

# Mass Media in Nigerian Democracy

Edited by

Fred I. A. Omu

Godwin Ehiarekhian Oboh

# News Flow Controversy: The Global Media Coverage of Nigerian Democracy

---

**Ekeanyanwu Nnamdi Tobechukwu**

Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication,  
College of Human Development,  
Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.

## **Abstract**

*The media anywhere in the world are generally referred to as the "Fourth Estate of the Realm" and the "watchdog of the society" meaning that the media exist as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, educational promotion, entertainment, surveillance, social enlightenment, political socialisation and mobilisation. These functions set the media apart as agents of political re-engineering and protector of democratic norms. This paper therefore evaluates the coverage of the new democratic Nigeria in the international media to determine the depth and nature of coverage given to this largest single democracy in Africa. Using the content analytical study method as the main source of facts generation and analysis, this paper discovers that the Nigerian state is still under reported in the international press, years after the restoration of democratic governance. This paper therefore, suggests that African democracies should establish media organisations with global reach and penetration so that they can report themselves and avoid the current misrepresentation of the continent in the global space.*

## **Introduction**

Nations of the world are brought together through the instrumentality of communication. Communication has also fostered togetherness amongst nations of the world especially with the realisation that no nation of the world can exist on its own as an island but must relate with other nations for the exchange

of mutual benefits. International communication according to Dkunna (2002: 250) is:

...the exchange of meanings across national frontiers and between two or more countries. It is brought about by the dependency need of man, a situation which makes it imperative that the way one man needs to reach out to other men for meaningful existence, so does a country need to reach out to other countries for better life for its citizens.

Ekeanyanwu (2005:1) sees it as that arm of mass communication concerned with the gathering, dissemination, interpretation and analysis of global news, information and communication. Continuing, he opines thus:

International communication arose because of the need to maintain international friendship and relations as well as to understand and keep abreast of happenings around the world. This is one of the core objectives of international communication. International communication also enhances the job of diplomats who may use it as a tool of diplomacy. Most wars amongst nations or between one country and another had their remote and immediate causes connected to the inability of the combatants to talk meaningfully in a round table or the inability to understand and appreciate the other side's point of view and opinion due to poor international relations and information management abilities of the diplomats involved (Ekeanyanwu, 2005: 1-2).

The interdependency of nations has also brought about a much more powerful condition in the international community; this condition is the globalisation of the world. Globalisation is one of

the topical phenomena in the world, which has undoubtedly changed the face of international communication. According to Robertson (1992:8) cited in Devereux (2003:29), "Globalisation is the compression of the world and intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole". Silverstone (1999:107) also cited in Devereux (2003:29), says globalisation "is the product of changing economic and political order, one in which technology and capital have combined in a new multi-faceted imperialism." Globalisation can generally be described as a modern trend involving the shrinking of time and space, resulting in the disappearing of borders and national boundaries and shrinking the world into a single world community and interdependent global village. Ekeanyanwu (2005) prefers to call the scenario described above as the "Villagisation of the Globe".

The idea of the Global Village was first brought to light by the Canadian scholar- Marshal McLuhan, who predicted that all the citizens of the world could participate in the global society through their media use. True to this talk today, citizens of the world have access to the global society through the instrumentality of the new media technologies, although the extent of this access defers depending on the status of the nation as rated in the global community. Therefore, an information gap exists between nations of the world particularly between the West and the Third World despite the promise globalisation was said to hold for all, this problem is what has culminated in the information "Imbalance" in the world today.

As the name implies, imbalance connotes inequality and unfair treatment of two different things. This usually causes some troubles as the one or things unfairly treated raise objections about the basis of the inequality and unfairness. Imbalance also means an absence of balance (Ekeanyanwu, 2005). In International Communication, imbalance refers to the unequal flow of mass media messages from the First World or the industrialised countries to the Third World also known as the underdeveloped or developing nations. Imbalance in this parlance also refers to the one-sided flow of information from the developed countries to the developing countries. MacBride and his team of

Communication experts further opine that the imbalances are today not limited to news flows alone but it also affects, in a very serious sense, the collection and diffusion of data necessary for scientific purposes, technical innovations, commercial needs, trade development, exploitation of natural resources, meteorological forecasting, military purposes, etc. They finally conclude, "There is an imbalance regarding strategic information for political and economic decision making". Imbalance in the flow of global news and information is at the root of the call for a New World Information and Communication Order.

In the 1970s, the less developed countries called for a redistribution of global information resources that is characterised by imbalance and inequalities, and proposed the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Ekeanyanwu (2005:76) captures the demand for NWICO in the following statement:

The demand for NWICO is born out of the desire to change the present pattern of global information, which favors the western capitalist nations and gives the Third World nations little or no chance at all to have their say. The demand is also meant to address the issues of distortion of contents, control, equality, freedom, balance, and access.

The demand for NWICO is traceable to the 1946 UN Declaration on Freedom of Information, which proclaims that the nations of the world should propose policies that will make freedom of information a fundamental human right. The implications of this Declaration were so obvious and therefore, led to a disagreement between Soviet Union and the West led by the United States. This disagreement specifically started in 1948 at the Geneva Convention. The debate on the demand for NWICO became more conspicuous in the 1960s and 1970s. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) became involved in 1970 and at this time, the concepts upon which the present debate is focused were formulated in very

clear-cut terms. In 1972, the majority of the delegates to a UNESCO Convention resolved that there were potential danger of global information flow imbalance and when in 1974, the UNESCO conference approved a declaration on the New International Economic Order (NIEO), the needed impetus and foundation of the call of NWICO was unknowingly laid (Ekeanyanwu, 2005:77).

UNESCO, in her efforts to discover if there truly exist an "imbalance" in the flow of global news and information appointed a committee of communication experts to study global communication problems and make recommendations. An Irish diplomat, Sean MacBride, headed this committee popularly referred to as the MacBride Commission.

In 1980, the commission completed its assignment and submitted the final report of its findings to the General Conference of UNESCO. This document is known in international communication circles as the MacBride Report or simply The Report and was published under the title "Many Voices, One world". The Report, according to Okunna (1993:94) states in no uncertain terms that there is an imbalance in the world information system and that cultural domination is a reality of this imbalance.

The Western capitalist nations however, did not accept the MacBride Commission's report and were agitated by its findings. The result was the United States' withdrawal from UNESCO and the withdrawal of its funds in 1985 citing UNESCO's politicisation and general hostility to "the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press" (Giffard, 1989: 58). The US also attempted to shift the terms of the debate, away from questions of media control to those of technological capabilities. At the UNESCO meeting in 1980, for example, the US sponsored the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) as a kind of "Marshall Plan of Telecommunications" (Preston, 1989:127), established to facilitate the technological transfer and development of the communications infrastructure in developing countries. In the following years, however, the United States never delivered the support it promised, offering only \$100,000 in expert services.

and no direct funds (Preston, 1989: 157). Not surprisingly, such efforts did little to quantitatively bridge the divide between the communications capabilities of developing countries and the West.

Later, US official reasons for the withdrawal of her financial supports to UNESCO included UNESCO's anti-Western and anti-Israeli stance, static tendencies, lack of responsiveness to the US demands that she change her ideological orientation, UNESCO's rejection of sound management principles, and her support of NWICO debates. Britain and Singapore followed suit, maintaining that the NWICO declaration was "an endemic hostility towards the institution of a free press, free market and above all, individual human rights" (Ekeanyanwu, 2005).

UNESCO however, maintained her stand and insisted that NWICO will bring about "more justice, more equity, and more reciprocity in information exchange, less downward diffusion of messages, more self-reliance and cultural identity, and more benefit for mankind". From the perspective of UNESCO then, US withdrawal is an attempt to exercise hegemony under the guise of "free flow of information," understood no longer to be equity of access to information, but a free market for information and the treatment of information as a commodity.

## **The New Democratic Nigeria in Perspective**

Nigeria as a nation is one of the products of colonialism and has suffered cruelly in the hands of Western European nations. The interior of Nigeria was first penetrated by Europeans, primarily British, in the late 18th century. It took another 20 years to establish effective British administration over all of the territory of the original British Oil Rivers Protectorate (1885). Ibo land resisted until 1906. It was also not until 1906 that Lugard completed the incorporation of Bornu in the Northeast into the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The entire area of present Nigeria was, however, acknowledged to be British under agreements with Germany and France, made during the 1890s.

In 1906, the governments of Lagos and of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated to form the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In 1912, Lugard who had been pushing for the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates, was made governor of both. In 1914 he achieved his ambition of a "united" Nigeria when the two administrative units were merged as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.

On October 1, 1960, Nigeria became independent within the Commonwealth of Nations. On October 7, it was admitted to membership of the United Nations. The first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, headed a coalition government representing the major parties of the Northern and Eastern regions. The Governor-General was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who became President when Nigeria adopted a Republican form of government on October 1, 1963. Meanwhile, on February 11 and 12, 1961, the northern section of the former British Cameroons had voted to become a part of Nigeria. From the early days of independence however, ethnic rivalries, religious and political differences seriously strained the unity of the federation.

Political bickering and corruption, which left young army officers increasingly impatient, finally culminated in a military coup in January 1966. Prime Minister Balewa and two regional premiers were killed. The army commander Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, took over governance and abolished the federal system. In July, northern officers led a countercoup and killed Ironsi. His successor, Major-General Yakubu Gowon, revived the federation. During the 1960s, thousands of Ibos living in the north were killed while others sought refuge in their homelands in the Southeast. Civil war broke out in Nigeria in 1967 when Nigeria's Eastern Region seceded and proclaimed itself the Republic of Biafra. The bloody conflict devastated Biafra before the federal Nigerian army defeated the Biafran forces in 1970.

Nigeria made a short-lived attempt at a democratic rule during Alhaji Shehu Shagari regime of 1979. The 1983 military coup d'état saw Major-General Muhammad Buhari deposed President Alhaji Shehu Shagari. In August 1985, Major General

Ibrahim Babangida, opposed to the excesses of Buhari's military rule, led his own bloodless palace coup and installed himself as President. Despite promising a return to democracy, Babangida strengthened his grip on power. Babangida's rule lasted until 1993 when, in the face of international condemnation for annulling the results of the the June 12 presidential elections. He unwillingly, stepped down as President, in August, relinquishing power to an Interim Government, headed by Ernest Shonekan.

General Sani Abacha seized power from the Interim Government and was President of Nigeria from 1993 to 1998. His regime was ruthless, and his suppression of opposition violated human rights, leading to international condemnation. The slow pace of democratisation and Abacha's actions against political opponents led to increased international condemnation of his regime. Abacha however, had plans to take Nigeria back to civil rule but in April 1998 it emerged that August's presidential election would have only one candidate—Abacha, who secured the backing of all the five officially approved political parties. The election in effect became a referendum requiring voters to vote only on whether they would support him or not. The political landscape changed dramatically when Abacha died of a supposedly heart attack on June 8, 1998.

General Abdulsalam Abubakar took over as President and said that he would adhere to the transition programme intended to return Nigeria to civilian rule in October 1998. He later changed the date to May 29th, 1999. In local elections in December 1998, which were the first free elections since 1993, the formed centrist People's Democratic Party (PDP) achieved a landslide victory. The Presidential flag bearer, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo also won the Presidential Election and became the democratically elected President of Nigeria. Obasanjo's government was also re-elected into government during the 2003 democratic elections amidst public outcry of massive rigging on the part of PDP.

One of Obasanjo's first acts was a radical removal from office of all senior military officers who held political positions between 1985 and 1999. He also instituted an investigation into alleged human rights abuses committed during that period, and

put forward an anti-corruption bill to try to tackle the evil called corruption. Several other efforts such as the ongoing Poverty Alleviation Programme, Universal Basic Education Scheme, Deregulation and Privatisation of the economy, the bank recapitalisation programme, have also been made by the government to build a new Nigeria and correct her negative international image and reputation (Part of this is culled from the *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia's* article on Nigeria).

This study therefore aims at finding out if Nigeria's battered international image and reputation still haunt the new democratic Nigeria. The global media is the window to the international community and the best channel to be used to discover if Nigeria's rebellious and notorious reputation is improving. The need to discover this fact cannot be overemphasised as the success or failure of any nation lies in the way and manner it is perceived in the international community. Since the restoration of democratic culture and polishing of Nigeria's image, have the international media changed their coverage of the country? What is the extent and nature of the coverage? What is the prominence and slant of these reports? How much recognition is given to the efforts towards building a new democratic Nigeria by the global media? Is there truly an imbalance in the nature and manner of reportage about democratic Nigeria? All these questions and more are what this paper is out to answer.

### **Significance and Contribution to Knowledge**

As one of the contemporary and persistent issues in international communication and world politics today, it is important to find out how the international media have continued to report Nigeria since she became a democratic nation. This study will therefore help to discover if indeed the adoption of a democratic government in Nigeria has helped in the improvement of the nation's poor image in the international media. It will also help in discovering if the idea of building a "New Nigeria" is actually paying off globally by discovering if efforts like: the anti-corruption

campaign, debt relief, deregulation of the economy and privatisation of the public sector, etc., are reported and the manner in which they are reported in the global media.

The depth of analysis this paper will provide will be valuable to the government and the nation at large as it seeks to discover the degree of success made so far towards correcting Nigeria's negative global reputation. It will also give insight into Nigeria's present standing in the international scene and will help weigh the level of her recognition and acceptance in the global community after so many years of international rejection and isolation. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this paper will be very relevant to the success and sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Democracy:** A simple and generally accepted definition of democracy is one given by one of the foremost presidents of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln. He defined democracy as the government of the people, for the people and by the people. Today, we may make a slight different adjustment to define democracy as the government of the people, for the people and by their duly elected representatives. Democracy within this paper refers to a government freely and fairly elected by the people, which takes into cognisance the Fundamental Human Rights of the citizens as entrenched in the constitution and is guided by the supremacy of the rule of the law.

**Global/International Media:** The media refers to the various channels of mass communication e.g., radio, newspaper, television, magazines, journals, books, newsletters etc. The global media therefore, refers to the channels of mass communication with a global reach. They are media that can beam and transmit information to a large and diverse international audience beyond their national frontiers. However, in this paper, the global media is limited to the print media of international coverage with particular reference to *Newsweek* and the *Economist* news magazines.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### Introduction

Contemporary events in the international scene have shown that the world has entered the Communication Age. It has been empirically documented that the subject of communication is fundamental to peace and human development. Communication, by its nature, complexities and, to a large extent, its indispensability in international and interpersonal relations has become, in this century, a global concern. To this end, therefore, individuals and nations are becoming interdependent – requiring one another for survival and sustenance (Ekeanyanwu, 2005).

According to M'Bow (1980:xiii):

This interdependence, however, goes hand in hand with a host of imbalances and sometimes gives rise to grave inequalities, leading to the misunderstanding and manifold hotbeds of tension which combine to keep the world in ferment.

Herein lies the basis for the call for a New World Information and Communication Order. The antecedent to this call centres on the view by Third World nations that the existing order is unfavourable and unacceptable to them because of the obvious imbalances.

Though it is true that among the Western media scholars, the News Flow Controversy is regarded as a non-issue, some of the scholars still, are inclined to admit that there is really an imbalance in news flow between the developed and underdeveloped or developing nations. But this admission is often branded the logical consequence of the developed gap between the industrialised nations and the Third World countries. Arguing that the world is a free market place of ideas where information flow should be free and unhindered, they also refuse to recognise anything insidious in the virtual saturation of the under-developed or developing Third World nations by news report and cultural artifacts originating from the West at the detriment of the Third World political, economic and cultural stability (Okigbo, 1996:284).

Third World journalists and scholars on their part, countercharged that what the West call global "free flow of information and news" is in fact, a euphemism for the economic, political and cultural domination of developing nations by the West with the aid of its powerful news agencies. According to Okigbo (1996:284):

A survey of the main currents of 20th century scholarship must reveal the pivotal position of the controversy about the imbalance in the global flow of news. By some accounts, few issues in international relations have generated as much heat as the debate on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which proved to be mostly ideological.

Furthermore and in the nature of ideological debates and controversies, much heat has been generated but very little progress has been made thus; the debate has been described as "dialogue of the deaf", "much ado about nothing" and "misplaced in important respect (Plowman, 1979); Atwood Murphy, 1982; Uche, 1986).

One school of thought argues that the controversy had not benefited from the increasing scientism and empiricism that have featured recent communication scholarship, and thus the debate, according to Okigbo (1996:284), "was more often than not based on opinionated conjectures that often lacked the support of objective facts and reliable statistics." Some of the protagonists of this school of thought also tend to take sides in the controversy, and then argue to defend their positions, regardless of the evidence against their chosen view.

The furor has become more intensive and academic in the Third World where nearly all aspect of "communication-related policy discussions, research and action implementation has been conceived in terms of New World Information and Communication Order" (White, 1988: 783). According to Agba (2002:257):

International Communication ought to be a situation where major actors in the international scene have the opportunity to spread information about significant events and news to the whole world or to many countries as they wish, and in return have adequate knowledge of world issues... This is the ideal picture that never exists anywhere.

This review, therefore, will focus on the global news flow pattern as an issue under the New World Information and Communication Order and analyse all the arguments about the debate as it concerns the flow of world news and information.

### **The Review**

In this unified world village, as in all communities, there are inequalities arising from the varying levels of industrial development among the component nations. The sphere of news, information and communication structures and contents are not left out in these unequal relations. In view of the realities of the time therefore, there is, on the part of the developing nations, an awareness of, and consequently, a protest against some perceived imbalances, distortions and other incongruities in mass communication structures and contents favourable to the developed nations but detrimental to the healthy development of the Third World nations.

The major focus of the Third World grievance is that there is a deliberate attempt by the developed countries, especially the Western World, to exploit the advantages of their industrial and economic superiority to establish and perpetuate domination in mass media systems over the developing nations both quantitatively and qualitatively. Agba (2002: 257) says that:

Quantitative imbalance concerns the amount of news flow in both directions (developing and developed). It is argued that most news and information flow from the developed to the undeveloped world while news and information only crawl up from the latter to the former.

In addition to the quantitative imbalance in the flow of news, there is perhaps a more serious qualitative imbalance, which manifest itself in the pre-eminence of unfavourable Third World news in the international news systems (Okigbo, 1990: 339). In his attempt to support his views on the quantitative imbalance in global news flow, Agba (2002) cites Masmoudi (1979: 193) thus:

This imbalance is created by the disparity between the volume of news and information emanating from the developed countries and the volume of the flow in the opposite direction. Almost 80 percent of the world news flow emanates from the major trans-national agencies. However, these devote only 20 to 30 percent of news coverage to the developing countries despite the fact that the later account for almost three quarters of mankind.

Furthermore, Egwu (2001:20) paints the picture thus:

Since 1883, when the first newspaper was published, publication has been dominated by the North, especially the USA. Today, the United States has over 25,000 periodicals; over 1,200 book publishers; over 10,000 radio stations (AM & FM); over 1,000 television stations, and some 26million other types of (e.g. citizens band) radios. There is therefore a situation of media monopoly by the North, not only in hardware, but also in softwares. News Agencies also abound in the North (AP, Reuters, UPI, CNN, VOA, BBC etc) to the annoying neglect and marginalisation of the South, especially Africa.

Nwosu's (1979:10) comparative content analysis of four British and American newspapers' coverage of the continent, indicated that 0.1% of the entire news space was used in their coverage of Africa over a period of four months. This reveals serious under-reporting of the African continent. Nwosu's study also supports the accusation by Third World media scholars that much of

Western reporting on Africa is characterised by "bush fire" journalism where crises predominate to the vital exclusion of development – oriented news.

Okunna (1993: 95-96) citing Jika (1987) says that the developed or centre countries of the world also dominate the international flow of news largely due to the domination by the developed nations of world communication structures and resources, which include news agencies, satellite, broadcast facilities, newspapers and magazines.

Domatob (1988) also quoted by Okunna (1993:94) is also of the same view when he says that world news has always been dominated by the Big Four international news agencies: Reuters (Britain) Associated Press (US), United Press International (US) and Agence France Presse (France). He goes further to state that even in those Third World countries which have made good progress in reducing their dependence on other types of imported Western Media Programmes, their reliance on the 'big four' for world news is virtually complete.

By 1978, a UNESCO report on mass communication had summarised the quantitative imbalance by noting that the news agency services in the world were

Overloaded with items from and about Europe and North America.... (Whereas) inadequate coverage is given to news emanating from countries of Asia, Africa and South America where about 90% of the world's population live.

Despite the establishment of national and regional news agencies, this situation has not changed in the last decade as much as is necessary to democratise communication in the world. In Africa, for instance, there is still increasing concern among African countries that the news coverage of their affairs by foreign news agencies is grossly inadequate (Ochogwu, 1987:7). While most media houses in Africa have regular slots and spaces for news originating from the developed nations, African countries are either not being covered at all in the media of the Western World (Quantitative) or endure malicious negative news reports

about events in these countries (qualitative). These negative reports are often about political instability such as coup d' etat, national disasters etc., aimed at ridiculing Third World leader's as inept. Once no such calamities take place in developing countries, these countries hardly get a mention in the media of developed countries (Ekeanyanwu, 2005).

This belief has been reinforced by the Timbergen report to the "club of Rome" on information flow in 1977. The report states:

It must also be recognised that international dissemination has long formed the subject of discriminatory practices....The monopolistic and discriminatory practices inherent in current international information dissemination must be deemed as one of the worst.

The argument here is that communication according to MacBride *et.al*, has become an "exchange between two unequal protagonists without necessarily having to compete, but instead allows the predominance of the more powerful, the richer and the better equipped to continue to monopolise the flow of news". Momoh (1988:7) strengthens this view, when he states thus:

It is common knowledge that news from Third World countries usually make their appearance in the media of developed countries only when they are sensational and border on drama strong enough to arouse their sensibilities and sense of curiosity.

Okigbo (1980:6) also points out "despite the fact that the developing countries account for about 75 percent of the world population, less than 30 percent of world news coverage is devoted to them". Okigbo argues further that this leads to a "perpetual under-covering of the regions, the ultimate result of which is lack of adequate information about these areas". He goes on further to say that the flow of world news is mostly unidirectional. Thus, according to him, the average Third World

citizen is more likely to know more about the Western World than the Third World. This paucity of news flow from the Third World to the Western World also means the average Westerner is likely to know very little about the Third World. This inadequate and biased flow of international news around the globe has led to the perpetuation of some prejudices and the holding of certain attitudes that do not support global co-operation based on fairness, equity and just treatment.

In defence of the Western hegemony over global news flow pattern, Stevenson and Gaddy (1982) quoted by Uche (1996) deny that the Third World media are prisoners of the Western news agencies. They argue that the complaints of the Third World against the Western World media are less problems of journalism in general. They assert that Third World editors are to blame for their over-selection of conflict news events from the Western wire services. They, however, point out that since conflict is newsworthy, the imbalance in global news flow is a reflection of events, observing that there are more international conflicts in the Third World than in the rest of the world. Galliner (1978:14) is also of the view that:

The serious press in the West publishes more information on the developing countries than those countries do on important events outside their own frontiers.

The author goes further to say "there is little doubt that the grievances of the Third World countries concerning the present news flow system are intelligible and natural to some extent". Continuing, he asserts thus:

But the problems cannot be overcome by blaming the West, or by excluding the West. They can be tackled with concerted effort on the part of the Third World countries together with financial, technological and moral support from the West

This compilation of empirical evidence to support imbalance in world news between the Western World and the Third World could go on and on. The question, therefore, remains – why this imbalance and which way forward? According to Atwood and Murphy (1982:4), the issue is not so much bias in news coverage as imbalance in trans-border flow of economic and technical data. In their view, whatever is the substance of imbalanced flow; the argument is misplaced in these three important respects:

First, it is not the content of the world's news channels that gives rise to the controversy. More important than news stories, be it development news or coups and earthquakes, is the economic data transmitted daily across national borders.... Second, in the long run, neither journalists nor scholars can direct fundamental changes that eventually will be made in the international communication system. (And third) too much has been placed in increasing information and information flows as a solution to problems... (as) information, by itself, guarantees no solutions and may, indeed, create new problems.

In many respects, the solutions proposed by the advocates of the new world order are misunderstood not only because of deliberate misinterpretation but also because the key words in the controversy (equality, freedom, access, balance etc.,) mean different things to different people in different situations depending on the context. According to Okigbo (1996:286), "The varying interpretations of the concepts as well as the easy availability of evidence to support the different perspectives on the debates make it impossible for a consensual view to have emerged".

Porat (1978:21) cited in Uche (1996), however, offers a suggestion on why the imbalance exists and may continue to exist when he opines that:

The Third World's information infrastructure is impoverished. There is a dearth of scientific, technical, professional and managerial talent; and even that which exists is often trained abroad in European and United States Universities. The Third World, as present, cannot afford to produce its own information.

This view, even though wrong and outdated may still has some elements of correctness in the present dispensation unless Third World countries unite and pool their resources together to fight their common enemy. This may be a tall order considering the fact that most Africans are directly or indirectly influenced by Western media reports. Even those who should be called literate and educated Africans, hardly give serious credence to local news. One of their ready yardsticks for judging credibility of news events or stories is their frequent reportage by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), or the Voice of America (VOA) or even when they are read in foreign newspapers and/or magazines. A good many have even refused to read the local newspapers and magazines or listen to local news broadcasts. And this has a lot of negative political, economic and cultural implications.

Based on this, it was recommended by UNESCO that there should be a qualitative reinforcement of the endogenous capacities of developing countries, which would enable them to count on their own strength, to better utilise their resources and to lead progressively to self-reliance without leading to self-seclusion. The implication of this is that the African press must be ready and willing to identify itself with the aspirations of Africa.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study could be discussed or analysed with many mass communication theories or hypotheses, amongst them are: the International Flow of Information Theory, Gatekeeping Theory, Agenda Setting Theory, the Value System Theory and so on just to name a few. This configuration of theoretical frameworks is

due to the nature of the research problem, which cuts across all the competing and related theories.

For this study, however, the Agenda Setting Theory and the Gatekeeping Theory will be used to argue the position of this paper.

### **The Agenda Setting Theory**

The Agenda setting Theory simply says that the media determines what issues are regarded as important at a given time in every society. It says that if the media is able to establish and consistently maintain a stand on any given controversial issue of concern, the public on the other end will naturally begin to "gravitate" towards the direction of the mass media's position concerning that issue. In other words, the presentation of the media is what actually determines the public's view on the issue.

According to McComb and Shaw (1974), the media emphasis on an issue influences the audience to also view the issue as important. The media attach certain weights to news stories through placement, size and frequency of appearance of such stories. Agenda setting posits that audiences learn these salient issues from the news media, thus incorporating a similar set of weights and importance into their own personal agenda. Shaw (1983:132) reaffirms this view when he posits that the media, by focusing repeated and major attention on an event or set of related events, can transfer that event into an issue. Umechukwu (2001:148-150) and Folarin (2002:75-76) also agree that the mass media have an impact on agenda setting in that they have the ability to choose or emphasise certain topics, thereby causing the public to perceive the issues or topics as important. This implies that the mass media predetermine what issues are considered as important at a given time in a given society. Agenda Setting Theory does not give to the media the ultimate power to determine what the public actually thinks; but it does give them the power to determine what the public should be thinking about. The above view is a reaffirmation of Bernard Cohen (1963) statement that the media may not be successful in telling people what to think but they may be very successful in telling them what to think about

Sandman *et al* (1976:19) also sees agenda setting as the editorial decision that a particular event is not news if the news media ignores it or says so. Globally, any event given major emphasis in the mass media ultimately becomes a major event. The journalist, therefore, effect cognitive change among individuals and at times thinks for them. This is exactly what is referred to as agenda setting, which gave birth to the Agenda Setting Theory of the press.

Marshal McLuhan (1968) similarly says "The press can colour events by using them in a particular way, or by refusing to use them at all." Walter Lippman (1922) further lays credence to the Agenda Setting power of the mass media by saying that "the people do not deal directly with their environment as much as they respond to the pictures painted by the press on the events that occur in their environment."

All these assertions lay credence to the Agenda Setting power of the mass media. The Agenda Setting Influence of the media can thus be seen in the following areas:

- the frequency of reportage on a particular issue or event;
- the prominence given to the issue or event reported;
- the degree of conflict generated by the report (the degree of controversy involved); and
- generation of public debates on topical issues (elevating issues to a plane of discussion hence giving room to divergent views); and

These show the ability of the media to set the agenda of what obtains in the society. Relating this to the subject of this research, the global media is a very potent and powerful force in the international environment with the power to determine how events and issues are perceived on the international scene. In other words, the global media sets the agenda on the global scene.

However, since the global media is dominated by the Western and developed nations, they are able to use the instrumentality of the media to influence how certain issues, events and even nations are perceived in the international community. Hence, some Third World nations have accused the global media of presenting the Third World and the news and events that occur

in the Third World in the negative light thus attracting a negative perception of the Third World in the global environment.

Through prominence given to reports from the Third World, the frequency of reportage about the Third World and the slant or direction of the reports (which are usually in the negative angle), the Western nations are able to dominate global news, information and communication. Jarman (1998) believes that "competition drives the mainstream media to rely on negative and sensational stories which emphasise problems rather than solutions. The little coverage of positive developments remain tucked away inside low-circulation academic journals."

### **The Gatekeeping Theory**

The Gatekeeping Theory states that at every point in news flow and movement, there exists certain individuals (the journalists) known as gatekeepers who help to shape, filter, sieve, structure, fine-tune and organise the news before it finally reaches the audience. The term "gatekeeper" was first employed by the Australian Psychologist, Kurt Lewin to refer to individuals or group of persons who govern the "travel of news items in the communication channel." Bittner (1989: 12) defines a gatekeeper as "any person or formerly organised group directly involved in relaying or transferring information from one individual to another through a mass medium."

The Gatekeeper under this theory has the power to influence and determine what eventually comes out as news and what the news composition will be through their ability to select and reject certain bits of news and information based on their personal judgments of what should make up the news and to sieve the contents of the news before it finally reaches the intended audiences. This shows the fact that personal biases of individual reporters/gatekeepers may sometimes set in to determine the news content and the way news flows.

The Gatekeeping Theory reveals the fact that "a great deal of what we know about, what is happening else where in the world is as a result of mass mediation. The latter determines what people are informed about, how they are informed and indeed when they are informed" (Devereux, 2003: 44). It lays credence to the fact that there exists an imbalance and inequalities

in global news dissemination as the shaping, sieving and fine-tuning of the news may result in the outright distortion of the news contents.

The Gatekeeping Theory explains to us how the developed countries of the world through the ownership and control of the global media can influence the transmission of global news and information through filtering, sieving and shaping the content of the news to suit their own desires and interests. It further supports the assertion that developing countries "know virtually nothing about events in neighbouring countries that has not been filtered through the lenses of the developed media systems" (Thussu, 2000: 66).

The Gatekeeping function also gives the media the power to select the particular bit of news and information they perceive most suitable to be reported or that is of higher news value. Silverstein (1994) graphically explains how this affects the Third World or developing nations of the world:

The first rule is that the Third World largely doesn't exist for the American media until the White House, almost always for national security reasons, decides to put one of the Third World countries on the map. Rule number two is that once this threat to national security is over, the Third World country in question once again falls off the news agenda until the next crises situation arises.

This reveals that journalists may in fact be determined to objectively observe and neutrally report social reality but since it is impossible not to be tied to one's own background, messages will inevitably be distorted.

### **Methods**

This study made use of content analysis. According to Ohaja (2003: 14), content analysis refers to "the examination of the manifest content of communication to discover the patterns existing therein." Wright (1975) cited in Tejumaiye (2003: 137) also defines it as:

A research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories. It may involve quantitative or qualitative analysis, or both. Technical objectivity requires that the categories of classification and analysis be clearly and operationally defined so that other researchers can follow them reliably.

McQuail (2000) quoted by the same author says it is:

A technique for the systematic, quantitative and objective description of media texts, that is useful for certain purposes of classifying output, looking for effect and making comparisons between media and over time or between content and "reality".

Content analysis is the most appropriate method for this study as it "helps the researcher to look at existing records, detect a pattern or patterns and arrive at some conclusions regarding the attitudes of the writers of the records or the originators of those messages contained in those records" (Sobowale, 1983: 17).

The population will comprise of all the international print media of mass communication from which two leading news magazines of global reach and repute have been selected for the study. These selected print media firms are the *Newsweek* of the United States and the *Economist* of London.

Both news magazines under study are internationally acclaimed papers with a global audience and appeal. They are also serious in general tone and have a wide coverage of politics, economics, the arts, science and technology and other matters of significant concern. They are also noted for good writing, high quality journalism, a strong and distinct editorial voice, and a high calibre staff. The systematic random technique is used for the selection of the issues. According to Sobowale (1983: 38), "this

technique operates on the basis of the first element being randomly selected. Once the first element has been selected, all elements that will fall into the sample become known."

A complete list of all the issues between January 2003 and December 2005 for both news magazines were collected (the sampling frame) in order to enable the researcher systematically random pick the particular issues for the study. According to Sobowale (1983: 38):

After the sampling frame has been obtained (with all the elements carefully listed) the researcher must decide on what fraction of the population must constitute the sample. Once this is done, the researcher should then multiply the population by that fraction. The product will be the sample size. The population should then be divided by the sample size to get the sampling interval.

Following this description, the researcher chose to study 30% or one-third of the population as sample. The *Newsweek* has a total of 156 issues from January 2003 to December 2005, 30% or one-third of the entire population will be:  $156 \times 1/3 = 52$ . The sample size for the *Newsweek* therefore is 52.  $156/52 = 3$ . The sampling interval therefore is 3.

Using a random start approach, the researcher put the dates of the first three issues of the magazine on a paper and randomly picked one with closed eyes, to determine the start. The same procedure was used to select the sample for the *Economist*, which also had a total of 156 issues from January 2003 to December 2005, a sample size of 51 issues and a sampling interval of 3. (The slight difference is due to a special edition, which spanned two weeks rather than one).

Accordingly, the following issues of the news magazines were selected for analysis:

**Newsweek [Year 2003]**

*January 20; February 10; March 3, 24; April 14; May 5, 26; June 16, July 7, 28; August 18; September 8, 29; October 20; November 10; December 1, 22.*

**Newsweek [Year 2004]**

*January 12; February 2, 23; March 15; April 5, 26; May 17; June 7, 28; July 19; August 9, 30; September 20; October 11; November 1, 22; December 13.*

**Newsweek [Year 2005]**

*January 3, 24; February 14; March 7, 28; April 18; May 9, 30; June 20; July 11; August 2, 22; September 12; October 3, 24; November 14; December 5, 26.*

**Economist [Year 2003]**

*January 18; February 8; March 1, 22; April 12; May 3, 24; June 14; July 5, 26; August 16; September 6, 27; October 18; November 8, 29; December 20.*

**Economist [Year 2004]**

*January 10, 31; February 21; March 13; April 3, 24; May 15; June 12; July 3, 24; August 14; September 4, 25; October 23; November 13; December 4, 25.*

**Economist [Year 2005]**

*January 15; February 5, 26; March 19; April 9, 30; May 21; June 11; July 2, 23; August 13; September 3, 24; October 15; November 5, 26; December 17.*

The units of measurement or analysis for this study were divided into the following categories and numerical values or codes assigned to the categories and sub categories, which were

aggregated at the end of the analysis. According to Sobowale (1983: 52), "unless data are converted to numerical codes, representing attributes or values of variables, quantitative analysis cannot be done."

**A. Story Type**

1. Political and government news
2. Economic news
3. Science and Technology news
4. Education news
5. Arts, entertainment, culture and tourism news
6. Sports news
7. Religious news
8. Health news
9. War, conflict and defense news
10. Human interest news
11. Photo news.

**B. Direction**

1. Favourable
2. Unfavorable
3. Neutral

**C. Prominence**

1. Front page Headlines
2. Back page
3. Centre-spread
4. Inside page.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study generally aims at finding out the way and manner Nigeria is reported in the global media since the installation of a democratic government. As stated earlier, a total of 103 issues of the two international news magazines were sampled. From the issues analysed by the researcher, only 16 reports about Nigeria were discovered. What this implied is that for a study period of 3 years (2003-2005), the two news magazines selected

for this study only reported 16 stories about Nigeria. The percentage of this to the entire news reports in the global media was not determined as it is not within the purview of this study.

**Table 1: Distribution of Magazine Issues Containing Reports about Nigeria**

Magazine Issues	Frequency	Percentage
Nigeria reported	13	13
Not reported	90	87
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>

The researcher's attention also centred on the type of reports the global media most often carried about Nigeria. To this effect, categories were developed to help determine type of possible reports. As could be deduced from Table 2 below, Political stories were reported most by the global media about Nigeria. This story division was reported 9 times and this represents 56.3% of the total number of reports in the global media. Economic stories came second with 5 reports or 31.3% while Health and Religious stories appeared only once, each accounting for 6.3%. Table 2 summarises this data better:

**Table 2: Distribution of Reports about Nigeria According to Story Type**

Topic Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Political & Govt. news	9	56.25
Economic news	5	31.25
Health	1	6.25
Religion	1	6.25
Education	-	-
Science and technology	-	-
Art/entertainment	-	-
Sports	-	-
War/conflict/defence	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

The study also sought to find out the importance or prominence the global media gave to the various stories reported. To determine this, the researcher classifies the stories' importance according to the page they appear. This implies that stories that appeared on the front page were regarded as very important, followed by the ones that appear on the back page. The stories that appeared on the inside pages were regarded as the least in importance. Again Table 3 gives us a breakdown of this data thus:

**Table 3: Distribution of Nigeria Stories According to their Placement**

<b>Page Placemnt</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Front page	-	-
Back page	-	-
Inside pages	16	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table reveals that all the Nigeria reports that were found were located in the inside pages of the news magazines, which is the least in prominence.

The researcher also sought to discover the slant or direction of the reports about Nigeria by the global media. To discover this, the researcher created three content categories, which are classified into favourable reports, unfavourable reports and neutral reports. Table 4 summarises the findings thus:

**Table 4: Distribution of the Slant/Direction of the Reports about Nigeria**

<b>Slant</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Favorable	5	31.25
Unfavorable	9	56.25
Neutral	2	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 shows that only 5 reports out of the total reports about Nigeria was favourable making for 31.3%, 9 reports or 56.3% were unfavourable, while 2 reports or 12.5% were neutral in nature.

There is no doubt from the result of this study that the new democratic Nigeria is still under reported in the international press. This study shows that only 16 reports were carried about Nigeria for a period of 3 years (2003-2005), this reveals gross quantitative imbalance as Nigeria is obviously under reported in the global media. Fifteen (15) out of the total reports about Nigeria originated from the *Economist* magazine while only 1 report about Nigeria was found in *Newsweek*.

Qualitative imbalance was also revealed in the little coverage given to Nigeria as 56.3% of the reports were unfavourable or negative in nature while only 31.3% of the reports were favourable, looking on the brighter side and 12.5% neutral reports. The Third World is most often put in negative light by the international media as the news carried about it are often negative in nature. The Global media always seem to look past the developmental processes and other positive events in the Third World nations rather favouring stories with a negative slant. This supports the assertion by Oeffner (2002) that only negative occurrences and events in the Third World nations make news in the global media. The western news values for determining news from the Third World is always based on oddity, controversy generated, war, disaster and conflict etc. All these have a way of denting the image of Third World countries in the international scene.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Considering the number of valuable man-hours the global information flow controversy has consumed and its volatile nature, it is imperative for the global media barons who only represent their western interests, to have a rethink and work to correct the obvious imbalance.

The News Flow Controversy is real and there exist imbalances and inequalities in global news flow particularly from the Third World to the developed world and enough researches

like this have continued to point to this singular fact. Nigeria as a Third World nation, despite all its effort to correct its bad international reputation and image, unfortunately is still a victim of this treatment by the global media. The New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) as an approach to check this impendent inequality is therefore justified.

However, the sparse reportage of Nigeria in the global media indicates an absence of negative occurrences during the study period as the global media specialises in carrying odd and negative news about the Third World. The global media only carry reports about the Third World at advent of crises, war, famine, hunger etc.,(Oeffner, 2002). Momoh (1988: 7) further asserts:

It is common knowledge that news from the Third World countries usually make their appearance in the media of developed countries only when they are sensational and border on drama strong enough to arouse their sensibilities and sense of curiosity.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested as a contribution to the raging controversy in order to help end the controversial debate on global news flow.

The recommendations include encouraging the establishment of media channels with an international or global reach by Nigeria and other Third World nations. This will help secure a voice for the Third World in the international scene and will help the Third World to be able to actively compete with the west for attention of the global audience. There is therefore the need for an elite corps media in the Third World that will help fight against the evils of inequality by bringing to the notice of the world development processes and other breakthroughs in the area.

Developing countries must also take specific measures to establish or develop essential elements of their communication systems: print media, broadcasting and telecommunication along with the related training and production facilities. Without

this, it will be difficult to compete with the highly technological, specialised and developed western media that dominates the global scene. According to the MacBride et al (1981: 281) recommendations:

Strong national news agencies are vital for improving each country's national and international reporting. Where viable, regional networks should be set up to increase news flows and serve all the major language groups in the area. Nationally, the agencies should buttress the growth of both urban and rural newspapers to serve as the core of a country's news collection and distribution system. National book production should be encouraged and accompanied by the establishment of a distribution network for books, newspapers and periodicals. The stimulation of works by national authors in various languages should be promoted... Adequate educational and training facilities are required to supply personnel for the media and production organizations, as well as managers, technicians and maintenance personnel. In this regard, co-operation between neighboring countries and within regions should be encouraged.

The government can assist in this respect by putting policies and programmes in place that will enable the effective and efficient existence of public, private and regional ownership of various global media types. This will help give the organisations a platform from which to operate and will accord them more credibility and recognition in the global scene.

The government is also advised to secure the help of International Public Relations (IPR) and media practitioners in its efforts at building a positive international image and reputation and in building a new Nigeria rather than involving politicians, as often done in time past, who do not possess the skill or professional know-how in communication or PR. If the government

involves IPR and media professionals in its activities in the international scene, these experts will be able to help government develop good strategies and methods for gaining and securing the sympathy, recognition and acceptance of the nation on the international scene. They will also help develop strategies that will help enhance the morale of the nation by showing off her strengths and achievements and downplaying her weakness. This is a veritable instrument in communication that is used to persuade and secure favourable disposition towards a particular source.

Finally, Nigeria in particular and Africa in general must continue to pursue her democratic ideals whether the developed world reports this or not. However, the national media systems of African nations must brace up to this unique challenge and ensure that African states are not poorly reported again. The African media in this era of African democracy must be the mouthpiece of the African people. Communication, which is an instrument of political socialisation, must be used for this purpose.

## Bibliography

- Baillie & Winseck (ed.) (1997). *Democratising Communication: Comparative Perspectives on Information and Power*. London: Hampton Press
- Bittner, J. (1989). *Mass Communication: An Introduction*, 5th Edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Devereux, (2003). *Understanding the Media*. New York: Sage Publishers.
- Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2005). *International Communication: Issues, Concepts and Researches in the 21st Century*. Lagos: Standard Concept Company.
- Giffard, A. (1989). *UNESCO and The Media*. White Plains, New York: Longman Inc.
- Ginneken, J. V. (1998). *Understanding Global News*. London: Sage Publishers.
- Golding, P. & Harris, P. ed (1997). *Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Globalization, Communication & the New International Order*. London: Sage Publishers.
- Macbride, S. et al (1981). *Many Voices, One World*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press (reprinted copy).
- Ohaja, E. U. (2003). *Mass Communication Research and Project Report Writing*. Lagos: John Letterman Limited.
- Okunna, C. S. (1993). *Theory and Practice of Mass Communication*. Enugu: Abic publishers.
- Preston, W. Jr., Edward, S. H, and Herbert, I. S. (1989). *Hope & Folly: The United States and UNESCO 1945-1985*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Sina, A. (2003). *Global Communication and the Media Agenda*. Abeokuta: Julian Publishers

- Smith, A. (1980). *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World*. New York: Faber & Faber.
- Sobowale, I. (1983). *Scientific Journalism: What Tools for the Precision Journalist?* Lagos: John West Publications Limited.
- Tejumaiye, J. A. (2003). *Mass Communication Research: An Introduction*. Ibadan: Sceptre Prints Limited.
- Thussu, D. K. (2000). *International Communication; Continuity and Change*. London: Arnold Publishers.
- Uche, L. U. (ed) (1996). *North-South Information Culture Trends in Global Communication and Research Paradigm*. Lagos: Longman Publishers.
- Wimmer, R. D. and Dominick, J. R. (2003). *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*. USA: Holly J. Allen.

### **Conference Papers**

- Soludo, C. C. (2004). Consolidating the Nigerian Banking Industry to Meet the Developmental Challenges of the 21st Century. An address delivered to the special meeting of the Bankers' Committee, July 6, at CBN Headquarters, Abuja.

### **Unpublished Materials**

- Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2005). Foreign Correspondence, Unpublished Lecture Notes, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State.
- Oboh, G. (2003). Theories of Mass Communications, Unpublished Lecture Notes, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State.

### **Newspapers**

- Momoh, T. (1988). Towards a New African Information Order. *New Nigeria*, 30 January.
- The *Guardian* Newspaper, Thursday 18 October, 2001. Page 9
- The *Punch* Newspaper, July 1, 2005. Page 2-3.

**Others**

- Jarman, J. (1998). *Real People, Real Problems, Real Solutions*, in Changemakers.net, <http://www.changemakers.net/journal/98december/jarman.cfm#note>, retrieved 25/01/06
- MacBride Roundtable on Communications, <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~rvincent/macbride.htm>, Retrieved 12/02/06
- Nigeria. Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2005, Microsoft Corporation.
- Oeffner, A. (2002). The Third World in the Media. An article as part of the Global Journalism Course at JMK, Stockholms Universitetet, <http://www.askjeaves.com>, retrieved 02/02/06
- Silverstein, K. (1994). Interview by Barsamian, D. in Zmag, <http://www.zmag.org/ZMag/articles/sept94barsamian.htm>, retrieved 03/02/06
- UNESCO, *Many Voices, One World*, Paris: UNESCO, 1980. Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2005, Microsoft Corporation.
- UNESCO. General Conference, 30th Session. Paris: UNESCO, August 1999.