APPRAISAL OF CORRUPTION NEWS REPORTAGE ON NTA INT’L AND CHANNELS TELEVISION

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Abstract
This paper x-rayed the reportage of corruption news on NTA International and Channels TV, as well the appraisal of some professionals on such coverage. NTA International is a satellite broadcast outfit owned by the federal government of Nigeria, with the responsibility of projecting the good image Nigeria to the world, while Channels TV is a leading independent satellite television station in Nigeria. The study came on the heels of wide spread speculations that Nigerian broadcast media reportage and treatment of corruption news under the Buhari administration were tainted by some intervening factors, including problems of ownership, control, subjectivity, institutional gatekeeping, selfcensorship and bias. These provided the basis for empirical evidence to ascertain the views learned professionals hold about the treatment accorded corruption news stories by these stations. The survey was adopted as research design. The questionnaire was used to collect data for the survey from a sample of 302 respondents drawn from among practicing journalists, mass communication lecturers and public servants, who were subscribers of either DSTV or GOTV. The results of the study showed that these viewers tended to trust and view as fair and balanced corruption stories reported by Channels TV but berated the station for inaccuracies resulting from their haste to speculate or break such stories. On the contrary, viewers identified the NTA International with the tendency to suppress corruption stories, especially where they involved members of certain political parties or political leanings. Respondents also identified NTA International with propaganda, half-truths and bias in its attempts to manage government information and image. From the findings, the study recommends that as corporate citizens, the media should strive for social responsibility in the discharge of their functions. Second, media treatment of corruption issues should be devoid of partisanship, if Nigeria must redeem its image and regain its pride of place in the comity of nations. The fight against corruption could yield tremendous results where the media are pluralistic, reflecting the diversity of the country through various points of view and right to reply.

Key Words: Media, Corruption, Reportage, Partisanship, Objectivity, Ownership, Self-Censorship

Introduction
Television is one of the most potent forms of mass communication. The medium’s strengths draws from its ability to tell the news while it is happening, complete with synergy of sight, sound and motion. In fact, as Bielak (2002) notes, in terms of clarity and comprehension of news, television has remained the most preferred medium, though also the most abused by government officials (Nwanze 2003). This perhaps, explains why in most developing countries of the world, television remained the monopoly of government for tens of decades. There are reasons for this, and paramount among them was to serve as dictatorial and propaganda instruments for the government in power. Dominick’s (2007) assertion is thus well-made that the media system that exists in a country is directly related to the political system in that country. Until 1993, television broadcasting in Nigeria had remained the monopoly of the government, suggesting that news at that time had remained downright
one-sided, information couched in the mould and coloration of the government in power. Yet, as Baran (2004) notes, news is a tool people need for daily living, an instrument to help them make informed input about the polity and how they are governed. One then imagines what good the media would serve if they are reduced to purveyors of half-truths, distorted realities and propaganda. Nwanze (2003) observes that “the major motivation of successive governments in Nigeria in establishing the first generation of Nigeria's television station was political. Television broadcasting was used for propaganda purposes by politicians of the First Republic. All that time, the media were mainly political organs”.

Folarin (1998) and Oyero (2010) have also stated that such authoritarian tendencies by government have been counterproductive and critically disadvantageous; broadcast contents which are outright propaganda – news designed, tailored and doctored in line with government's definition, perception and characterisation of reality. Sometimes in a bid to avoid featuring programmes that would tend to show, highlight or elaborate restlessness among bewildered citizens on the face of hardships occasioned by misrule, political and economic crisis, unstable governments are known to engage in deliberate , sometimes desperate misinformation and under information of the people. The masses on their own have become increasingly suspicious of news emanating from government-owned media. Accordingly, Nwanze (2003) submits that government's influence on news coverage and dissemination has not in any way been selfless. According to him, it promotes partial coverage, cynicism and rumour mongering and does serious havoc on mobility of information that ensures balance, with the result that destructive rumour mongering is embraced by the populace.

In the light of the above premise, Nigerian had yearned for an alternative mouthpiece. Thus the thunderous ovation that tore through the country was well-deserved and befitting, when in 1993 the federal government decided to heed the voice of reason and deregulated the airspace. Indeed, it would be unjust to say that ever since then there have not been improvements in the quality of our broadcast contents, in terms of quality, composition and coverage, especially with the emergence of private players. But as Nwane (2003) contends “change being inevitable, society needs a mechanism for accomplishing it peacefully. Without free exchange of ideas and arguments, completely bottled-up pressures may mount to the point of exploding into violence and tearing society apart”. Ivey (2002) corroborates this point when he opines that “unless the communication process allows us to maintain a certain consensus on how we want change to take place, and to identify the goals of social changes, we have a complete breakdown of social organisation”. One of the leading campaign rhetoric and cardinal objectives of the Buhari-led government which took over in May 2015 has been the war against corruption. The administration claims to have recovered billions of dollars in cash and assets in the past three years, but the anti-graft war is perceived in some quarters to be one-sided. The Wikipedia (2017) defines corruption as a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. It goes on to situate the most referenced form of the menace, in Nigeria, as 'political' corruption – which it says occurs when an office-holder or other government employee acts in an official capacity for personal gain. Other types include, economic, moral, bureaucratic and judicial corruption.

The 2016 Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (TI) ranks Nigeria 136 out of 176 countries, meaning that for the fourth consecutive year since 2013 Nigeria has failed to rise from the ashes of corruption. Transparency International says corruption is endemic to the very fabric of the Nigerian state, permeating every sector of her national life. While Transparency International scored Nigeria 26 percent in its last report, it scored the country 28 in its latest report. Putting the scores in context, the organisation said that the lower-ranked countries in their index are plagued by untrustworthy and badly functional public institutions like the police and judiciary. They added that even where
anti-corruption laws are on the books, in practice they are often skirted or ignored. According to Jose Ugaz, Chair of Transparency International ‘people are deprived of their basic needs and go to bed hungry every night because of corruption, while the powerful and corrupt enjoy lavish lifestyles with impunity.’ Ugaz went on to add that ‘people frequently face situations of bribery and extortion, rely on basic services that have been undermined by the misappropriation of funds, and confront official indifference when seeking redress from authorities that are on the take.’ Interestingly, however, the report noted that higher-ranked countries like Denmark and New Zealand, which score 90 percent free of corruption, tend to have higher degrees of press freedom, access to information about public expenditure, stronger standards of integrity for public office, and independent judicial systems.

Over the past two years, there have been heightened speculations to the effect that state-owned broadcast media in Nigeria have been biased in their reporting of corruption, particularly where the suspects or subjects are card carrying members of certain political parties. In fact, extant literature on the subject matter has tended to suggest some form of media culpability in the skewed and varied perceptions of the masses with regards to the war against graft. Expectedly, the issue has generated a heated debate among scholars and viewers, alike, as to whether the broadcast media have been fair and above board in their handling of corruption news. However, subjectivity and partisanship seem to have been a trend that has trailed the practice for some decades. For instance, the Guardian, a leading Nigerian national newspaper, in its editorial of Sunday, October 18, 2007 while commenting the perceived bias in treatment of news among government-owned stations noted that “the federal government owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) though arguably the largest of its type in Africa, has yet to have the operational freedom required to maximize its potential.” This corroborates the view of the National Concord of April 6, 1983, on the partisan nature of the Nigerian media:

One would think that the mass media's first duty should be to keep the people fully, accurately and truthfully informed and not be partisan, biased and influenced...good faith with the public is the foundation of worthy journalism. If the public lacks confidence in the media in a society, then that media is (sic) as good as dead.

The direct satellite or cable platforms, NTA International and Channels Television often bombard viewers daily with news bulletins bordering on corruption and other related matters, but whether the stations’ treatment of these stories are perceived by viewers as fair, accurate and balanced forms the crux of this paper.

**Statement of the Problem**

One of the dominant themes at the front burner of public discourse in the Buhari-led government is the much-vaunted war against graft. This should come as no surprise as the issue formed the core of the campaign rhetoric upon which he rode to victory in the 2015 presidential polls in Nigeria. A peep at the newsstand and the average news bulletin in the Nigerian media over the past three years or so would reveal that corruption-related stories is arguably the news leader, aside security and politics. In the discharge of their information and surveillance function, the media are expected to keep the people fully, accurately and truthfully abreast of developments in the polity, and not to be partisan, biased or influenced. However, there is the suspicion of an increasing dissatisfaction among audience members with regards to broadcast media treatment of corruption news in the country, with particular reference to accuracy, balance and fairness. This dissatisfaction may not be unconnected with certain gatekeeping factors known to influence the packaging of news by media houses – factors like ownership and pattern of control, editorial policy, self-censorship, operational philosophy and editor's perception of reality. These variables are thus responsible for how
well-informed or otherwise the audience members are on topical issues, as well as the views they hold about the issues in the news and the media that report them. And since the modern media user is an active participant in the news process, this paper seeks to ascertain their evaluation of the coverage of corruption news by broadcast stations in Nigeria, in terms of accuracy, fairness and balance. The question therefore remains: how do members of selected professions in Akwa Ibom appraise the treatment of corruption news by NTA international and Channels Television.

**Objectives of the Study**
The objectives of the study were to:

i. determine how members of selected professions in Akwa Ibom appraise NTA International and Channels television treatment of corruption news in terms of accuracy, fairness and balance.

ii. find out what members of selected professions in Akwa Ibom think are the shortcomings associated with NTA International and Channels television handling of corruption news.

**Corruption: Conceptual Definition and Forms**
There is little consensus on the beginning of corruption in Nigeria. Online research portal Researchclue (2017) notes that the origin of corruption in Nigeria predates our political independence. Supporting this position, the site reports that nearly a decade before Nigeria’s independence, the Emir of Gwandu moved a motion in the Northern House of Chiefs: “That this House, agreeing that bribery and corruption are widely prevalent in all walks of life recommends that Native Authorities should make every effort to trace and punish offenders with strict impartiality and to educate public opinion against bribery and corruption.” Generally, corruption denotes efforts made to secure wealth or power through illegal means or a misuse of public power for private benefit and usually at the expense of the public. Acts of corruption could also involve giving or taking of bribe or the exercise of indiscretion, advance fee fraud, fraud, money laundering and embezzlements. Other common forms of corrupt practices and economic crimes include, narcotic drug trafficking, embezzlement, bribery, looting and any form of corrupt practices, illegal arms deal, smuggling, human trafficking and child labour, illegal oil bunkering and illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractice including counterfeiting currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market abuse and dumping of toxic and prohibited goods.

Transparency International defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Act (2000) views corruption as impropriety which encompasses all forms of reprehensible, indecorous and infamous conduct in the performance of some official and non-officials responsibilities. This means any act which go out of any normal societal behaviour. According to Nye (1967), Corruption is a behavior, which deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private (gains) – regarding (personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gains). It is behavior, which violates rules against the exercise of certain types of duties for private gains. Oyinola (2011) states that corruption is found in the award of contracts, promotion of staff, dispensation of justice, and misuse of public offices, positions, and privileges, embezzlement of public funds, public books, publications, documents, valuable security, and accounts. The World Bank cited in Raimi, Suara and Fadipe (2013) defines corruption as:

The abuse of public office for private gains; public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if
no bribery occurs, through patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets or the diversion of state resources.

To Tanzi (1998), it is “generally not difficult to recognize corrupt practices when observed”. Corrupt acts require a minimum of two individuals from one or more communities, and either exchange or the promise of an exchange of money or services takes place; typically in secret, and the pact benefits the dyad to the detriment of everyone else. According to Salisu (2000), the simplest definition of corruption is that it is the misapplication of public resources to private ends. For example, public officials may collect bribes for issuing passports or visa, for providing permits and licenses, for authorizing passage of goods at sea/airport, for awarding contracts or for enacting regulations designed to create artificial scarcity. Macrae (1982) defined corruption as an arrangement that involves an exchange between two parties (the demander and the supplier) which (i) has an influence on the allocation of resources either immediately or in the future; and (ii) involves the use or abuse of public or collective responsibility for private ends. Sternberg (2000) states that a bribe is an incentive offered to encourage someone to break the rules of the organization he nominally represents and deliver an (unfairly) favorable outcome.

Corrupt acts are increasingly regarded as “unfair” and indeed criminal by many high-income countries because the bribe-recipient’s betrayal of trust with his employer, when practiced systemically by high-ranking public officials, compromises the “development of fair and efficient markets” (Boatright, 1999). Corruption is the root and leading cause of under development in Africa. It is indeed the reason most societies lag in infrastructure and human capital development. Because of the fact that corruption affects public projects, that it determines significant loss to education, health and poverty prevention budgets, in both underdeveloped and developed countries, corruption is considered to be an important obstacle in the way of sustainable development (Floristeanu, 2010). Lack of action to salvage the social system from corruption can result into state capture by private interest groups, with harmful effects on the state, its economy and society, because the rules of the game can be fundamentally distorted for good, in the favor of some privileged individuals (Anderson and Gray, 2006).

The assertions above tend to suggest a relationship between corruption and economic or financial crimes. The terms are related and have been used interchangeably. Corruption undermines the foundations of sustainable development in the country; it leads to the inefficient allocation of resources, promotes inequality and inefficiencies in both the private and public sectors. Politically, corruption contributes to a loss of confidence in the government and a general non-compliance with laws, undermines the legitimacy of elected officials and democratic values, diminishes the effectiveness of public policy, and impairs the power of public institutions, Mohammed (2014).

**Theoretical Framework and Literature**

This paper is anchored on the social responsibility theory. The social responsibility theory is regarded as an extension of the libertarian theory because it seeks to protect the freedom of expression. It enjoins the mass media to develop and enforce ethical practices in the interest of the public. According to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) cited in Baran and Dennis (2009), it emphasizes the need for an independent press that scrutinizes other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news and reports. The most innovative feature of social responsibility, the authors note, is its call for media to be responsible for fostering productive and creative “Great Communities”. It state that media should do this by prioritizing cultural pluralism by becoming the voice of all the people – not just elite groups or groups that had dominated national, regional or local culture, in the past. Baran and Dennis (2009) argue that “instead of demanding that media be free to print or transmit whatever their owners
wants, social responsibility theory imposes a burden on media practitioners; the press is not free if those who operate it behave as though their position conferred on them the privilege of being deaf to ideas which the processes of free speech have brought to public attention. McQuail (1987) summarized the basic principles of social responsibility as follows:

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society;
- The obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance;
- In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions;
- The media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder to give offense to minority groups;
- The media as a whole should be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of views and right of reply;
- Society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure them for public good;
- Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

Nigerian Media and the Fight against Corruption

The media in Nigeria over the years have earned a reputation for their vibrancy, vitality and fearlessness in combating social injustice. The numerous recognitions have not come cheap, though, considering the history of vicious hostility against the press, with many newspapers and magazines arbitrarily shot down through non friendly laws, while some journalists arrested and unjustly detained and some like Dele Giwa Editor-in-chief of Newswatch magazine bombed to death. Despite the aggression, it is safe to infer that the media played some pivotal role in some of the most celebrated expose on corrupt cases in Nigeria. It was the media that exposed the corrupt process that exalted Ibrahim Sanusi to the position of Speaker House of Representatives in 1999. Evan Ewerem lost his palatial position of Senate President when the Media revealed that he had a double identity. These revelations ultimately galvanized efforts for the resignation and subsequent trial of Sanusi in court.

Again, the prominent role of the media in the June 12 struggle and their bravados against prolonged military absolutism remains evergreen. Media play critical role in promotion of good governance and mitigating corruption. Media not only raises public awareness about corruption, its causes, consequences and possible remedies but also investigates and reports incidences of corruption. Ayoola (2008) opined that if democracy is to survive and be a fruitful concept, the media must live up above board. This is because a corrupt press cannot fight corrupt individuals. Corruption in the media circle in Nigeria is prevalent because of the brown envelope syndrome in media practice. Generally, the brown envelope is a monetary bribe handed out to a person to put pressure on him or her to do what the bribe giver wants (Okoye, 2001). It is any form of gratification which a journalist may receive to cover an event or influence the judgment of a journalist. The event may be a press conference, an interview of any sort, a workshop, an impromptu or organized briefing.

Broadcast Media Ownership, Gatekeeping, and Objectivity

Ownership of the mass media in Nigeria is one issue that has generated a lot of public attention and debate. Ownership of the broadcast media had been the monopoly of successive governments in Nigeria, for over three decades. However, the monopoly of the airspace was broken in the mid 1990s with the establishment of privately-owned broadcast stations and networks, notable among which is the Africa Independent Television (AIT). Nwanze (2003) reports that the chief aim of government's exclusive ownership of the airspace was to exploit its propaganda prospects. Mcquail (1987) is of the view that the belief
that ownership determines the nature and operations of the media is not just a Marxist theory but virtually a common sense axioms. According to him:

The content of the media always reflect the interest of those who finance them. This disposition of an owner as to his interest and vision for the medium would also to a great extent determine his view of ownership as a form of public trust or stewardship, rather than as an unlimited private franchise.

The import of this, therefore, is that when the ownership of a country's media is vested in government or concentrated in the hand of a group of few individuals, the media tend to become mere megaphones of those in control. The import of these is that ownership of broadcast media carries with it a reasonable degree of control. This is because the leadership of a government owned station, for instance, would be expected to act the script of hits boss and financier – say, an incumbent governor or president who appointed him into the position. Folarin (1995) understood this fact when he argued that:

Publicity-owned and government-controlled media tend to be more authoritarian than privately-owned media, they carry more news favourable to it; they avoid direct criticisms of government actions and suppress news critical to government actions and suppress news that would amount to revealing government secrets.

With this in place, the audience is steadily fed with slants – as shaped by the editors' perception of reality, operational philosophy or management policies. Privately-owned broadcast stations on the other hand tend to possess some degree of independence and the free-hand to operate. A unique characteristic of such stations is that they enjoy relative freedom in criticizing government policies programming, activities and functionaries. Despite these arguments, it should be noted that privately-owned stations just as their government-owned counterparts, have laid down policies and philosophies which are woven around the main objectives of the station and which must guide the day-to-day operations of the station. These, too, determine what is covered and the treatment given to such items. On the whole their messages tend to be better, fuller and accurately presented.

Writing on gatekeeping process, Folarin (1998) notes that no medium can transmit all the messages it receives in the cause of a day's routine, but that some individuals would have to decide which information to transmit, which to defer, which to modify and which to delete entirely. Being a voluntary self-censorship performed by the media themselves, the term emanates from the understanding that, apart from the legal restrictions on what is to be published, including photographs; journalists have a moral right to be socially responsible to their readers on whatever materials they package for them. Social responsibility demands that the broadcast media perform their role in such a way as to demonstrate awareness that they have a stake in what happens to society - stability or confusion, order or anarchy, equity or corruption. Certain factors are known to influence media gate keeping decisions. They include timing, ownership pattern, management policy, perceived needs or preferences of the audience, editors' perception of reality, views held by the competition, influence of advertisers, appraisal of offerings by the competition, availability of photos and film footage, legal considerations, professional ethics and ideological perspective and political considerations. Journalistic objectivity ranks among the thorniest issues in contemporary media practice. This is because practitioners and scholars alike are yet to arrive at a consensus as to what journalistic objectivity entails. To some, objectivity does not mean a scientific precision, but instead on effort by journalists to produce news stories and newscasts that are emotionally-detached and that separate facts from opinion (Dennis and Merrill, 2004). Generally, objectivity means factual reporting, straight-forward, descriptive
presentation. But Merrill (2004) is of the opinion that such is not feasible. According to him, objective reporting:

Would be reporting that is detached, unprejudiced, unopinionated, un-involved, unbiased, omniscient and infallible... Where do we find this? The objective report would, in effect match reality, it would tell the truth the whole and nothing but the truth. Where do we find this kind of reporting? No reporter knows the truth: no reporter can write a story which can match reality...

He concludes by saying that since the reporter, as part of the nature of journalism must select, organise and manipulate facts, journalism is a subjective enterprise from beginning to end. However, proponents of journalistic objectivity, like Dennis (2004) argue that journalism would seem doomed in the light of Merrill's argument. They argue that journalistic objectivity is not only possible but a manifest reality. Dennis (2004) states that it is merely a method and style of presenting information, hinged on three principal characteristics, namely: separating facts from opinion: presenting an emotionally-detached view of the news: striving for fairness and balance, giving both sides an opportunity to reply in a way that provides full information to the audience.

Dennis (2004) sums up the argument by saying that journalist use four procedures to lay claim to objectivity, namely:

- Presentation of conflicting possibilities ...
- Presentation of supporting evidence ...
- The judicious use of quotation marks
- Structuring information in an appropriate sequence

The dilemma can be resolved when one approaches the concept with its two essential ingredients: depersonalization, which demands that reporters refrain from inserting into the news their own ideological or substantive evaluation of officials, events or ideas; and balance, which aims for neutrality, while requiring that the reporters present the views of legitimate spokesperson of the conflicting sides of any significant dispute and provide both sides with the same attention. In theory, objectivity limits the role of the media in depicting reality for people to judge themselves and prevent the journalist from influencing people's thoughts and actions. Good journalism entails giving meaning of facts, putting facts in perspective and providing setting sequence and significance to the news. It also involves providing explanations to events reported in terms that will have a great level of significance to its readers. Fairness is a crucial standard by which the quality of news should be judged and in a way that helps douse the debate on objectivity. Both sides of the story must be told as adequate as possible and all arguments fairly presented. Fairness also requires that the reporter gives a fair hearing to all the contending sides of a story. A fairly covered story is complete in that all sides are reflected in it before is published. Furthermore, a fair report requires that a reporter gives balanced treatment to opposing views in a new story.

Methodology
This study adopted the survey research design. The population for the study comprised practicing journalists, mass communication lecturers, and public servants in Akwa Ibom state. This gave a population figure of 1065. Since studying the entire population was not feasible, a representative sample was taken for the study. Consequently, a sample of 302 respondents, representing 31 percent of the entire population were purposively selected from three cities – one in each of the State's Senatorial Districts, namely: Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket to form the sample. In Uyo, respondents were drawn from among practicing journalists; in Ikot Ekpene, respondents were drawn from among Mass Communication lecturers and from Eket, respondents were selected from among public servants. Choice of these class of respondents was based on their media literacy skills, occupation and perceived
socio-economic status. Tongco (2007) asserts that purposive sampling technique is the most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain where knowledgeable experts are involved. To reach these subjects, a multi-stage cluster sampling procedure was adopted. The sampling techniques were stratified, purposive and available. The researchers first relied upon the senatorial division of Akwa Ibom State, from where they purposively selected three classes of respondents they deemed fit to complete the questionnaire. Finally, the available sampling technique was used to select the respondents from each category, making up a sample size of 302.

Analysis of Questionnaire Data

Table 1: Respondents’ Appraisal of Treatment of Corruption News by NTA International and Channels TV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NTA Int’l</th>
<th>Channels TV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>No. of Respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinformative Governmentcentered</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro-Government</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balanced Fairness Accuracy</td>
<td>160</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>302</td>
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In Table 1, respondents’ evaluation of corruption news reportage on NTA Int’l and Channels TV were sought, and the responses showed viewers rated Channels TV highly in terms of fairness, balance and accuracy. Channels TV was also found to devote considerable airtime to corruption news involving government official, compared to NTA International.

Table 2: Respondents’ Perception of NTA Int’l and Channels TV’s Shortcomings in Corruption News Reportage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NTA International</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shortcomings</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Lack of objectivity</td>
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<td>ii. Suppression of opposing viewpoints</td>
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<td>iii. General lack of balance, fairness and accuracy</td>
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<td>iv. Pro-government stance on corruption matters</td>
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<td>v. Bias and partisanship</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<th>Channels TV</th>
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<td>iv. Pro-government stance on corruption matters</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. Bias and partisanship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 was an open-ended question where respondents were asked to state what they saw as the shortcomings of the NTA Int'l and Channels TV. The ills of NTA International were thematically analysed to include lack of objectivity, suppression of opposing viewpoints, general lack of balance, fairness and accuracy, pro-government stance on corruption matters, bias and partisanship. Channels TV's stories on corruption were found to be somewhat speculative, brief or slanted.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Research Question One**

*How do Akwa Ibom viewers appraise NTA Int'l and Channels TV Reportage of Corruption News?*

The data presented in Table 1 was used in answering this research question. In that table, respondents were asked to appraise the coverage of corruption news by NTA Int'l and Channels TV. Their evaluations were primarily woven around accurately, fairness and balance. Other variables were misinformation government-centeredness, and progovernment reports. Respondents perceived NTA's level of coverage as generally lacking in accuracy, fairness and balance; they also saw the station as being progovernment in its treatment of corruption news. On the other hand, they perceived Channels TV's coverage as being balanced, fair, accurate, and less pro-government and more about corruption stories involving person in the corridors of power. These findings are in line with the School of Thought which believes that mass media audience members are not passive recipients of messages, but active, can perceive, interpret, receive or reject messages use the for their own purposes. As active and equal partners in communication, Akwa Ibom viewers corroborate the position of Gamble and Gamble (2000) in Folarin (1998) that prior knowledge, uses and expected gratifications shape individual's perception of the media. On why Channels TV tends to be more accurate, fair and balanced in its reports, Folarin (1998) observed that privately-owned broadcast stations tend to posses some degree of independence and the free hand to operate. According to him, a unique characteristic of such stations is that, “they enjoy relative freedom in criticizing government policies, programmes, activities and functionaries.” On the whole, their messages tend to better, fully and accurately packaged, as the survey has shown".

**Research Question Two**

*What do Akwa Ibom viewers think are the Shortcomings associated with NTA Int'l and Channels TV's Reportage of Corruption News?*

The data presented in table 2 answered this question. Respondents outlined the shortcomings of NTA Int'l to include lack of objectivity, suppression of opposing viewpoints, lack of balance, fairness and accuracy pro-government stance on matters, bias and partisanship. For Channels TV they listed speculative reporting, briefness of news reports, and inaccuracies due to haste in breaking news stories. The challenges of NTA Int'l are similar to the general problems facing most government-owned broadcast stations. This is
also not unconnected with the fact that broadcast media ownership had been the exclusive monopoly of successive government in Nigeria, for many decades, serving mainly as its chief propaganda tool, Nwanze 2003. In scenarios where the ownership of a country's media is vested in government or concentrated in the hands of a group of few individuals, the media tend to become mere megaphones of those in control. Folarin (1998) explains government-owned media's continued lack of objectivity, balance, fairness and accuracy and suppression of opposing viewpoints with the dictum that “he who pays the pipe calls the tunes”. Pushing the argument, Folarin contends that: Publicly-owned and government-controlled media tend to be more authoritarian than privately-owned media; they carry more news favourable to the government of the day and avoid news unfavourable to it; they avoid direct criticisms of government actions and suppress news that would amount to revealing government secrets.

To be socially-responsible, McQuail (1987) asserts that the media as corporate citizens should accept and fulfill certain inalienable obligations to society by setting high or professional standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance and be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of their society giving access to various points of view and right to reply.

**Conclusion**

This paper has established that television remains a potent source of information and a tool for implementing the policies and programmes of government. However, the extent of the medium's usefulness in championing Nigeria's anti-corruption war depends largely on the strategic manipulation of the medium's primary commodity – news. The paper, therefore, advocates professionalism and social responsibility in the reportage of corruption stories, and calls for media pluralism, in order to win the war against graft.

**Works Cited**


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