The Influence of Media Ownership and Control on Media Agenda Setting in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study assessed the influence of media ownership and control on media agenda setting using Nigeria as a case. The core method of data collection in this study was in-depth interview. The sampling methods employed include the Cluster sampling and the purposive sampling since the data expected requires an in-depth knowledge of the Nigerian media landscape. The finding of this study revealed that different levels of government in Nigeria which comprises of state and federal governments, serving and retired high level public and private officials, politicians, as well as influential businessmen and women, own most of the media organizations in Nigeria. It was observed that these groups of people (the ruling elite) are the core "news makers" whose views and opinions populate most of the views, news, opinions and information disseminated in the media in Nigeria. The findings further showed that the current media ownership pattern and the level of media control in Nigeria actually hinder the media from independently setting society's agenda.*

Keywords: *Government, In-depth interview, Media, News, Politicians, Private officials*

1. INTRODUCTION

The media and communication are closely related. It is the ability of the media to give salience, importance or prominence to an issue while de-emphasizing or ignoring others in the process of communication that gives the media its agenda setting capability. The relationship between the media and communication is so inextricable that one cannot begin to appreciate any without knowledge of the other. In contemporary society, the prerequisite for relating to and understanding the wider world have been narrowed to the effective use of information communicated through the media. Moreover, the enormous opportunities available from being part of the global village have become conceivable only because of innovations in information and communication technology which in turn have democratised media information.

A general discussion of the media involves all the communication technologies that brought with it the transformation of the media and paved the way for the remarkable democratization of information today. Among recent developments in information and communication technologies are digital electronic audio and video devices, the World Wide Web (WWW), broadband, social networks, Internet ready devices like smart phones, tablets, as well as mobile internet etc. These modern communication technologies have inadvertently democratised access to information and are today deployed both in Nigeria and elsewhere to facilitate communication and/or information dissemination.

Many media scholars and experts in Nigeria, Africa and indeed around the world agree that the media have some form of impact, influence and/or effect on its audiences. However, the direction, nature and extent of this influence, impact and/or effect remains a source of disagreement. In his own view Edie (2001) noted that the mass media all over the world have established themselves as a new channel - a third channel for political, (social and economic) influence - and in many aspects also as an independent power broker. Thompson (1995) believes that the media have played a central role in the development of modern institutions. In contrast, Kupe (1999) claims that in the African scenario the media have always been peripheral to the lives of most people in the continent. But Tettey (2001) argues strongly that the media are among the forces that have shaped, and continues to define the establishment of democracy in Africa.

Daily, individuals across the globe are constantly exposed to information, ideas, news, advertisements, messages and ideologies from different media sources in the cause of their daily activities. In Nigeria, citizens have access to all sorts of media information ranging from; radio, television, cable and satellite broadcasts, the Internet both broadband and mobile internet, social networks, smart and ordinary mobile phones, digital audio or video devices, newspapers, magazines, periodicals, journals, books, cinemas, etc. One may then ask, why humans of all ages willingly expose themselves to this almost overload of information? One may equally answer that "by its very nature the media helps members of society i.e. (humans) to make sense of their world". In addition, the media also have functional roles in the political, social and cultural structures of society including surveillance by acting as society's watchdog and directing members of society to important societal issues. Olayiwola (1991) explained that the media provides news and sets the agenda for political, social and cultural discourse. It is important to note at this point that the sourcing of news and information in the Nigerian media has its peculiarities. These peculiarities render it incorrect to argue that issues canvassed in the Nigerian media and discussed in the Nigerian public sphere is the agenda of the media. Much of the local news and/or information disseminated in the Nigerian media originate from the ruling class who are referred to in the Nigerian media parlance as "news sources". News sources in Nigeria are dominated by the ruling class or petty bourgeois who are tagged "news makers". This class of individuals includes politicians, business executives, captains of industry, top civil servants and other influential members of the ruling elite whose views and opinions dominate daily news and public information in Nigeria. Interestingly, much of the news content and other media information in Nigeria are mostly populated with the views and opinions of the ruling class tagged "news makers". Consequently, the level of media control by the ruling elite, the emergence of news commercialisation, and the concept of "news making" in Nigeria raises the question, whose agenda is the Nigerian media agenda.

2. THE MEDIA IN NIGERIA: A BRIEF HISTORY

The history of the Nigerian mass media began with the setting up of redistribution centres by the British colonial government to rebroadcast programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for the enjoyment of Her Majesty the Queen's employees in the West African coast. Additionally, newspaper publication began with the setting up of the 'Iwe Iroyin' a vernacular newspaper by the Presbyterian mission in Abeokuta in 1859 by Reverend Henry Townsend. This was followed by newspapers like the Anglo African, Lagos Times, Gold Coast Colony Advertiser, Observer and Lagos Weekly Record etc. established by educated Africans like Robert Campbell, Richard Beale Blaize, John Payne Jackson etc.

Dimkpa (1997) confirms that the second key owners of the media were foreigners who immigrated to Nigeria during the colonial days. These foreigners were mostly Sierra Leoneans and Liberians who were earlier exposed to western education before Nigerians. This group of newspapers were then followed by newspapers like the West African Pilot, Daily Times and the Nigerian Tribune all published by Nigerians like Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo etc. By 1937 no fewer than 51 newspapers had been established in Nigeria signifying the emergence of the first indigenous industrial enterprise. Most of "these newspapers" Dare (2000) observed were founded by men in all sorts and conditions of distress, people who according to Obafemi Awolowo … himself a member of the second generation of pioneers of the press were regarded as the "flotsam and jetsam" of the growing community of Nigeria's intelligentsia. In the 1950s radio and Television stations were established first in the western region of Nigeria which was quickly followed by the eastern region a few years after. Today the Nigerian media landscape is crowded with scores of newspapers, magazines, radio, Television and the new media.

According to Kawonise (2012) there are presently not less than thirty (30) newspapers published daily; the weekly magazines – the serious ones, that is – are about fifteen (15), while the soft sells are not less than fifty (50). Nigeria currently has more than 150 radio and television stations publicly and privately owned. Five (5) of the television stations are on the satellite and are thus watched beyond the shores of the country. Quite a number of the television and radio stations that broadcast on the terrestrial space are available online and could be accessed wherever there is broadband Internet access.

3. MEDIA OWNERSHIP PATTERNS

The ownership of the mass media namely; electronic, print and the new media in Nigeria has different historical origins. Presently however, the electronic and print media in Nigeria appear to have arrived at a similar pattern of ownership. A look at their existing ownership pattern will reveal that there is dual ownership i.e. public ownership or government ownership, as well as private ownership of both the print and electronic media. This ownership pattern therefore involves the ownership of the print and electronic media by private individuals and/or private institutions. There is also the emerging ownership of the electronic media by institutions known as community broadcasting. What is interesting however for some inexplicable reasons is that in some instances the ownership of some media outfits in Nigeria is shrouded in secrecy. Frankly speaking, media ownership in Nigeria is not diaphanous in most cases this is because most precise owners of some media organizations are not always known to the public and, in many cases, the professional journalists serving as directors of such media companies are seen as fronts for unknown investors. Under the National Broadcasting Commission Act, religious bodies and political parties are specifically precluded from owning broadcast media. Foreign ownership of broadcast media is also restricted, resulting in very little foreign investment in the Nigerian media.

4. PROBLEMS OF MEDIA CONTROL

At one time or another in the history of most countries, media and information control has been a source of problem for governments around the world. Generally, according to Omu (2000), the problem of media control is associated with owners' interests and punitive laws that make it difficult for the media to perform its statutory functions without let or hindrance. These laws most often include laws of libel, sedition, defamation, official secrets, and national security.

In Nigeria three types of government (colonial, civilian and military) had been in power at one time or the other in the country and all three types of government have implemented policies that restrained freedom of the press in Nigeria. To achieve control, media outfits have been deliberately denied advertising revenue, while journalists have been killed, maimed, harassed, detained, jailed, and repressive laws and decrees enacted to cow the media. Omu (2000), explained that while the few indigenous businesspersons who could advertise in the newspapers at the time gave their advertisements to Standard Newspaper or other newspapers that represented their nationalistic feelings. … presently, unsurprisingly, one finds more government advertisements in pro-government newspapers than in any anti-government newspaper. Comparatively, the British colonial administration in Nigeria appears to have been the least repressive. However, it is said to be responsible for setting in motion many of the repressive press laws existing in Nigeria today. Omu (1978) explains that measures of government control include denying journalists access to places and persons for information, refusing to give government advertisements and dubious labeling of documents containing valuable information. All these measures have been used. … Newspapers that were pro-government during the colonial rule, the Eagle, Lagos Critic and Record (for some years of its existence) received most government advertisements. These different measures and obnoxious media laws and decrees give government officials the opportunity and legal backing to prosecute, fine, detain and imprison journalists, as well as proscribe media houses. For instance, Decree No. 4 of 1984 criminalized press reports and proscribed written statements that exposed an officer of the military government to ridicule. Then, the Offensive Publications (Proscription) Decree 35 1993, made it possible for the government to clamp down on six media houses across the nation. Under the same Decree 35 1993 the Nigerian government in July 1993 closed down 17 newspapers and magazines and one broadcasting station in a single day (Ojo, 2001). Even government owned media were not spared. This kind of suppression also took place after the 22 April 1990 failed coup détat when over seven media houses were closed down.

The era of military dictatorships in Nigeria witnessed the worst forms of media emasculation in the history of the media in Nigeria. Joseph (1997) explains that the period of military dictatorships was marked by 'arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, corruption, excessive use of force, torture of detainees, harassment of journalists and democratic activists and arson attacks on media houses. At times family members of targeted journalists were also arrested, detained, brutalized and constantly harassed. In particular those journalists who refuse to acquiesce are disgraced and sacked with ignominy. According to Ekpu (1990) the Nigerian government pulls all

the strings, and the functionaries who run the state-owned newspapers, magazines and broadcasting outlets must either behave like pliant, puppets or lose their places to others. Apart from government control of the media through laws, decrees and the courts, other means of control exist which obstruct freedom of expression. One of such other means of control is what (Uche, 1989) referred to as *"co-opting"*. The government uses certain preferential treatments to buy the most influential journalists in the country... appointing these influential critics in the media to top posts within the government. "Co-opting" of journalists ensures that they are reduced to being mere stooges of government officials. This tactics was riff during the many years of military dictatorship in Nigeria. It is not surprising therefore that the editor of the Guardian had to publish an article reassuring his readers that his proprietor's acceptance of a ministerial appointment in the government could not influence the objectivity of the newspaper in handling issues concerning government (Uche, 1989).

Furthermore, regulatory bodies set up by the government can be a source of media control. Where there are defects or loopholes in the decree that set up such regulatory bodies, these can be used for repressing freedom of expression. It is thought that government may intentionally leave loopholes in laws and decrees so as to exploit such in silencing any opposition. Media scholar believe that one pitfall in the decree that set up the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is the power given to the commission to revoke the licenses 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 what the public interest is, as in the American Federal Communication Commission. Thus the decree allows the NBC to provide licenses in perpetuity only to withdraw them at whim.

In addition, Uche (1989) points out that the influence of government is seen in the unflinching support government media organizations give the government of the day. Government officials do not hesitate to remove anyone in charge who fails to offer unquestioned support. An "erring" official risks being sacked with "immediate effect" or faces other punishments for such "heinous" acts. He observed that within one year of the elected civilian government assuming office in 1990, no less than ten chief executive officers of state-owned broadcasting stations were sacked. Uche (1989) further argued that private media proprietors also exert significant control over their media organizations. Proprietors have been known to demand self-censorship by their editors. The proprietors expect those working in their media organizations to understand and protect their interests. Often a proprietor's economic and/or political interests are very influential in how they want their papers to relate to the government of the day. Media practitioners have never failed to denounce these controls, except for journalists who have been "co-opted". There have been instances when the government has been taken to court. In 1975, a reporter was arrested, flogged and his hair and beard shaved on the orders of a military government who found his articles offensive. The reporter instituted a court action and, won and the government was asked to pay him damage (Uche, 1989).

4.1. Agenda Setting Theory

The power of the media to set society's agenda by focusing public attention on few key public issues is an immense and well-documented phenomenon. It was McCombs and Shaw that carried out the first systematic study of the agenda-setting hypothesis (see McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The agenda setting theory posits that what the media finds important will eventually be mirrored by what members of society will come to think are important. It facilitates the formation of public opinions and the distribution of pros and cons of a particular issue. Agenda-setting shifts the focus of attention away from immediate effects on attitudes and opinions to long term effects on cognitions (Protess and McCombs 1991). Lang and Lang (1959) agree that not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news. Newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in the daily news, like lead story on page one, other front page display, large headlines, etc. Television news also offers numerous cues about salience as well as the opening story on the newscast, length of time devoted to the story.

These cues repeated day after day effectively communicate the importance of each topic. In other words, the news media can set the agenda for the public's attention to that small group of issues around which public opinion is formed. The agenda setting theory fundamentally explores the

relationship which the news media have on the perceived salience of key political issues. According to Ghorparde (1986), agenda setting is a relational concept that specifies a transfer of salience from agenda primers (media) to agenda adopters (consumers).

Agenda setting research has shown that there is a correlation between what the media deems important and salience in the public mind. The concept explains the ability of the media to tell us what to think about. Ngoa (2006) explained that agenda setting refers to media audiences' acceptance as important those issues, events and people because the media has made it so for people to think and talk about. McQuail & Windahl (1981) observed that the media, by simply paying attention to some issues while neglecting others, will effect on public opinion (adding that) the hypothesis would seem to have escaped the doubts which early empirical findings had on the powerful media effects view.

Although the influence of media agenda can be substantial, the media alone does not determine public agenda. Information and cues about object and attribute salience provided by the news media are far from being the only determinants of public agenda. The substantial influence of the media did not in any way nullify the basic assumption of democracy that the masses have sufficient wisdom to determine the course of their nation, their state, and their communities. McCombs (2005) claimed that people are quite able to determine the basic relevance to themselves and to the larger public the topics and attributes advanced by the news media. The media set the agenda only when citizens perceive their news stories as relevant. Folarin (1998) identified four elements involved in agenda-setting to include: the amount or frequency of reporting, the level of prominence given to the issue reported, the degree of conflict generated by the reports and the cumulative media-specific effect over time. Wood (1983) in his contribution observed that virtually all communication researchers and writers seem to agree that the media possess the power and prestige to determine for its audience what is important. The media does this in three distinct ways, establishing materialistic goals, status conferral and agenda-setting. Describing the concept of status conferral, Ngoa (2006) indicated that it is closely related to the concept of agenda setting and adds that status conferral refers to the media's ability to confer or bestow prestige as well as enhance the authority of individuals, groups, organizations and even issues by legitimizing their status in the public's eye. As agenda – setting on the other hand, refers generally, to the ability of the media to raise the importance of an issue in the public's mind. Dearing & Rogers (1992) refers to agenda setting as "an ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain attention of the media professionals, the public and policy elites. Ngoa (2006) explained that the idea of people desiring media assistance to be able to order their priorities, especially in determining political reality had been in existence but without the name agenda setting. Consequently White (1973) describes the ability of the media to shape election campaigns as a primordial and sweeping political power unrestrained by any law.

The media sets the agenda of public discussion, and determines what people will think and talk about; an authority usually reserved for tyrants, parties and priests in other nations. Again, after the annulment of what most observers and participants saw as the most fair and free election ever held in Nigeria in 1993, the media went to town agitating for the de-annulment and revalidation of the elections. That particular media agenda appears to coincide with the agenda of majority of Nigerians. Ngoa (2006) argues that the agenda-setting theory of mass communication seems to have manifested in the unanimity among the media in Nigeria, with the agenda of pursuing from office the then military ruler, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida who nullified the collective will of Nigerians through the annulment of the election of Mr Abiola as President. Agenda-setting as a theory of mass communication has become rather sophisticated and (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) have also fine-tuned their hypothesis by postulating a "*need for orientation*" as a crucial factor in peoples willingness to let the mass media shape their thinking; yet McQuail (1987) insist that despite recent research on the theory, there is insufficient evidence to show causal connection between the public's ordering of priorities and the order of importance placed on issues by the media. He also notes that the doubts with agenda-setting as a theory stem from not only the strict methodological demands but also from theoretical ambiguities, and as such "agenda-setting theory remains within the status of a plausible but unproven idea. Accordingly, agenda-setting theory is still developing and expanding both in focus and in dimension. The latest development is a focus on a new level which McCombs and his associates referred to as "second level of agenda-setting". The "second-level-agenda-setting" model views an agenda as an abstract notion and that

many other things other than issues could be items on the list. Severin & Tankard (2001) confirmed that opening up the agenda-setting concept to include the second level has expanded the theory to now include even effective attributes or attitudes. Lang & Lang (1983) also suggested that agenda setting as a concept expanded into the concept of "agenda building"; a collective process in which the media, public and the government influence each other in determining what issues to be considered important.

4.2. Critique of the Agenda-Setting Theory

The order in which media agenda occur referred to as "causal order of agenda-setting" is an important question in determining whether the media influence public agenda or that the public influence media agenda. McCombs & Shaw (1972) argued the whether the media influences public agenda, the result of their findings revealed a strong correlation between the media and public agendas though it could not show which was influencing the other. According to Severin & Tankard, (2001), there are certainly alternative models of this relationship, of which the main one will reverse the flow and state that underlying concerns of the public will shape both issues definition by political elites and those of the media, a process which is fundamental to political theory and to the logic of free media.

Infant et al. (1990) argued that the media's agenda-setting theory at least for the time being is left with the status of a plausible but unproven idea, because it is fraught with theoretical ambiguities and methodological inadequacies. The concept of inter-media agenda setting, calls to question who the real agenda setters are. In other words, whose agenda is the media agenda? Besides, one of the problems associated with agenda-setting is the monitoring of all media that an individual is exposed to and the actual determination of how the individual has been affected.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Data Collection Method

The core method of data collection in this study is in-depth interview. A depth interview is an extended conversation, but it has a different purpose from that of an ordinary conversation (Berger, 1998). Berger (1998) further explained that depth interviews are conducted to get at particular issues, such as hidden feelings or attitudes and beliefs of which a Respondent may not be aware or that are only dimly in his or her consciousness. An in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique that allows for person to person discussion (Obiajulu, 2007). Cluster and purposive sampling methods were used in this study because the data needed required an in-depth knowledge of the Nigerian media landscape. Consequently, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted.

A breakdown of those interviewed is as follows: 15 journalists representing privately owned newspapers, public newspapers, privately owned radio/TV, public radio/TV, as well as privately owned news magazines. Eight (8) media executives or chief executive of media organizations representing privately owned newspapers, public newspapers, privately owned radio/TV, public radio/TV.

5.2. Method of Data Analysis

Grounded theory and its qualitative data analyses technique was the method of data analysis employed in this study for the qualitative data generated through in-depth. The basic idea of the grounded theory approach is to read (and re-read) a textual database (such as an interview transcript and 'discover' or label variables (called categories, concepts and properties) and their interrelationships.

The ability to perceive variables and relationships is termed 'theoretical sensitivity' and is affected by a number of things including the reading of the literature and the use of techniques designed to enhance sensitivity. Open coding is the part of the analysis concerned with identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text. Essentially, each line, sentence, paragraph etc. is read in search of the answer to the repeated question 'what is this about? What is being referenced here?' These labels refer to things in this case like media, media ownership, control, private media, public media, news and information sources etc.

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In other to identify the characteristics of each respondent, the codes in the table below were designed to show sex, occupation and present position or status of each respondent.

Table1. *Showing respondent's identification codes*

F = Female	M = Male
CE = Chief Executive	GMd = Government Media
Aca = Academician	Fo = Former
J = Journalist	PMd = Private Media

6.1. Media Ownership Pattern in Nigeria

The opening interview question in this multidimensional theme is directed to ascertain: *What the current pattern of media ownership is in Nigeria.* Responses on the issue show that Respondent 7 (M/Prof/Fo/PuOH) in line 234-235 agrees that: *"Media ownership in Nigeria is a mixture of government and private ownership and I believe that this mixture is good enough because it is what happens everywhere in the world".* Respondent 3 (M/CE/GMd) in line 77-78 also reported that *"there are two worlds in media business in Nigeria one private, one public and public means government".*

Evidence in the response showed that two major media ownership patterns were identified by Respondents':

- ➢ Government or public media ownership
- ➢ Private media ownership

The pattern of media ownership and control described by Respondents' in the data is in line with the existing reality in the Nigerian media industry. Basically the government has considerable power in the Nigerian media industry. For privately owned media organizations to operate in Nigeria, they have to secure an operating license through the Nigerian Media Council (NMC) for the print media or the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) for the electronic media. These two regulatory bodies are under government control. This situation gives the government a measure of controlling influence over the industry as the government can withdraw the operating license of any media organization it chooses. Government control of the media in Nigeria goes beyond just issuing of operating licenses. For example radio stations in Nigeria usually broadcasts on either Frequency Modulated Band (FM), Medium Wave (MW/AM) and/or Short wave (SW). The allocation of frequencies for radio and TV broadcasts is also the responsibility of government regulatory organizations. So all private radio stations in Nigeria broadcast on FM, state government owned radios broadcasts on FM and AM or MW, while all federal government radio stations can broadcast on FM, AM/MW or SW bands. This way the federal government controls the reach or coverage areas of private and state government owned radio stations.

Similarly all private and state government TV stations transmit on Ultra High Frequency (UHF) which limits their coverage, while federal government TV stations (Nigerian Television Authority, NTA) transmit on either UHF or Very High Frequency (VHF). Again this is another means of controlling the reach and coverage areas of TV stations.

Findings revealed that Respondents' believe that the pattern of media ownership in Nigeria is defined as a split between government or public media ownership and private media ownership where individuals and private institutions own media. This pattern of ownership gives the federal government the opportunity to control the Nigerian media industry through the issuance of operating licenses, allocation of operating frequencies and enactment of laws.

6.2. Effect of Current Media Ownership Pattern in Nigeria

The next question in this theme explores whether the current media ownership pattern in Nigeria affects the effective performance of the Nigerian media. Specifically, the question is: *Do you think that the current pattern of media ownership have any effect on media performance?*

Quotes from responses presented below exemplify the views expressed by Respondents' on the issue of patterns of media ownership and nature of media performance in Nigeria.

For Respondent 10 (M/Prof/Fo/PuOH) in line 172-177 argues that: Ownership is very important. If the media is private sector driven it will serve Nigerians better. Therefore, there should be a change in the character of media ownership in this country.

Respondent 5 (Fe/J/PMd) in line 154-158 reveals that: "you risk losing your job if you give out unfavorable information about government activities, while the reporter in public media that makes use of such unfavorable information also runs the risk of losing their job. However, private media organizations that come across such information normally use them but at times the reporter could be compromised".

In addition Respondent 18 (M/CE/PMd) in line 349-353 explains that: "There are institutional problems with media operations and ownership in Nigeria. The guys who are stealing the money are the ones rich enough to set up newspapers in Nigeria. And he who pay's the piper would dictate the tune. Look at all the newspapers in Nigeria. Tell me which one is not being bank-rolled by those bad guys".

The findings indicates that the current media ownership pattern in Nigeria has a number of limitations with regards to the media playing critical role in setting agenda for societal discourse. This can be observed in the support which media organizations give to the government of the day regardless of the performance of such a government. Respondents' agree that proprietary and ownership influence is another hindrance in the attempt of the mass media in Nigeria to serve as the watchdog of the people. Most often those rich enough to set up media outfits also have a lot of political, social, business and/or economic interests to protect. They at times bring these interests to bear on the day-to-day running of their media organizations. Proprietors have been known to demand self-censorship from their editors. They expect those working in their media organizations to understand the need to protect the proprietors many and differing interests. The Respondents' suggest that public and private discourse in Nigeria tends to support the argument that the control of the mass media by the ruling class is one of the means through which it influences people's ideas and thoughts thereby propagating personal agendas as media agenda. The owners of the media in Nigeria are not only major capitalists in their own right but are also closely linked to the ruling circles around the globe.

Furthermore, result indicates that the current media ownership pattern in Nigeria negatively affects the ability of the media to perform without hindrance. This is exemplified by the situation where media practitioners working in both private and public media organizations make sure that their reports are not perceived as 'unfavorable' by the government of the day. The reality is that public media which are financed with public funds and controlled by public officials do not criticize government actions or inactions because of fear of sanctions. Many media executives in the public media have been known to lose their jobs because they disagreed with government officials. Some private media outfits established by associates of public officials indirectly influence the running of private media outfits. Evidence from data shows that Respondents' agree that current media ownership pattern is making it difficult for the media in Nigeria to function effectively and efficiently for the overall good of society.

6.3. Nigerian Media Ownership and Media Agenda Setting

The interview question in this theme seeks to ascertain if the: Current media ownership pattern in Nigeria can hinder the media from setting agenda for society.

Data in this theme exemplified by responses from Respondents' presented below provides answers to the question - Is the current pattern of media ownership in Nigeria inimical to effective media performance and agenda setting?

In response, Respondent 5 (Fe/J/PMd) in line 195-199 argues that: "Privately owned media houses owe government no apology but mind you the government of the day can still use their law and order their closure. You remember during Obasanjo era when they closed AIT because they aired something about air mishap when (there was) plane crash …. and recently Channels Television was closed down because it aired information about President Yardua's health condition. So, even the private media organs still trade with caution".

Respondent 3 (M/CE/GMd) in line 190-194 explains that: "Publicly owned media outfits receive subvention from government and like the saying goes 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune' as

the person that pays the subvention he may strangulate you with funds or will not give you fund to function and you know everything will then be in a state of disrepair and it will fold up and to continue being on air, transmitting, doing your job you have to be loyal to those in government".

Respondent 5 (Fe/J/PMd) in line 175-178 reveals that although: "AIT is independent. That is, no government is supposed to influence its activities but I am telling you the independence is not total. At times they influence the private media because most of those government functionaries are also friends to the owners of the private media establishments. I am telling you some of them even commit their money there. They work hand in hand so the independence is not even total".

Respondent 2 (M/J/GMd) in line 146-149 agrees that: "Government officials interfere with the operations of some media outfits in Nigeria by deciding whose announcements or paid adverts are aired in government sponsored radio and Television stations or whose face appear on the pages of government control newspapers".

From findings of the present study, it is clear that media ownership is crucial in determining the nature, extent and direction of performance of the media in Nigeria. This is because media ownership is often associated with media control as evidenced by the study data. The study data indicates that Respondents' perceive journalism in Nigeria to be shifting from mirroring the society to protecting the people in power as a result of the existing media ownership pattern.

7. CONCLUSION

Different levels of government in Nigeria (that is state and federal governments) serving and retired high level public and private officials, politicians, as well as influential businessmen and women, own most of the media organizations in Nigeria. These same groups of people (the ruling elite) are the core "news makers" whose views and opinions populate most of the views, news, opinions and information disseminated in the media in Nigeria.

The concept of "news making" by "news makers" which largely revolves around this same group of people (the ruling elite) and the control they exert both directly and indirectly undermines the ability of the media to on its own perform its agenda setting function. Instead, the media functions to regurgitate the imposed agendas of its owners, their friends and associates. This therefore shows that current media ownership pattern and the level of media control in Nigeria actually hinder the media from independently setting society's agenda.

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