security agencies possess a strong mutual distrust, lack relationship between the thereby leading to the destroying of both public and private radio station, while in Nigeria, the freedom of expression by journalist is been violated by security agencies and journalist continuously face restriction laws even when the 2011 act to information is on ground. The journalists are faced with physical threats and economic pressures thereby devaluing the professional code of conducts.

To answer research question three (RQ3) (**Compare the level of difference in media operation and constitutional provision in Mali and Nigeria on the freedom of the press**). The following compared and there levels of difference were also observed:

s/n	Mali	Nigeria
1	Press freedom is guaranteed and recognised	Freedom of the press is based on responsibility and accountability of the government to the people
2	The rights of access to information are not mentioned and the press freedom is define by laws which does not give a clear supremacy in the constitution in this regard but guarantees equal access for all to own media, specifying that it will be subjected to conditions that shall be determined by an independent body.	Freedom of Information Act 2011 states that, the right of any person to access or request information is guaranteed with regulation whether or not contained in any written form or oral.
3	The constitution gives cognisance to international laws as well as a national policy that is superior to laws of a state, with the right of the court to rule on any constitutional law relating to the media. It does not give right to reply	The constitution does not take into cognisance of any international law but national laws are superior to states laws and like in Mali, it does not give the right to reply
4	The right to practice journalism is only to someone with a possession of a diploma or a degree with at least a year professional experience in newsgathering and	Decree No. 60, 1999 creates a Press Council with a mandate for the accreditation of journalist and must be a holder of a qualification as approved and Article 22 specify a certification of experience.

	dissemination with either public or private media industry and must be resident in Mali.	
5	In Mali, for one to operate or practices as a journalist, he/she you must be licensed from the Press Card Commission with all the members of the commission signing on your identification card and must be from 18 years and above	The constitution does not have this in place in Nigeria and also the age was not mentioned in any form.
6	Article 7 – 9 requires all newspapers or other periodicals to be registered with the Court of First Instance	Decree 60, 1999 requires that all print will be registered through the Press Council with an entitled "Documentation of Newspapers" stating their objectives as well as their mission statement.
7	Decree No. 92-022 of January 18, 1992 determines the conditions for obtaining and suspending private Audio/visual licenses, the Ministers of Communication and the Interior are jointly responsible for granting authorisation for broadcast licenses (Article 5). Such a decision is to be made within 15 days of the application being lodged with the respective ministries. Failure to respond to an application within 15 days equates to an approval of the license which is renewable after three years (Article 7).	Decree of 1992 establishes the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) as the regulatory authority for broadcast. The 1999 Amendment did not substantially change the legislation. In terms of Article 2, the Commission is responsible for: a) advising the Federal Military Government generally on the implementation of the National Mass Communication Policy with particular reference to broadcasting (The Amendment of 1999 removes reference to the military government) etc. Approval of license must come through the minister of Information to the President and Commander in Chief.
8	Members of the board are dominated by state (government) representatives (this indicates that the board is not an independent body giving room to questioning of the combination of members of the board as errant boys).	Members of the board are recommended by the Minister of Information and appointed by the president. (this indicates that the board is not an independent body giving room to questioning of the combination of members of the board as errant boys).
9	Media ownership is restricted to Malian citizens only and any other product outside Mali is seen as foreign. Any publication that is seen as a bypassing is a jail sentence	The law did not spell out any restriction in the ownership of media outfits in Nigeria thereby giving room to any foreigner to operate and run the media industry in Nigeria.
10	Defamation is seen as a criminal matter and harmful content (hate speech and pornography) is punishable by imprisonment	Defamation is seen as a criminal matter and harmful content (hate speech and pornography) is a punishable offense but the law states that it does not apply to television or sound broadcasting (which activities are regulated by licence conditions).
11	There is no law as to coverage of any political programmes	Coverage to all political activities must be given equal attention both on paper and on the broadcasting media. In practices this is not done by government owned station if the programme is of the opposition party.

12	Confidentiality of sources of information is protected by law	The confidentiality of sources of information is protected by the NUJ code of ethics and not by law

Conclusion

Media laws are the legislative regulation and the legal system which the media institutions and individuals within the media industries must comply with. The policies regulate how the laws will be applied to any particular case. The laws vary based on the nation and the society in which they exist. The constitution prescribes what actions are considered permissible within the media by setting standards in which a particular event or case may be influenced the decisions to be taken in the future from the date it is signed into law and these laws must address basic elements that should show that the society is truly a just and democratic society. Respect for the rule of law by giving the media a true freedom of expression will not only lead to a true democratic society but an economically develop society. This can only be achieved when there is a complete freedom of communication or information dissemination, which is a precondition for the attainment of the new world economic order beating in mind that the media is the fourth estate of the realm.

Recommendations

Mali and Nigeria practice the democratic system of governance and the freedom of the press is guaranteed and recognised in their constitution. It is therefore recommended that there should be full recognition and implementation of the rights of the press especially the rights to information and expression in both countries.

As enshrined in both constitutions, it is therefore recommended that the media should be given the full rights to operate without restrictions to information access and information gathering. Security agencies should see the media as partners rather than see them as enemies as they served as the link between the society and their electorates.

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