

**POST ELECTION REPORTING IN NIGERIA :  
NAVIGATING CONFLICTING INTERESTS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE PUBLIC  
AND POLITICAL INTEREST GROUPS.**

**BEING A PAPER PRESENTED BY SHU'AIBU USMAN LEMAN, NATIONAL  
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*“The Media must always test the resiliency of the free speech and free press clauses by challenging any attempt to restrict their coverage of political activities and the society and by arguing passionately that the public has a right to know. This is as it should be, since a free press, even one that occasionally exceeds bounds of good taste is essential to the preservation of a democratic society....”*

**-- John W. Johnson**

**Introduction:**

The topic of this paper confronts us at many levels. Conflicting interests and political interest groups. Presumably, the topic recognizes that we belong to a state and country of great diversities; **Conflict** according to **Webster’s Reference Library Dictionary and the Thesaurus** is “**a fight, a contest, strife, quarrel, emotional disturbance, to be at variance, to clash, to struggle**”. Bearing in mind our great diversities, the topic is challenging us during this workshop to identify, build and connect our diversities irrespective of who we are or represent. More importantly, and specifically as journalists, the organizers of this workshop have considered that we are the voice of the voiceless but how do we live up to this consideration especially when laced with the fact that **journalism demands a high degree of public trust.**

This workshop would want us to demonstrate how we can make a difference by identifying conflicting interests and expectations of the public and the polity, and connecting these diversities using the pen, tube or the radio.

But before we go further, let me also mention a positive side of conflict as enthused by **International Contemporary Dictionary of Mass Communication and Media Studies** on the subject:- Conflict Management. The authoritative, up to date and concise dictionary defines Conflict Management as **“the identification and control of conflict within an organization”**. It went further by elucidating on three main philosophies of Conflict Management: **“all conflict is bad and potentially destructive; conflict is inevitable and managers should attempt to harness it positively; conflict is essential to the survival of an organization and should be encouraged”**.

### **Journalism, Democracy and Conflicting Interests:**

The primary purpose of Journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing. According to John Dewey, **“Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly Community”**. Nigeria is a vast multicultural society. The size of the country explains its diversity and pluralism. The issue of conflicting interests is a controversial one, whereas some see it as a problem. Others see it as an intrusion. But from this workshop we should see it as an opportunity.

Nigeria has a potential to grow better, and Nigerian Journalists have the greatest opportunity to influence this if we utilize the wealth of knowledge, experiences and resources that are available through our diversities.

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines diversity as **“a range of many people or things that are very different including a range of many people or things”**.

Thus diversity is a term covering broad range of issues and activities aimed at overcoming discrimination. It is a collection of things that are very different from one another. These include ethnicity, ideology, religious beliefs, organizational ties, disability, culture, skills, demographic and technological considerations which are central to understanding the concept.

Diversity presents us with a special challenge. How can people with different feelings, ideas and backgrounds learn to get along with each other? Awareness and understanding our individual, cultural, religious, ethnic, institutional, organizational diversity is important for peaceful coexistent, reconciliation and social progress. Similarly, the broader our base of knowledge and awareness is, the deeper our source of possible creativity. People get stuck, believing that their way is the “right” and only way and then are unable to create new, positive and progressive solutions. Nigeria as a Country is deeply affected by this perception in all sectors of its polity.

However exploring other value systems and becoming aware of more than one approach to social issues widen our pool of creative resources. By creating an awareness of the world full of many societies can put our values into perspective, enable us actively and productively to fight all forms of discrimination.

### **Response to Discontents of Public and Political Interest Groups:**

One way of summarizing the situation arising from the many pressures on media to deliver certain benefits is to say there is a ‘**public interest**’ in how the media conduct themselves. This concept is both simple and also very contested in social and political theory of Mass Communication. As applied to the mass media, its simple meaning is that the media carry out a number of important, even essential tasks in a contemporary society and it is in the general interest that these are performed and performed well. It also implies that we should have a media system that is operated according to the same basic principles governing the rest of the society, especially in relations to justice, fairness, democracy and reigning notions of desirable social and

cultural values. It is clearly in the public interest that the media do not cause social problems or extreme offence. But the idea of public interest also involves positive expectations.

This simple notion does not take us very far in practice. The first problem encountered is that most media are established not to serve the public interest as such but to follow some goal of their own choosing. The goal is sometimes defined in cultural, professional or political terms but more often it is the goal of making profit as a business. Sometimes, it is both at the same time. This points to the key issue of determining just what the public interest might be and of who should decide it. There are always diverse and conflicting versions of what is good for a society as a whole, and there is even support for the view that it is better for the media not to pursue any normative goal at all. Rather, the many different media should be left free to do what they want, within the limits of the law. Where media are run on a commercial basis, as they mainly are, the media's view of what is the public interest tends to equate it with what interests the public. This shifts the responsibility for norms, ethics and values to the society. The difficulties of handling the public interest concept are inextricably connected with its high significance. In this respect, **Blumler (1998: 54 – 5)** makes three key points:

**“First, just as in the case of government, there are questions of authority as well as of power. In communications, the media are similarly placed. The justifications for their freedoms, their wide-ranging roles in the society, politics and culture, and their regulatory orders depend ultimately on the public interest presumed to be served thereby.”** In short, the power of the media, like that of government has to be used in a legitimate way, which is not far removed from the notion of responsibility. Secondly, Blumler argues that **“a certain transcendent quality attaches to the notion of the public interest. It is different from and, in policy terms, superior to particular interest. This entails a longer-term perspective, in which the claims of successor generations and the future of society are included as well as people's immediate needs.** Thirdly, **“notions of the public interest must work in an**

**imperfect and impure world**". This means inevitable tension, compromise and improvisation according to circumstances.

### **Journalism of Information plus Journalism of Conversation:**

A basic premise of the public journalism movement is that journalism has a purpose, that it ought to try and improve the quality of civil life by fostering participation and debate. **Schudson (1988)** describes it as based on a **trustee model** rather than a market or advocacy model. He writes (1998: 136), **"In the trustee model, journalists should provide news according to what they as a professional group believe citizens should know"**.

In **Schudson's** word, **"The Journalists are professionals who hold citizenship in trust for us"**. According to **Glasser and Craft (1997)**, "Public Journalism calls for a shift from a **'journalism of information'** to a **'journalism of conversation'**. The public needs not only information but also engagement in the day's news that invites discussions and debate.

### **Good Governance:**

If we are to successfully navigate through the murky waters of conflicting interests and expectations, then we must ensure good governance.

Good governance involves a normative judgement that indicates a preferred relation that should ideally govern relationship between state and society and between government and people. It is the responsibility of the media to promote good governance and protection of human rights.

The term governance and good governance are increasingly being used in development literature. Governance describes the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Hereby, public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights. Good governance

accomplishes this in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regards to the rule of law.

Good governance defines an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work toward this deal.

Good governance can be understood as a set of 8 major characteristics:

- (1) Participation.
- (2) Rule of Law.
- (3) Transparency.
- (4) Responsiveness.
- (5) Consensus Orientation.
- (6) Equity and Inclusiveness.
- (7) Effectiveness and Efficiency.
- (8) Accountability.

These characteristics assure that:

- (A) Corrupt is minimized
- (B) The views of minorities are taken into account, and that:
- (C) The voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making.

### **Conclusion:**

It must be accepted that perhaps deficiencies of the media (newspapers especially) are now more glaring than in the past, given the complexity of the society, the interdependence of its component parts and the indispensability of information and communication, comprehending and adapting to the rapid challenges that occur in our society.

Similarly, it is quite obvious that the media do not sufficiently take our environment into account when performing the role of transmitting information to the members of society. There is therefore the urgent need for the press to redefine the concept of news in such a way as would enable interpretation of events to take cognisance of the totality of our population.

The Mass Media, as change agents must embrace development journalism. The media must understand that they operate in a developing economy and their strategy must include modalities for lifting our population out of squalor, poverty and ignorance.

Finally, we must encourage effective media to help people understand the history and evolution of oppression or discrimination and give them the necessary perspective to make rational choices. It is only with this kind of information can people have the means to participate in democratic processes and shape their futures.

I am indebted to the following references for the above insights and write up.

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