

EXPLORING THE ABSENCE OF WATCHDOG JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA BROADCAST MEDIA

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The research became necessary to explore the watchdog role of broadcast media in Nigeria. The study was conducted for the purpose of understanding how broadcast media interpret the watchdog function and the reason for its rarity in Nigeria broadcast media.

Methodology: The study used the qualitative case study approach. Two broadcast media were purposively selected for the study-FRCN and AIT. Semi-structured face to face interview was used to collect data from ten informants comprising of senior editors and field reporters who were purposively selected for the study. Researchers used thematic analysis for data analysis to interpret and discuss findings.

Main findings: The broadcast media perform the watchdog role through reporting of investigations not initiated by them and also through their programs. The absence of watchdog in their media is influenced by the interference of broadcast media owners, enormous economic and commercial pressures on them being a more capital intensive media as well as the failure of broadcast media practitioners to explore the freedom of information Act like their print counterparts do.

Application/Implication: The findings offer a reference point for media regulatory bodies to discover broadcast media issues that are useful for making regulations to improve media practice. It contributes to the call for media social responsibility by providing insight into the impediments of fulfilling the media's social obligation as a watchdog.

Novelty/originality: Research in the area of media watchdog role and functions have often focused on audience perceptions and evaluations of print media. This study explored broadcast media and added to the conceptualization of the concept of media as watchdog beyond investigative journalism only.

Keywords: Broadcast Media, Ownership, Economy, Watchdog Role, Journalism, Laws, and Regulations,

INTRODUCTION

The media is a fundamental democratic institution. It is an important institution that serves as a beacon of freedom, a check on authorities and a driver of agenda for development and progress of the society ([Shardow & Asare, 2016](#)). There is a consensus among media scholars and practitioners about some of the important roles the media plays in a democratic society. These include providing a platform for participation and diversity of ideas, encouraging, shaping public opinion, and acting as watchdog over the powerful and those in authority by monitoring and informing the public about the happenings in governance as well as preventing and exposing wrongdoings and corruption ([Shardow & Asare, 2016](#); [Coronel, 2010](#); [Waisbord, 2015](#) & [Spiess, 2011](#)). As a watchdog, the media performs a guardian and monitorial function for the public. The effective performance of this role has seen the media especially in developed countries like the USA prevent abuse of public trust even before it happens as well as expose wrongdoings and deter other people from engaging in it.

Broadcast media particularly has the potential to impact more audiences through its news and other programs because of the inherent advantages it possesses over the print media. Some of these advantages include that it has the ability to reach a wider audience simultaneously; its limited mental demand also makes it appealing to all categories of the audience ([Ojomo, 2009](#)). These inherent features, therefore, bestows on them a greater responsibility to drive home development agenda, and very importantly, monitor and guard the public against the excesses and abuse of government and public authorities. Yet, Nigeria broadcast media remain docile in that regard ([Jibo & Okosie-Simbine, 2003](#); [Ojomo, 2009](#)).

As a watchdog, the media in Nigeria has been applauded for the important and visible role it played during the struggle for independence. In the same way, it is widely commended for its doggedness and fierceness during the military rule leading to democracy in Nigeria. However, even this is not attributed to all media, most of the watchdog feat attained by the Nigerian media is attributed to the print media. For example, it was the print media that exposed the former speaker of the house of representatives for dishonesty in declaring his age, which, led to his resignation in 1999 ([Apata & Ogunwuyi, 2019](#)). Also, the print media exposed the ploy by former president Olusegun Obasanjo to influence the national assembly to amend the constitution to give him a third term in office. Many such examples of financial misappropriations, corruption in the civil service and among the people saddled with public trust abound, many of which were brought to the attention of the public by print media. Perhaps, the obvious lack of watchdog reporting in broadcast media informed [Ojomo \(2009, p. 11\)](#) assertion on broadcast media's monitorial duty that "this is the core responsibility of the electronic media in any society, yet it is the area where the Nigerian broadcast media have failed the most". Meanwhile, section 22 of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria 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” ([Agbo & Chukwuma, 2017](#)). This provision has expressly equipped all media to carry out its duty as the fourth estate by serving as a watchdog for the society. This further affirms the importance of this function.

Over the years, the inability of broadcast media to live up to its role as watchdog was attributed to “the long monopoly of government ownership of the broadcast media” ([Ojomo, 2009, p. 11](#)). Others attributed it to some laws and broadcast regulations that stifle freedom of the media and also the absence of freedom of information law that would grant free access to information of importance to the public ([Akinfeleye, 2003](#); [Akinwale, 2010](#); [Kur & Nyekwere, 2015](#)). As valid as those reasons have proven to be, the public expected better performance when the Nigerian government deregulated broadcast media in 1992 ([Akeem, Oyeyinka, Qasim, Lateef, Omolayo & Oyinyechi 2013](#); [Jibo & Okoosie-Simbine, 2003](#)). More so, in May 2011, former president Goodluck Jonathan assented to the freedom of information bill, which had lingered in the national assembly for many years. This new law was greeted with so much enthusiasm and hope that journalists would have more easy access to information ([Oberiri, 2016](#)), and the provisions of the law did provide more access to information that would otherwise be hidden from public eyes and ears. Yet, broadcast media continues to lag in its watchdog role performance ([Amodu & Usaini, 2014](#)). Perhaps, this could have contributed to the public resorting to social media as an alternative to fill in the perceived gap.

This study, therefore, employed the qualitative case study method to investigate why there is a growing absence of watchdog journalism in Nigeria broadcast media. In doing this, the study also sought to find out how broadcast media practitioners understand their watchdog role in order to understand how they interpret the watchdog function.

The media as watchdog

As the fourth estate of the realm, the watchdog role of the media stems from the acknowledgment of the basic role of the media to distribute important information and impact the acceptance, formation, and expression of public opinion. According to [Onyemaobi \(2018\)](#), the conception of the media as watchdog presents an entity saddled with the responsibility of monitoring, scrutinizing, guarding and exposing of wrongdoings as well as stopping them while promoting the rights and interests of the public. In performing this role, the media engages in informing the public about political, social, economic and environmental issues. They also set agenda and shape public opinions by providing the public with in-depth and relevant information they require to make informed decisions.

[Oso \(2013\)](#), notes that a media that performs its role as watchdog is a free media. He explained that they must be free from all kinds of internal and external interference and give no room for pressures that could stand in their way. Many audience and journalists alike, consider the watchdog role to be the most important and crucial function of media in democracy, this understanding could have informed [Oso \(2013\)](#) assertion that it is the importance of this role that informed constitutional provisions for the media to hold government accountable to the people even in nascent democracies like Nigeria’s. Similarly, [Shardow and Asare \(2016\)](#) echoed Oso’s understanding when they opined that, to make sure that authorities discharge their functions to the public effectively, a free media is indispensable to ensure that happens.

The obvious fact that people in place of authority, regardless of whether they are government or individuals wield a lot of power, demands a critical and watchful eye to scrutinize and assess them against the likely abuse of the trust of the public ([Munoriyarwa, 2018](#)). Thus, the media who serve as a link between the public and government is empowered to represent the public in ensuring that those saddled with the responsibility of governance are accountable. Perhaps, this is why media social responsibility emphasizes freedom of the media to be able to do so.

In much of the world, the media performance of its watchdog function has visibly declined ([Pinto, 2008](#); [Waisbord, 2000](#); [Munoyiwarwa, 2018](#)). Scholars have argued that the continuous and effective performance of the role requires a dedicated, professional and passionate breed of journalists who are willing to pursue public interest above all others. However, a lot of reasons account for the absence of watchdog journalism in the media. For example, [Oso \(2013\)](#) examined the efficacy of the media as a watchdog and concluded that it has been eroded by political and economic benefits. He argued that these interests can be seen in the commodification of media services and have come to determine and define the operational activities of the media. Hence, these interests as observed by Oso have successfully overtaken the media and weakened its ability and vigor to be effective watchdogs. In his words, “they may still occasionally bark, but their ability to bite has been seriously curtailed”. In the same way, [Waisbord \(2015\)](#) argued strongly about the impact of economic factors. He argued that news media established for commercial interests are often simply not interested in using their often limited resources in pursuance of stories that consume those resources, for that reason they would rather stick to the routine reporting which mostly just reports what authorities say without in-depth investigations.

[Coronel \(2010\)](#) also argued that economic reasons affect independent media more than it does those owned by the government. Private media organizations will naturally enjoy more freedom to exercise its watchdog duties; however, they are oftentimes more likely to be slaves to the market than government media who by virtue of being owned by the government alone are tied to do the biddings and propaganda of the government ([Endong, 2017](#)). In countries like

Malaysia, the grip the government has on media and the attendant restricted freedom has reduced its ability to be an effective watchdog ([Yeoh, 2011](#), [Ismail, Ahmad & Mustaffa, 2014](#)).

Access to information with some legal framework could be a determining factor. Most western democracies are backed by laws to seek information including those pieces of information that people in power would rather have hidden. In fact, the freedom to demand and access information is one of the major drivers of media freedom ([Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng & White, 2009](#)). As argued by [Waisbord \(2015\)](#) access to information is a key factor in watchdog journalism. While noting that simply having information available is not sufficient for watchdog journalism, he reasoned that having legal backings or tools that aid access to information is necessary. The lack of freedom of information act in place in many countries especially developing countries have therefore stood in the way of the media ([Ismail, Ahmad & Mustaffa, 2014](#)).

In many parts of the world, the media living up to its role as a watchdog has been upheld as the symbol of demanding accountability and in many climes where the media has made it an important part of their journalism, it has contributed in consolidating democracy through encouraging and building an attitude of transparency and accountability. Therefore, a persistent decline or absence of watchdog journalism not only affects the credibility and trustworthiness of a media, but it also goes a long way in impacting democracy ([Munoriyarwa, 2018](#), [Kunia & Othman, 2019](#)).

Nigeria media and the watchdog function

The colonial and military media in Nigeria have played very significant roles in attaining independence and transitioning to democracy ([Jibo & Okoosie-Simbine, 2003](#)). During military regimes, for instance, draconian laws like the decree No. 4 of 1984 criminalized media exposes and reports that expose the military governments or its officials to scrutiny and criticism. Despite such laws, journalists like Dele Giwa, and Ray Ekpo through their newspapers made it a point of duty to demand good governance by criticizing and exposing some of the policies, programs, and decisions of the military government that were not in the interest of freedom and national development ([Apata & Ogunwuyi, 2019](#)). Through their style of writing and passion, they were able to bring some corrupt practices of the military government to light. According to [Ojo \(2007\)](#) during the military rule of General Ibrahim Babangida, there were talks and plans for transition. However, the dictator kept pushing it forward, as a result, the media (print), including Guardian, Concord, Punch and Tell magazine resorted to looking for official documents, interviewing public officials secretly as well as digging for classified documents in order to unravel the plans of the president. These acts resulted in the detention of some editors and even proscription of others. However, the journalists kept at it and continued to use various sources in hiding to expose the dictatorial agenda of the governments. Most of these moves were very risky but it was such journalism that contributed to the transition to democracy in 1999.

In the case of broadcast media, the government was in total control during most part of the military dictatorships, however, in 1992, before the transition to democracy in 1999, broadcast media was deregulated and private ownership was opened, but even that came with some stringent regulations ([Aginam, 2010](#)). The grip government had on broadcast media was attributed to the real-time and direct contact is provided for the government to reach all citizens even to the grassroots ([Ojomo, 2009](#)). Broadcast media was also the most preferred and popular means of reaching more people. It was preferred because of its relative affordability and other advantages ([Aginam, 2010](#)). Those governments, therefore, monopolized it and used it to reach a larger number of the population with their propaganda. The very long monopoly government had on broadcast media accounts for its laxity in watchdog journalism ([Ojomo, 2009](#)).

Moving on to current democratic dispensation, there was an influx of private media ownership of both print and broadcast which broke hegemony and ushered in plurality, and with plurality came diversity in representations in the media. The early years were marked by a resurgence of the previously muzzled media and journalists. Many came back, more energized and equipped to perform their democratic duties to the public. The early period was marked with newspapers re-organizing, re-structuring and setting the tone, expectations, and directions of what the citizenry expected of the newfound democracy ([Adeniyi, 2016](#)).

During this period, the media continued to challenge and demand good governance by setting agenda and criticizing as well as checkmating the government. A number of exposes were initiated and published by print media, ([Ojo & Adebayo, 2013](#)). For example, the first Democratic speaker of the House of Representatives, Salisu Abubakar was exposed by the media for false declaration of age. This led to his resignation. The media also dug and exposed the plots and ploy of president Obasanjo to extend his tenure to a third term ([Apata & Ogunwuyi, 2019](#)). The most recent one was in 2017, which saw a minister resign from office as a result of the exposure of a forgery she did to get into office. Premium Times, an online newspaper, did this. The media has also fared well in terms of its reporting of corruption, misappropriations and human rights abuses by engaging in extensive coverage and agenda-setting.

The essence of the Nigerian media is to serve as guardians of public interest by providing enough in-depth and relevant information for the people to make informed decisions to ensure that the people they elected into offices carry out the wishes of the people. [Amodu, Yartey, Ekanem, Oresanya & Afolabi \(2016\)](#) evaluated the Nigerian media's watchdog role in ensuring government accountability. The survey study found among other things that more than half of the respondents agree that it is the duty and responsibility of the media to provide information on governance by reporting

the activities of the government. The study suggested that the media has done fairly well in that regard in terms of furnishing the public with information. However, the Nigerian media like many plural media around the world are increasingly becoming profit-oriented, where the commercial profit takes more precedence than its role as “watchdog” of the society ([Amodu, Usaini&Ige, 2014](#)).

Media freedom may have so much to do with how media performs its role as a watchdog as well as ownership structure. [Ali \(2015\)](#), argued that broadcast media deregulation in Africa has not really served to enhance media freedom through media plurality but, has served as a means of advancing the political biddings of the rich and powerful. Comparing media ownership and press freedom in Africa with the United States and the United Kingdom, Ali, argued that, the media in those countries are highly independent and regulations placed on owners of media outfits help check their influence and control of their media.

Considering that deregulation has made the Nigerian media very pluralistic and independent, the question, therefore, becomes how truly independent is the Nigerian media? For [Oberiri \(2017\)](#), the level of press freedom is not so much about ownership like it is about restrictive and repressive media laws. He reasoned that right from the military era where decrees and laws were used to censor and harass the media, such laws even though in a democracy are still silently showing their ugly heads in the way and manner journalists resort to self-censorship. According to him, despite the entrenchment of press freedom in the Nigerian constitution, statutory back-ups do not exist. Oberiri argued that the 1999 constitution is counteractive in its provision. He pointed thus: “section 39 of the 1999 constitution qualifies and tactically curtails freedom of expression and of the press. Subsection two of section 39 places a prior restraint on the ownership of the media for the exercise of freedom of speech, particularly on the broadcast media”p.30. As such he reasons that Nigerian media freedom is constantly defiled by legal pressure. Similarly, [Chukwu’s \(2018\)](#) study argued that “in Nigeria, there is no clear cut or expressed constitutional framework for freedom of information and effective practice of journalism profession. Rather so many laws are made to create an impediment to the latter” p.24. He further lamented that section 22 where freedom of expression is guaranteed and the duties of the media explained does not provide the required legal framework for the journalism profession. Like Chukwu observed, enshrining freedom of the press clearly in the constitution and reviewing and removing “any existing legislation which tends to unduly strangle this freedom” p.32, will lead to a better and a corrupt-free society.

At a time the media is needed to rise up to the call to exercise its function as a watchdog, [Apata and Ogunwuyi \(2019\)](#) observed that it is relegating its role and its performance is rather disappointing. According to Fakoya (2010), as cited in [Amodu, Usaini & Ige \(2014\)](#), the media in Nigeria now reflects the corruption that has eaten deep into the Nigerian state. He described the media in his words, as “a hotbed of corrupt and sharp practices”. Amodu, Usaini&Ige noted that economic factors and non- adherence to professional ethics are sedating the watchdog ability of the media in Nigeria. [Endong, \(2017\)](#) observed that the media, particularly the ones run by the government have become easy tools for the propagation of government interests without questioning or scrutinizing them. Indeed, economic factors like financial constraints to pursue investigative stories as well as lack of strong capital base by media organizations opens up doors for politicians and highly placed individuals to invest in media, and because they have become stakeholders by their investments in various forms, media cannot publish or report anything against them ([Yusha’u, 2009; Odunlami&Adaja, 2015](#)).

METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative method of research with the case study approach. [Merriam\(2009\)](#) described a case study as a method of inquiry whereby an event, individual, process or program is explored in-depth. The case here is broadcast media, which the study focused on. Two broadcast media organizations were purposively selected for the study. The broadcast media were Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), a radio station owned by the federal government of Nigeria and Africa Independent Television (AIT), a privately owned television station. The selection of these stations was based on their ownership type, which characterizes the ownership structure of broadcast media in Nigeria. The reason for this is to be able to have a holistic view of broadcast media even though, the aim was not to compare and contrast.

Empirical data was collected using semi-structured one on one, face to face interview ([Creswell, 2012](#)) with ten informants who comprised of six senior editors and four field reporters with experience in broadcast media practice. These informants were selected purposively in the two broadcast media stations to represent views from reporters in the field and that of decision-makers who get to decide what makes it to the news or not. The semi-structured interview format gave room for flexibility in asking the questions ([Yin, 2018](#)). Since the case was broadcast media, the selected informants were interviewed in order to get the perspectives of broadcast practitioners on the central phenomenon of why there is an absence of watchdog journalism in broadcast media and their understanding of what the role entails since they are the ones saddled with the performance of the watchdog function. More so, audience perspective has often dominated research of media watchdog function ([Amodu, Yartey, Ekanem, Oresanya & Afolabi 2016](#)). These informants were to give the perspectives of broadcast media.

Data analysis was done using the thematic analysis format. According to [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), thematic analysis entails a process of searching and identifying patterns or categories within qualitative data. In doing this, researchers

painstakingly, engage in an iterative process of searching for similar or common patterns in data to arrive at themes that best describe participants' responses. [Merriam \(2009\)](#) explained that there are no hard and fast rules on how to go about thematic analysis. This, therefore, makes it a very flexible method, which does not rely on a particular theoretical perspective ([Maguire & Delahunt, 2017](#)). However, it requires carefulness to capture the very essence in data without compromise. In generating the themes for this study, first, the interviews were transcribed to allow the researcher to actively study and identify and select those patterns that were common across all transcripts. It is pertinent to point that themes are not just sitting somewhere in the data, but forming them is at the discretion of researchers. However, they should reflect, capture and represent the research objectives and give meaning to the entire data ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#)). The following section presented and discussed the themes that emerged in the data analysis. The themes show informants' understanding of the watchdog function and why there is an absence of watchdog in Nigeria broadcast media. The researchers tried to interpret the data with a manageable number of themes. [Merriam \(2009\)](#) suggested that "the fewer the themes, the greater the ease with which one can communicate findings to others."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Broadcast media interpretation and performance of the watchdog role

As part of the roles and functions of media in society, serving as watchdog is considered one of the most important ([Shardow & Asare 2015](#)). This role is seen as performed exclusively in the interest of the public. Generally, findings demonstrated that informants have a good understanding of what the role entails. All informants in both FRCN and AIT interpret the watchdog role pretty much as literature conceptualizes it.

Overall, they interpret the watchdog role as one of the most important role they should perform in the society, which, involves exposing wrongdoings, corruption and other malfeasance in government as well as provide important and in-depth information about government's activities, their actions, and inactions for the public to help them make informed decisions. All informants acknowledged that it is a duty and responsibility mandated on them, which they believe, should be done in service to the public as a matter of duty and not discretion. An informant in AIT pointed out thus, "The media as watchdog re-affirms our place in the society. As the fourth estate, we have the responsibility to overlook the activities of the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government so that we can ensure they are accountable to the people. This role is essential for us to ensure checks and balances. So it is not something you do discretionally, it is a duty and responsibility given to us". This response shows a sense of awareness of responsibility. In the same way, another informant in FRCN corroborated, "The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria has bestowed upon us the responsibility to hold the government accountable to the society. The watchdog role for the media now means upholding this responsibility by being the watchdog of the society over the government in order to protect society against the excesses of government". Hence, broadcast media see themselves as a public trust with an obligation to be socially responsible to the public by serving as its watchdog. This is further reinforced by the constitution of Nigeria, where it stated in parts that "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people" (1999 Constitution).

Journalism scholars have variously conceptualized and identified the watchdog role of media essentially as a monitorial and guardian function. It is to guard the public against bad governance by keeping it informed about the activities of government and monitoring the conduct of public officials and expose wrongdoings especially as it relates to governance and accountability ([Coronel, 2010](#); [Spiess, 2011](#)). The understanding or interpretation of the watchdog role by informants affirmed that of [Coronel \(2010\)](#) and [Spiess \(2011\)](#) and it showed that they have a good understanding of what is expected of them.

Investigative Reporting

In performing the watchdog role, informants in both organizations expressed that investigative journalism or reporting constitutes most of what they regard as performing the watchdog role. Data gathered from informants essentially reveals that investigative reporting which serves to ferret out wrongdoings, expose corruption and abuses by public officials and institutions is one of the major ways they perform the role of watchdogs. Investigative journalism generally entails bringing to the knowledge of the public issues that would otherwise be kept hidden. This can be done purposely by the use of sources that are open as well as secret sources. Informants reiterated that investigative reporting is topmost on the hierarchy of the media as a watchdog. They believe that the essence of the media in the society is tied to its ability to demand accountability from authorities by not serving as public relations officers to them but, by policing them to find out and expose the wrongdoings in their actions and inactions. One informant in FRCN expressed that, the routine reporting of issues of public importance is no less watchdog reporting. However, he stressed that investigative reporting requires them to go beyond the normal routine reporting to dig out facts beyond what the visible thus, "You see...true journalism is not doing PRO for government or institutions, the importance of journalism is underlined by this role. In doing this, sometimes we go beyond the normal routine reporting to dig out more details. That is not to say that the routine reporting does not amount to anything, but when it comes to being watchdogs, investigative reporting tops the rank, and it is up there. You have to take up the initiative to deliberately go on a mission to investigate issues of public impact".

However, while informants emphasized investigative reporting as the most critical for them in performing the watchdog role, this study found that broadcast media rarely engage in initiating investigations to dig out wrongdoings in government and public institutions. They rather rely on official government sources to give them information on wrongdoings mostly through press conferences or releases. Informants were quick to point out that their organizations hardly come up with the initiative to carry out investigations, but they rely on government sources for information regarding corruption and abuse of office, especially the government-owned media. One informant related that “I believe that investigative journalism is the most critical to our performance as watchdogs, I will apologize though that we don’t do too much of that here, we are a government media, most of the time we rely on government sources for information that has to do with wrongdoings or corruption”.

Overall, informants expressed that, investigative reporting is one of the ways they perform the watchdog role. However, they reveal that, for some reason, their investigations do not follow the ideal methodological means. They rather report investigations than, initiate the process of digging out wrongdoings. This finding supports [Waisbord \(2000\)](#) and [Waisbord \(2015\)](#) who opined that investigative reporting is watchdog reporting which seeks to expose information of public importance for the purpose of bringing about some form of change. The findings are in agreement with [Coronel \(2010\)](#) who argued extensively that, investigative reporting is one of the most celebrated forms of watchdog reporting which basically monitors and exposes corruption in institutions and organizations especially government.

Broadcast media programs

The analysis of data shows that broadcast media journalists believe that their programs are a means through which the watchdog function is seen. Informants expressed that their daily programs equip the public with enough and relevant information they need to know about the government and its activities. They stressed that their programs deliberately highlight and set agendas on issues regarding government activities and therefore, help to monitor the activities of government, which amounts to watchdogging. One informant in FRCN shared, “Through our programs, we have a lot of current affairs programs where we invite government officials of the particular ministry and head of agencies and parastatals to come and explain to the public, to give like an account of their stewardship, what they have done and what they are doing. During such programs, we ensure we ask those pertinent and germane questions, we believe the public wants to know. We do this so that the public can be well informed and educated about such issues that affect them”. An informant in AIT also shared that one of the ways they perform their watchdog role is through programs where they set agenda and draw the attention of the public to important issues thus; “In a bid to hold government accountable, we set agenda for them through our programs. Our current affairs programs especially try to cover in-depth issues that deal with government, politics, security and general welfare of citizens. By extensive coverage and in-depth exploration of these issues as they unfold, we keep the people informed”. This implies that, apart from the traditional investigative reporting, which exposes wrongdoings, broadcast media programs provide information that may not necessarily amount to exposes but equip the public with the in-depth information they need to demand accountability from authorities.

Some informants expressed that apart from current affairs programs involving government officials, they also conduct News Analysis with special attention on issues of governance and public interest, where they provide analysis to help the public make sense of government policies, pointing out the loopholes in such policies and drawing the public’s attention to what they should watch out for. One informant in AIT noted that through programs, they highlight issues of importance, and by the amount of coverage they give such issues in their programs, they are performing their role as watchdogs. Essentially, current affairs and news analysis programs provide in-depth information to the public about government and its activities.

The findings show that broadcast media programs are potent means through which they try to live up to their role as watchdogs. [Amodu, Yartey, Ekanem, Oresanya, & Afolabi \(2016\)](#) in their survey of “evaluating the media’s watchdog role in ensuring the accountability of the Nigerian government” found that the various programs of the media provide the citizenry with sufficient information about the fulfilment of election promises. In the study, a larger number of respondents affirmed that information provided by the media through its programs has helped them in holding government accountable. This findings agree with [Yusha’u \(2009\)](#) and [Ismail, Ahmad and Mustaffa \(2014\)](#) where they found in their separate studies that journalists believe that going the extra mile to get information about issues that are already in the news in order to keep the public more informed is an act of media performing its role as watchdog. Similarly, the finding provides support for [Waisbord \(2015\)](#) who opined that watchdog reporting also involves regular media reports or activities that do not necessarily involve the ideals of investigative reporting but provides information that lives up to disclosing some form of new information, in this case, new and in-depth information through broadcast media programs.

Broadcast media programs are created to achieve a specific goal or objective. Hence, this finding shows that through such current affairs programs, the public is kept informed. While literature did not state programs directly as a means of watchdogging, this finding implies in the direction of literature, that assert that not only exposes’ amount to media watchdogging but that the daily report on government activities, agenda-setting and so on is also watchdogging ([Coronel, 2010](#)).

Why there is weakening in broadcast media watchdog performance

Government and ownership interference

The control and interference of owners of broadcast media have greatly influenced the ability of broadcast media to live up to its role as a watchdog as found by this study. Usually, no broadcast outfit appeared out of nowhere. It is both established and run by the government, an individual or a group of individuals. It will be rather delusional to think that these organizations will run free of the wishes and biddings of its owners as they have a purpose for establishing them in the first place, observed by one informant from AIT. Informants overall explained that regardless of the editorial policies of their organizations guiding how they perform their journalistic duties, they always work with the consciousness of what their owners expect and project their affiliations. In FRCN, findings reveal that, by default, every information being broadcast about government must take on a positive angle for the government. As such, journalists are expected to write in favor of government or stand the risk of their reports being cancelled by editors, while editors must ensure that what gets to be broadcast does not portray government negatively or stand the risk of losing their jobs. Informants' position centered around the view that the organization does not allow anything that will indict the government who owns them to go out. As a result, their role as watchdog especially as it involves investigative journalism is influenced by this. An informant shared thus "One of our then Director-General in 2015, once came out, not in hiding and said to us that he will not allow anything against the then administration to go out through us (referring to the medium)". This implies a lack of editorial independence, which invariably impacts content.

Similarly, AIT, which even though privately owned, is not free of the shackles of the influence of its owners. For instance, it is no news in Nigeria that the owner of AIT is a card-carrying member of the current led opposition political party, the PDP. Informants' views show that although by law, they may be free of the interferences of government, the political affiliations of their owner, always stands in the way of their effectiveness as a watchdog of the society. As seen in the response of one informant: "yes, in the books we are independent of government, but I cannot sit here and tell you we are independent of our owner. From here, (referring to the interviewer's observation) you can tell which political parties we belong to, these things influence the kind of stories we put out". This implies that owners' political interest gets in the way of professionalism. Informants emphasized that, although the interest of owners cannot be erased completely, they are of the opinion that, this can be reduced to its barest minimum by a more stringent regulation on ensuring editorial independence for greater professionalism for them.

This finding although not entirely new, shows that, regardless of ownership structure, owners' interest is still prevalent in journalistic practice even in a very media plural society like Nigeria. proponents of social responsibility media theory advocated for pluralism in media ownership in order to break media hegemony, thereby promoting a more robust and all-inclusive representation of the society, this was believed to also break the dominance of only those who had the economic power to access the media (McQuail, 2010). The finding provides support for a lot of previous studies, which examined the place of ownership in media practice. For instance, Ngwu(2015) opined that there is a very high level of ownership influence on the activities of media in Nigeria which affects their freedom to discharge their constitutional duties professionally, in the case of this study, broadcast media watchdog role. It also affirms Munoriyarwa (2018) whose study found that in Zimbabwe the interest of media owners oftentimes contrasts professionalism and contributes to a decline in investigative reporting in the country's print media.

Similarly, Waisbord (2000) argued that a media's closeness or affiliation to certain powers will render it uninterested in keeping an eye on such power. He believes that in his words "watchdogs do not bite their owners...nor do they chomp neighbors with whom they have amicable relationships" p. 6. In line with the present findings, Endong (2017) and Yeoh (2011) equally submits that state ownership of the media exerts pressure and control on the media thereby constraining its ability to perform its watchdog role effectively. Therefore, in accordance with the current study's findings, the interest of the owners of broadcast media continues to show itself through their political affiliations and control of how they should be portrayed, which affects editorial independence and what they choose to pay attention to and subsequently broadcast.

Economic and Commercial factors

Data analysis also showed that commercial pressures influence watchdog performance of broadcast media. Broadcast media is a highly capital intensive venture, perhaps more capital intensive than print media. Hence, it tends to be swayed by the need for financial stability to continue to remain in business, sometimes even above its professional duties, informants reveal. Informants from both FRCN and AIT agreed that their organizations are pressured by inadequate funds for the proper running of daily broadcasting. Informants from AIT-the private media emphasized this issue more and through the interview sessions, it resonated more with them. Informants' views bothered on the fact that pressures from advertisers, politicians and public relations impact their watchdog role performance. They explained that, even as they have the mandate to serve the public interest by being its watchdog, they also exist as a business and one of the characteristics of business is to make a profit and to continue to remain afloat and compete with other rivals.

Considering the current economic challenges of Nigeria as a developing country, the media is not isolated from the vagaries of the economic realities of the day, as such, they have to strive to remain in business. It was gathered that one of the major sources of revenue for broadcast media is through advertisements, providing coverage for politicians and sometimes even rendering public relations services, one informant explained. The study found that the biggest

advertisers in broadcast media are government and its agencies, seconded by politicians, then private organizations. These advertisers usually pay huge sum of money for the purpose of advertising, one informant believes that they (broadcast media) receive more patronage from advertisers more than their print counterpart, he attributed that to developments in technology which is shifting audience preference to the electronic media and rendering newspapers less desirable and also because of its wider coverage. Thus, the fees paid by these advertisers make up the majority of the funds' broadcast media survives on.

Hence, these advertisers, directly and indirectly, influence broadcast media content and reduce their biting ability to dig out and pursue stories of wrongdoings committed by their patronizers. In the words of one informant in AIT, "Government is still the biggest patronizer of broadcast media in terms of commercial. So to a large extent, when we enter into a contract with them (government), we are tied a little bit to what we can say about them because what they will naturally do is withdraw their patronage and then it will be difficult for us to operate. So, largely, it makes us care about what we can do and cannot do, that is a major influence for us here". This certainly influences how they see and perform their watchdog role.

In a bid to keep up with financial pressures, the study also found that the two broadcast media organizations in the study have established what they refer to as "Dedicated coverage". As explained by informants, dedicated coverage is a form of news coverage they adopted, whereby a reporter is attached to a politician or an organization on request to cover their activities, more like public relations, however, the service is paid for by the client. One informant explained it more succinctly thus, "there is something we call dedicated coverage, every broadcast outfit has it now. It is a way of generating money, where you have a reporter attached with say, a politician or an organization, those people pay for that service. Now, you cannot write anything negative about those people. Now, as a broadcast organization, if you want to do your duty with due diligence and there is something wrong breaking about that individual or organization who is paying for the dedicated coverage, you are automatically constrained". In an economy where the media have to provide everything for the smooth running of their organization, including electricity, commercialization of news becomes apparent. This, therefore, stands in the way of their objectivity, balance and even accuracy as advocated and promoted by the social responsibility theory.

This finding corroborates a recent study by [Munoriyarwa \(2018\)](#) who found that advertisers patronage newspapers in Zimbabwe especially with the decline in circulation of newspapers, affects print media watchdog reporting a great deal. He argued that because there is a shortage of advertisers, they try to retain the few available and therefore throw out investigations about them. Furthermore, [Yusha'u \(2009\)](#), also study found that an inadequate capital base for media keeps them at the mercy of advertisers. The finding is also consistent with that of [Shardowand Asare \(2016\)](#) who opined that the high cost of printing newspapers and also a decline in patronage of newspapers has greatly impacted its investigative abilities. The finding further supports arguments by [Norris & Odugbemi \(2010\)](#), [Waisbord \(2015\)](#) and [Coronel \(2010\)](#) who all submitted that economic market forces render the media slaves to the market and reduce them to lapdogs. Similarly, [Oso\(2013\)](#) and [Omojola \(2010\)](#) adduced that the need for profit by media has rendered the independent watchdog's vitality ineffective by reflecting the biddings of those who keep them in business (advertisers).

Arguably, broadcast media is capital intensive and survives mostly on profits derived from advertising. Thus, commercial pressures, arising from economic issues renders broadcast media weak in performing its watchdog function and judging from the findings, therefore, this influences the watchdog role performance of broadcast media because the need for patronage to remain in business drives them to sometimes do the biddings of advertisers than represent public interest in their content and coverage.

Non-exploration of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

A very important theme that emerged from data centered on the absence of curiosity from the part of broadcast media journalists in relation to available information access law. Contrary to many works of literature that argued and found repressive and conflicting laws as hindrances to effective watchdog presence in the media, as they are found in many developing countries. This study finding showed that there is a general laxity and lack of will on the part of broadcast media practitioners to explore the freedom of information act like their counterparts in print media do to access information of public importance that were once kept hidden from the public because of the absence of such a law. Thus, this affects their performance of the watchdog role. Freedom of information act was signed in Nigeria in 2011. The actualization of the law was greeted with so much relief especially by the media. This was because of the apparent efficacy the law possesses to improve media freedom and also because it took more than a decade in duration for government to assent to the bill. It is believed that having the FOIA would boost journalistic inquiry since it provides legal backing for access to information from government and public institutions that were denied previously.

As revealed by informants, in terms of laws that guarantee press freedom in a democracy, they consider Nigerian broadcast media as operating in a largely free environment backed by laws. However, they all made reference to the freedom of information act as one of the important laws with regards to their watchdog role. Informants expressed that unlike print media journalists, broadcast media practitioners do not explore the freedom of information act. In both FRCN and AIT, informants believe the law was in place for their work to be aided and for greater public service but

decried non-usage of it. This was confirmed, as none of them (informants) affirmed to ever making use of the law to request or demand information from government or any public institution since it was signed.

Some informants attributed it to simply lack will to go outside the usual beat reporting, others were of the view that it hasn't been emphasized by their organization. As a result, they rather just take on the usual reporting rather than make extra efforts to follow the procedures outlined by the FOIA to elicit in-depth information of public importance. One informant shared that "This law that was passed by the national assembly after a long time, to be honest with you eh, we don't explore the freedom of information law enough. We are not exploring because we are not using a lot of it and that is because it depends on what one is looking for". This reveals a lack of will and somewhat shows a lack of emphasis on the part of broadcast media management on the need for journalists to pursue more information, especially information, people in authority try to hide from the public.

Findings from the study also revealed that broadcast media practitioners do not explore the law because they are skeptical of the practicality of the FOIA in terms of compliance from public officials and institutions. The long-time practice of secrecy and non-disclosure of official documents and information owing to the presence of the official secret act is still held unto by institutions to deny access to information, as pointed out by informant. These findings, however, contradict literature, which mostly, lamented restrictive and repealing laws standing in the way of media performing their roles. For instance, [Chukwu \(2018\)](#) opined that the removal of existing legislations that strangle media freedom would remedy media performance. [Ali \(2015\)](#) and [Oberiri \(2017\)](#) also highlighted loopholes in the laws that guarantee freedom for the press. The reason that such laws are often contradictory thereby giving media freedom on one hand and taking it back on the other hand.

The FOIA is largely seen as a boost to the media's performance of its roles. Considering that the law provides access to information of public importance, it is expected that broadcast media just like the print, use it to find out more information for the public. Contrary to literature which has consistently found and described the presence of repealing laws to impede the media, the finding here presents the opposite, which shows a lack of will and somewhat laziness on the part of broadcast media to fully utilize the FOIA to enhance and improve on its watchdog role performance.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the limitations, findings of this study have made some modest but insightful contributions to understanding the role of the media as a watchdog. First, it highlighted the importance of investigative journalism in broadcast media as a form of watchdogging and the monitoring and providing of in-depth information to the public through broadcast media programs also as a means of watchdogging which implies that watchdogging is not limited to exposes' alone. While broadcast media understand their role as a social responsibility, they need to do more in watchdog journalism. This would not only earn them the trust of the public, but it will also go a long way in pushing for transparency and accountability in governance. Secondly, the factors identified as affecting the watchdog role performance calls for actions on the path of broadcast media organizations in Nigeria to ensure that professionalism and business motives are balanced in order not to elude the very essence of the existence in the society. Thirdly, the findings also suggest that the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) ought to do more in ensuring less and less interference of owners in editorial independence.

LIMITATION AND SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study is a case study of broadcast media and findings do not represent the general case of all broadcast media in Nigeria. It is limited to the ones in the study. Future studies can incorporate more broadcast media or comparison in the level of performance of the watchdog role between public and private broadcast media.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Author one collected the data in Nigeria, contributed to the analysis of data and writing of the paper.

Author 2: Author two designed the analysis and contributed to the analysis of data.

Author 3: Author three contributed to designing and analysis as well as proofreading of the manuscript.

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