Party Politics and Influence Towards Public Broadcast Stations' News Credibility and Public Relations in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT *Public broadcast stations concern for news credibility in Nigeria; the likely differences in the challenge of ownership influence posed by partisan leadership governments towards public broadcast stations' news credibility and public relations; and how public relations may have been employed towards tackling possible problems of news credibility are the inputs of this paper. the survey research design was used to purposively study staff of four public broadcast stations –Nasarawa Broadcasting Service, Lafia, Nasarawa state, Nigeria; Radio Benue, Makurdi, Benue state, Nigeria; Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation, Ondo State, Nigeria; and Lagos Television, Lagos state, Nigeria as well as members of the public in the remote location of the respective broadcast stations. While the public broadcast stations were purposively considered, the broadcast staff were non-purposively sampled. At 95% confidence level -0.5 margin of error, respective sampling sizes –NBS=60; RB=90; OSRC=90; LTV=120 were drawn through the simple random sampling technique. 200 sampled in each location hosting the respective stations –Lafia, Makurdi, Akure, and Akuka. Two different closed-ended questionnaire were used for data collection. Study concludes that journalists are not ignorant of news credibility concerns; all partisan government leaderships have certain degree of ownership influence towards broadcast news credibility in Nigeria, and perhaps beyond; and there is a significant difference between the level of news credibility of public broadcast stations with quality public relations and those without. Recommendations include: mediating critically between public interests and the overall party interests; using broadcasting for democratic participation and development; and employing public relations tactics towards tackling possible problems of news credibility in some broadcast stations in developing countries, and beyond.*

Introduction

According to several scholars of media history, particularly, Nigeria's media history, there has being a strong co-relation between government media ownership, party politics and media messages. Ciboh (2007) states that most media outfits were either tools for government propaganda or political party agenda. Duyile (2005) reiterates that there has been a very strong link between government control, media attitude and influence. Atim (2012) acknowledges a contemporary situation where nothing in the media today can be noted without government control, party politics, power and financial interests. Daramola (2013, p. 182) affirms that "…the birth of the electronic media –radio and TV- in Nigeria has a link with political and cultural factors apart from the fact that the intention was mainly to strengthen the colonial hold of Britain on Nigeria." Today, well after the privatization of the broadcast media in Nigeria since 1992, there is a significant government ownership and control of the media. Though the media in Nigeria appears highly proliferated, the media is either regulated or owned by government.

There is a rising question of media credibility; especially, in the light of increasing political and power interest in the Nigeria contemporary democracy. Normally, given the role of public relations which deals with not just truth but image, one cannot but wonder if government controlled broadcast media care about the extent of public trust it enjoys. The issue of public relations and broadcast stations public trust lay particularly with news credibility. This is simply because news is the main media product, as well as product of public service (Ciboh and Terngu, 2004).

In view of the political undertones, government control and partisan politics, it seems interesting to understand how various selected public (government) broadcast stations, under different political parties **–as in the case of this study: Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP), and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)** have so far worried about public trust, broadcast news credibility, and public relations. This curiousity builds the basis of this research.

Statement of the Problem

With a possible feeling that propaganda is rampant and the broadcast media may often be a tool, it is pertinent to understand how state owned broadcast stations for instance, strive towards enhancing news credibility and legitimacy of other disseminated messages. The issue at stake is public trust and how public relations may be a part of the problem or solution. Also, the contemporary broadcast media in Nigeria may burst of growth in the face of continuing democracy, but certain concerns still persist with how staff and management of various state media, under different partisan leadership or government may be struggling with news credibility and public trust. Therefore, the extent to which care is given to public trust, and whether such a situation may be a challenging one that may also warrant the application of public relations remains a concern to be understood.

Objectives
The following are the objectives of this paper:
1. To determine if state broadcast stations in Nigeria worry about news credibility and fidelity.
2. To determine if there is any difference in the likely challenge of ownership influence posed by partisan leadership governments towards public broadcast stations' news credibility and public relations.
3. To ascertain if and how public relations may have been employed towards tackling possible problems of news credibility.

Questions
The following questions guided the empirical input of this paper:
1. Does state broadcast stations in Nigeria worry about news credibility and fidelity?
2. Is there any difference in the likely challenge of ownership influence posed by partisan leadership governments

towards public broadcast stations' news credibility and public relations?

3. To what extent has public relations been employed to-wards tackling possible challenges of news credibility?

Hypothesis

Ho:There is no significant difference between the level of news credibility of public broadcast stations with quality pub-lic relations and those without.

Operational Definition of Key Terms

Party Politics: Political activities with strong ties to very or-ganized and officially recognized group known as a political party.

Public relations: Mutual relations and relationship with mem-bers of the general public otherwise known as the masses or audience members.

News Credibility: The certainty of truth and absolute objec-tivity in broadcast news.

Public Broadcast Stations: radio and or television broadcast stations owned and controlled by government otherwise called the state.

Discuss

Nigeria, a very large West African country, historically boasts of the one of the most free and outspoken communication media in Africa. Nevertheless, media in Nigeria has also been consistently targeted and harassed. This is especially true of the past military dictatorships in Nigeria. Presently, irrespec-tive of the current democratic dispensation - somewhat less-oppressive current civilian government, many media persons or journalists have continued to come victimized or attacked; such impunities emanates from the government –as can be observed in the June 2006 arrest of Gbenga Aruleba and Rotimi Durojaiye of African Independent Television, on charges of sedition- or are perpetuated by other power play-ers or establishments –an example of which is the self-im-posed exile of Isioma Daniel, a then journalist with Thisday newspaper, who "found" trouble as a result of a riot in North-ern Nigeria over comments she made in an article regarding Muhammad and the 2002 Miss World pageant.

It is worth mentioning that while newspapers and, most re-cently, blogging and social media platforms have ensured considerable audience participation in Nigeria through the toughest of times, radio and television broadcasting have being perceived to be very limited in the sort of opportunity it delivers to audiences to react to issues in the news. This perceived situation may relates to the tendency of Nigerians to relay on foreign broadcast stations like British Broadcast-ing Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), Cable News Network (CNN), others like Al Jaziera' and Deutsche Welle (DW).   There appears also to be a multiplicity of websites that avail Nigerians the opportunity to air their opinions on a variety of topics. Blogging is an increasing means of safer and easier circulation of "credible news" among Nigeria au-diences who at one point or the other are disenchanted or dissatisfied with the state of affairs in Nigeria, or elsewhere.

Such concerns as mentioned above were reiterated at a 2013 biennial conference of the Nigerian Guild of Editors. This was in order to ponder the state of the Nigerian media. With reference to this, Olawunmi (2013) says that Nigerian media enjoys the accolade of being one of Africa's most vibrant, yet, media performance can be much better. Olawunmi (2013) continues that the major issues which demand attention in media practice include fairness and accuracy, rabid political partisanship in editorial content as well as media credibility. There is also the issue of poor quality control of editorial con-tent, particularly news stories, which is the flagship product of the media. In all these, the ownership factor is crucial.

Though there are several competing forces seeking control of the media. A key competing force is the media owner – public or private. There is the widespread notion that the media owner, like the person who pays the piper, has the right to dictate the tune in editorial content. This is a fallacy, given the media's primary mandate as a public trust. For the privately-owned media, it is a dual mandate – as a business and public trust.

According to Olawunmi (2013), where the owner is govern-ment, such media outfit should function mainly as public ser-vice, not business, as is currently the case with the commer-cialization of news, particularly in radio and television stations owned by federal and state governments. The indictment here is that news commercialization in a government owned media is in the first place wrong.

It is incorrect to surrender publicly owned media to market forces; such a scenario is a repudiation of government's fun-damental service to the people and a denial of their rights to know and be heard as such policy shuts out a significant section of the polity. It is understandable that governments, private owners, special interest groups and even advertisers would seek to influence or control the media in their desire to sell a point of view, to be positively projected to the people through the media or to contain resistance by the masses, Olawunmi (2013), sustains.

According to Haberman (1989), the media are more or less institutions in the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere means that the media should facilitate pluralist de-bate towards promoting free formation of mass or public opinion, and not to foster hegemonic philosophies on the people. Such is considered an essential aspect of any dem-ocratic process; a pluralist possibility which supports a free market place of ideas and an independent media.

Dahlgren and Sparks (1991) reiterates that very often, instead of the mass media to reflect popular concerns and perform the anticipated informational role, media powers play the consumer representation role, serving as actors in the mar-ketplace, pondering on scheming ideological interests of the dominant class in the society and getting integrated in exist-ing poles of economic and political tussles.

Theoretical Perspective
Critical Media Theory
The critical media theory was developed by Hanno Hardt in 1989 in an article about the critical approaches to the of problems of communication and media in American social science research. Hardt (1989) traced the understanding of a "critical" position through four periods: (1) pragmatism of the Chicago School, (2) the empirical sociology of the Lazars-feld tradition   (3) the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, and (4) the cultural Studies movement in the United King-dom. Hardt (1989) argues that the term "critical" refers to the social criticism. "Social criticism" is often used in the explanations about the theory because it refers to taking a scientific approach to social problems in other to bring about a change. The theory stresses the relationship between the media, power, and the maintenance of social order (Hardt, 1989:p. 559).

Lye (2008) states the following six positions of the theory about the critical media theory thus:
1. Conspiracy: The populace is being manipulated delib-erately by the owners of the mass media on behalf of the capitalist cause -- in the interests of profit; above all, social and political powers are seen as top-down and manipulative.

2. Dominance: The people who run the media, and the peo-ple who control business and government, have the same ends, values and socialization, and their values are influential towards mass media structures and content; especially, from the perspective of news.

3. Homogenization: The media function to mainstream society, to erode independent thought and action, and to render everyone more and more the same.

4. Political Economy: Capitalism drives the economic, political and communication systems towards injustice. The emphasis is necessarily on control of the market place, including the control of labour, with profits as the only goal, and on the centralization of power in the hands of the holders of capital. to control labour one controls, among other things, information and ideas.

5. Commoditization: Capitalism tends to turn all objects, work and relationships into commodities, things that can be bought, sold, valued; as such it totally transforms our understandings of ourselves and of our relations to others and to society. We become privatized individuals in a world of status and exchange value. In the meantime, the real value of goods is replaced by their 'sign' value or status value.

6. Erosion of Rationality: The mass media, driven by advertising, appeal to the sensation of images to our dreams, creates a sense of a false world in which commodities purchase happiness and in which social problems are resolved on the level of emotion and the individual. At the same time we are rendered passive and reactive people who are pleased to be entertained, thereby making us less competent members of a democracy. This is because any democracy calls for an informed, rational populace.

The critical media theory is considered by Lye (2008) to contain some problems, thus:
1. Seldom considers audience meanings
2. Denies any sense of audience resistance or critical intelligence.
3. Most often, does not establish how media may shape and influence perception and behavior.
4. Assumes that influence = attitude change = behaviour change.
5. Tends too often to proceed as if mass mediated communication were the only hegemonic force.
6. Tends to oversimplify the process of the production of the media.
7. Does not establish that the claims it makes are empirically or historically valid.
8. Diminishes the positive contributions of mass media to social and political awareness.
9. The theory fails to connect between societal and system forces on the one hand, and   the immediate effects of media on people, it looks like conspiracy theory rather than explanation.

According to Lye (2008), Despite the problems or criticisms associated with the critical media theory, Lye (2008) sustains that the theory is helpful, thus:

1. Big business and government do work together. This implies that the media observes trends that trip in financial gains and power interest. This is because no media exist in isolation of its society (Brian and Mack, 2010).

2. Profit is the bottom line most of the time. (Lye, 2008). The tendency of media blocs to strive for, and respect who pays the piper is usually high and real.

3. The mass media are controlled to a large extent by the big business and government (Lye, 2008). The functional frame work of most media fits into what the ownership expects (Brian and Mack, 2010).

4. We are often told lies. (Lye, 2008). This means that biases are a reality in media experiences (Brian and Mack, 2010). This implies that re-construct reality exist and the tendency to strive for credibility may often be neglected.

5. Much of the mass media is unimaginative, sensationalist, and slanted towards the interests of the powerful. In the end the interests of the most important and domineering class. (Brian and Mack, 2010).

6. Critical media theory teaches us to seek out and act against the abuse of power (Lye, 2008). This is critical to this study because the theory projects the likely mal-functions and tendencies involved in the application of media influence. Furthermore, the critical media theory provides the platform for media "watch dogs". Through this understanding, the struggle for balance and credibility may never die, irrespective of the kind of media tendencies that may persist. The media interplays will always be under scrutiny through a consistent critical analysis of the kind of public relations and public trust been ensured.

Methodology
In order to complete this paper empirically, the survey research design was used. According to statements by Bordens and Abbott (2008), the survey research design is appropriate for this kind of study. Staff of 4 state owned broadcast stations –Nasarawa Broadcasting Service, Lafia, Nasarawa state, Nigeria; Radio Benue, Makurdi, Benue state, Nigeria; Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation, Ondo State, Nigeria; and Lagos Television, Lagos state, Nigeria- were considered for the study as well as members of the public in the remote location of the respective stations that were selected.

While the stations were purposively considered, the broadcast staff were through a simple randomly considered and sampled. Tejumaye (2003) and Osemwota (2009) adduced that such sampling techniques are normally applied according to the appropriateness and needs of the research, as well as the characteristics of the respondents. In view of these, staff of the Nasarawa Broadcasting Service (NBS) were considered because it is the main state/government owned radio and television broadcast station of the **Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) led Nasarawa state government**. Staff of Radio Benue (RB), Makurdi were considered because it is the most viable state/government broadcast station of the **People Democratic Party (PDP) led Benue state government**. Staff of the Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation (OSRC), were considered for research because it the main state/government radio and television broadcast station of the **Labour Party (LP) led Ondo state government;** while staff of Lagos Television (LTV) were considered because it is the main/government most viable broadcast station of the **Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) led Lagos state government.** Note worthy, the stations whose broadcast staff were sampled have a varying number of broadcast staff. However, there was 95% confidence level -0.5 margin of error- in the various and respective sampling sizes –NBS=60; RB=90; OSRC=90; LTV=120. Rasul (2009) affirms the correctness of such a sample and sampling technique.

The random sampling technique was also used in the consideration and sampling of a total of 800 residents/populace (members of the public whom the respective broadcast stations were expected to remotely broadcast to), this means that in each state of the selected broadcast stations, there were 200 respondents -200 in Nasarawa State, 200 in Benue state, 200 in Ondo state, and 200 in Lagos state. However, there is no ascertained sampling confidence level because the number of respondents was not based on the population of the respective states, and as such not based on any statistical method. It was a mere simple random sample that was intended to provide a basic hit of the possible listenership and potential credibility that the respective stations may have being enjoying or otherwise. Copies of two different sets of close-ended questionnaire were used as instruments of data collection.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Staff concern about news credibility

Broadcast station	%
NBS	100
RB	100
OSRC	100
LTV	100

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

At confidence level of 95% each, staff concern about news credibility, according to responses by staff samples, was found to be 100% for all stations.

Table 2: Extent of news credibility

Broadcast station	%	Confidence level
NBS	53	95%
RB	44	95%
OSRC	56	95%
LTV	88	95%

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

At confidence level of 95% each, the extent of overall news credibility, according to responses obtained through staff samples, was found to be thus: 53% = NBS, 44% = Radio Benue, 56% = OSRC, and 88% = LTV.

Table 3: Partisan government ownership influence towards news credibility

Level of influence	NBS	RB	OSRC	LTV	Confidence Level
Very high	14%	17 %	6%	0%	95%
High	24%	56%	30%	3.5%	95%
Low	43%	12%	53%	64%	95%
Very low	19%	5%	21%	33%	95%
None	0%	0%	0%	0%	95%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

At confidence level of 95% each, partisan government ownership influence towards news credibility, according staff of the respective stations, is spread as follows; **Very high:** 14% = NBS, 17% = Radio Benue, 6% = OSRC, and 0% = LTV. **High:** 24% = NBS, 56% = Radio Benue, 30% = OSRC, 3.5% = LTV. **Low:** 43% = NBS, 12% = Radio Benue, 53% = OSRC, and 64% = LTV. **Very low:** 19% = NBS, 5% = Radio Benue, 21% OSRC, 33% = LTV.

Table 4: Functional Public relations units at the broadcast stations

Responses	NBS	RB	OSRC	LTV	Confidence Level
Yes	0%	0%	88%	98%	95%
No	52%	69%	00	00	95%
Undecided	48%	31%	22%	2%	95%
Total	100	100	100	100	

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

At confidence level of 95% each, the functionality of the public relations/information unit was agreed by staff of the respective stations to be 0% = NBS, 0% = Radio Benue, 84% = Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation, and 98% = Lagos Television.

Table 5: Functional Public relations/Information personnel

Responses	NBS	RB	OSRC	LTV	Confidence Level
Yes	0%	04%	54%	82	95%
No	0%	0%	00	00	95%
Undecided	100%	96%	46%	18%	95%
Total	100%	100%	100	100	

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

At confidence level of 95% each, the reality of the public relations/information staff was agreed by staff of the respective stations to be 0% for NBS, 04% for Radio Benue, 64% for Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation, and 98% for Lagos Television.

Table 6: Interactivity of a functional Public relations/audience feedback mechanism

Responses	NBS	RB	OSRC	LTV	Confidence Level
Yes	14%	11%	68%	98%	95%
No	0%	00%	00	00%	95%
Undecided	86%	89%	32%	02	95%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

At confidence level of 95% each, the interactivity of the audience feedback mechanism is agreed by staff to be 14% for NBS, 11% Radio Benue, 68% for Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation, and 98% for Lagos Television.

Table 7: Respondents Credibility Concerns in Ondo State

Responses	NBS	RB	OSRC	LTV
Yes	78.5%	83%	77%	74.5%
No	21.5%	17%	23%	25.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

Majority of the respondents that were sampled care about news credibility. In Nasarawa state, 78.5% of the respondents care about news credibility of Nasarawa Broadcasting Service (NBS), 83% of those in Benue care about news credibility of Radio Benue, 77% of those in Ondo care about the news credibility of Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation (OSRC), while 74.5% of those in Lagos care about the news credibility of Lagos State Television (LTV).

Table 8: Interactive/feedback Platforms

Responses	NBS	RB	OSRC	LTV
Yes	14%	6%	28%	64%
No	86%	94%	72%	36%
Total	200	100%	100%	100%

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

In Nasarawa state, 14% of the respondents (audience members) claim to be aware of Nasarawa Broadcasting Service (NBS) interactive platforms, 6% of those in Benue claim to be aware of Radio Benue's interactive/feedback platforms, 32% of those in Ondo claim to be aware of Ondo State Radio-Vision Corporation's (OSRC) interactive platform while 74.5% of those in Lagos care about the news credibility of Lagos State Television (LTV).

Table 9: Whether respondents' aware of Interactive platforms use them

Responses	NBS	RB	OSRC	LTV
Yes	0	1%	2.5%	26%
No	14%	5%	25.5%	38 %
Total	14%	6%	28%	64%

Source: Content Analysis, 2013.

All the 14% of audience members aware of the broadcast station interactive and feedback platform for NBS said they did not use them, 1% out of 6% who admitted to being aware of Radio Benue's interactive/feedback platforms claimed they used them, 2.5% out of the 28% of those who admitted being aware of OSRC interactive and feedback platform used them, while only 26% of out 64% of those who admitted being aware Lagos Television interactive and feedback platform did use them.

Test of Hypothesis
To test the hypothesis, a general notation for a 2x2 contingency was used.

Table 10: 2x2 contingency table for test hypothesis

	Credibility concern	Level of credibility	Total
Stations with quality PR	100	72	172
Stations without	100	49	149
Total	200	121	321

$X^2 = 2.737$

With $X^2 = 2.737$, the chi square distribution table shows that Df =1; while $P<0.05$. This means there is a significant difference between the level of news credibility of public broadcast stations with quality public relations and those without. The null hypothesis as stated earlier -*there is no significant difference between the level of news credibility of public broadcast stations with quality public relations and those without*- is therefore rejected.

Conclusion
This paper therefore makes the following conclusion:

Journalists' credibility concern: Broadcast journalists and perhaps, all journalists are not ignorant news credibility concerns, irrespective of where they work. Nevertheless, the level of news credibility is a direct product of editorial and ownership mission and vision. No public broadcast station has a 100% rating of news credibility. Credibility management results in half truths –incomplete information- instead of outright lies –in accurate information this is found to be a common tactics among public stations.

Partisan government influence: All partisan government leaderships have certain degree of ownership influence towards news credibility in Nigeria, and perhaps beyond. This study shows that all political parties in Nigeria have a strong and real desire to be "favoured" by public broadcast stations under their governmental jurisdiction. However, there are differences in the likely challenge of ownership influence posed by partisan leadership governments towards public broadcast stations' news credibility in Nigeria.

Public relations role: Public relations have been employed towards tackling possible problems of news credibility in some broadcast stations in Nigeria. This study reveals that's the extent of public relations at any broadcast station will to a very great extent to show such a stations' commitment towards ensuring news credibility. There is a significant difference between the level of news credibility of public broadcast stations with quality public relations and those without. The intention to open up for a two way communication is found to be important and strongly correlates with the re-spective news credibility perception levels of the broadcast stations that were studied.

Social media as public relations tools: The use of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, and the provision of "hot line" for audience feedback and reactions may not guarantee news credibility of such a broadcast station but will often encourage. This is because this study found out that very few audience members use such interactive platforms and avenues for feedback.

Importance of feedback mechanism: Despite that only few audience members use feedback/interactive platforms offered by public stations in Nigeria, such interactive platforms and avenues for feedback are found to be a motivation towards some enhances levels of public news credibility. Broadcast journalists working in public stations with public relations units and practitioner(s), and such interactive platforms and avenues for feedback between the station and the public are found to be more confident about news credibility and public trust.

Recommendations
The following are hereby recommended:
1. Mediating critically between public interests and the overall party interests in the need for development at all levels and spheres should be the template for public broadcasting in any democracy.
2. Broadcasting should be a tool, and can be a tool for encouraging democratic participation as well as development, and not negative, propagandist manipulations. The later will destroy party legitimacy and should be avoided by all partisan government leaderships in Nigeria and beyond. News credibility ratings should be considered as government transparency and accountability efforts to the people.
3. Public relations have been employed towards tackling possible problems of news credibility in some broadcast stations in Nigeria. The extent of public relations at any broadcast station will often show the commitment towards ensuring news credibility. Public relations should be imbibed at broadcast organizational policy and management levels.
4. The use and the provision of very active telecommunications and internets platforms like social media for broadcast audience feedback, interaction and reactions should be seriously encouraged. This is found to be lacking in most broadcast stations in Nigeria as far as management and policy are concern.

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