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Agenda Setting-Inclusiveness in Nigeria: Challenges of the New Media

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Abstract. Participation and stakeholders' engagement are critical to the success of any democratic governance. The mass media not only provide a platform for the cross – fertilization of ideas and issues which transform to meaningful agenda that propel societal concerns, they also determine the salience of such issues that engage the attention of the society. However, the advent of the social media has put the conventional media on their toes as they seem to be fast conceding their hitherto exclusive privilege of agenda- setting to the social media who with their liberal and increased access to the public sphere and have widened the prospects of audience participation in the digital media space. But this is not without its attendant challenges. Communication engagements in the social media, though robust, remain largely uncoordinated. It is even being speculated , and reasonably too, that the same forces which hijacked and hegemonised the agenda of the political elite on the masses through the mass media are subtly dictating the pace of public discourse even on the social media. It is against this backdrop that this paper examined the operations and activities of the social media in enhancing agenda-setting inclusiveness within the context of a diverse and heterogeneous entity like Nigeria. Through desk study and documentary analysis the paper ex-rayed the challenges necessitated by the change of paradigms from the old to the new media and suggest a creative synergy between the two if the country's democratic experiment would benefit from and maximise the advantages of an all- inclusive governance.

Keywords: Stakeholders' Engagement, Mass Media, Inclusive Governance, Agenda – setting, Social Media

1. Introduction

The increasing demand for democracy, transparent and accountable governance makes the principle of inclusiveness a key driver of public policy globally. This is because the more the people are involved in the decision- making process on the critical issues that affect their lives, the easier it becomes to collectively safeguard, defend and implement such decisions. The mass media play a crucial role in galvanising public opinion for agenda- setting and consensus building. We live in a world of perception. At individual, corporate, national and global levels, perception is a key index that determines and influences our worldview of emergent socio-economic and political realities. In a sense, therefore, perception, as the stimulus of ideas, may indeed be the real prime mover of social change.

In a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse setting like Nigeria, social exclusion and ethnic profiling arise out of perceptual errors or distortions which invariably account for most of the conflicts and crises in the society at large. It was in acknowledgement of the dangers of social exclusion to the society and indeed the world globally that the United Nations promoted the principles of Affirmative Action and Social Inclusion as crucial agenda for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This explains the rationale of the catchword "leaving

no one behind" which is an effort to help countries to promote inclusive growth globally.

The mass media, by their constitutional roles, are key stakeholders in engendering social inclusion as the strategic agencies for agenda - setting in the society. The engagement in this paper is therefore to examine how the mass media have been fulfilling their roles as traditional agenda –setters in Nigeria and the challenges that have occasioned this especially in the wake of the emergence of the Internet-mediated digital media which are fast altering the ecology of the global media landscape.

2. **Conceptual Review**

The concept of Agenda- setting is one of those that underscore the impact of the media on the society. The basic premise of the agenda-setting theory is that the media, consciously or unconsciously, create a definite image of reality. The concept simply refers to how the media's news coverage determines what issues become the focus of public attention (Alvernia University (2019). Fourie (2007: 244) explains that the media as agenda setters, confront us on a daily basis with events which are, in the media's view, important. "Everyday", Fourie states, "the media release a list of topics (issues on which they focus) similar to the agenda of a meeting." In the course of doing this, the media omit certain events and issues as a matter of editorial discretion and gate-keeping, while placing emphasis on others, and in this process, the media thus establish a particular way for the people to think about reality.

As McQuail (2010: 512) writes, the core idea of agenda-setting is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues. Agenda-setting, according to Straubhaar & LaRose (2002), thus bestows political power on the media as the goals and intentions of media decision makers influence society. This is so because what people identify as issues depends largely on what the media include as news or entertainment. It is indeed true that the mass media, as some authorities have argued, may not always determine what we think about or what views to hold on certain issues, the fact remains that the media actually set agenda for public discourse by telling us what to think about or hold opinions on (Cohen, 1963: 13).

Butler (1998: 28) and Van Praag & Brauts (1999: 179-199) argue that the agenda-setting power of journalists during election times has more in their discretion to include or exclude information of political actors than in their independent selection of issues.

McQuail (2010: 515) identifies six basic hypotheses of Agenda-Setting. These include the fact that:

(i)	Public debate is represented by a set of salient issues (an agenda for action)
(ii)	The agenda originates from public opinion and the proposals of political elites.
(iii)	Competing interests seek to promote the salience of 'their' issues.
(iv)	Mass media news selects issues for more or less attention according to several pressures, especially those from interested elites, public opinion and real-world events.
(v)	The outcome in media (relative degree of prominence of issues) both gives public recognition to the current agenda and has further effects on opinion and the evaluation of the political scene.
(vi)	Agenda effects are peripheral and short-term.

On his part, Folarin (2002: 275) identifies the four elements of agenda setting to include the quantity or frequency of reporting; the prominence given to reports through headline displays, pictures and layouts in newspapers, magazines, film, graphics or timing on radio and television; the degree of conflict the report generates; and the cumulative specific media effects over time.

Baran (2001: 385) however contends that the agenda-setting power of the media resides in more than the amount of space or time devoted to a story and its placement in the broadcast or on the page. According to Baran:

Also important is the fact that there is great consistency between media sources across all media in the choice and type of coverage they give an issue or event. This consistency and

repetition signal to people the importance of the issue or event.

Besides, the media coverage of issues in a political campaign may help individuals to perceive certain issues as being more important than others, and consequently influence their decisions about candidates based on how they address themselves to these issues (Bittner, 1989: 382). In a nutshell, agenda-setting defines the ability of the media to determine what is important to the audience in any given society at any given time.

Media literatures reveal three types of agenda that interact in complex ways to determine message salience with the audience. These are: media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda. Rogers (2004: 11) describes the general model of agenda-setting as a usual temporal sequence of:

Media Agenda ⟹ Public Agenda ⟹ Policy Agenda

Media agenda-setting, according to Zhu and Blood (1997: 99), is the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues. In other words, media agenda reflects those news or coverage items that are priorities of the media. These are contents deemed important by the media as reflected in the prominence given to such items/contents in terms of length, time and position.

Public agenda, on the other hand, refers to the list of issues that are on the minds of the public. These are often measured by a survey of people's responses to the open-ended question, "what is the most important problem facing our nation today?" Public agenda has to do with the focus of public attention or issues that the public consider, discuss and worry about as important.

An issue could be construed to imply a long-term problem or series of events that involve continual coverage. Zhu & Blood (1997: op cit) conceptualise an event as being characterised by a quick-onset happening over a discrete period of time, attracting intense but short-term media attention. Rogers Dearing (1988) counsel that it is important to differentiate issues from events when conducting agenda-setting research as these concepts may differ in terms of timing and salience, or importance.

McLeod, Becker and Brunes (1974) identify three versions of public agenda. These include: intrapersonal agenda (i.e. how important an issue is to the person him/herself); an interpersonal agenda (how important an issue is to others); and a community agenda (how important an issue is to the community or nation). These researchers are of the opinion that while these different levels agenda interact with each other to some extent, the media agenda-setting is most noticeable in shaping community agenda.

Policy agenda-setting relates to issues bothering on public policy or government legislations. Rogers (2004: 11) writes that media and public agenda-setting are the exclusive preoccupations of media scholars while political scientists and sociologists study mainly policy agenda-setting.

The agenda-setting hypothesis therefore involves two concepts (media agenda and public agenda) and postulate a causal relationship between them that media agenda influences public agenda. McQuail (2010: 513) states that the hypothesis "presupposes a process of influence, from the priorities of political or other interest groups to the news priorities of the media, in which news values and audience interests play a strong part, and from there to the opinions of the public." He however acknowledges the existence of alternative models of this relationship as the interactions between the three levels of agenda can also work in a reversed order, and states "that underlying concerns of the public will shape issue definition by both political elites and the media."

3. **Principles of Agenda-Setting Theory**

One of the basic premises of the agenda-setting theory, according to Barker & Kielder (1971: 193-205), is that if the same people are exposed to the same media, they would likely place the same importance on the same issues. This confirms the assertion that the media indeed create an agenda for our thoughts and affect what we decide is important. Louw (2005: 32)

proves this point when he states that the agenda-setting process involves creating the perceptual frameworks through which 'publics' experience the world from one perspective only. Entman (1989: 77-8) provides another insight into the workings of agenda-setting strategy of the media. According to him, *the key means to predispose people to thinking in a certain way is to influence what they think about by providing them with ready-made 'schematas' or frameworks. Such frameworks serve to guide the subsequent behaviour of media audiences and so turn them into publics (who behave 'collectively', despite being isolated individuals).*

Dearing and Rogers (1996) offer some inferences about agenda-setting: (i) that different media do tend to agree about the relative salience of a set of issues; (ii) that media agenda do not closely match 'real world' indicators because it is not the absolute significance of an issue that counts, but the relative strength of forces and people trying to define and promote an issue; and that the position of an issue on the media agenda importantly determines that issue's salience in the public agenda.

Dearing and Rogers' first generalisation on agenda-setting is the equivalence of Vivian (1993)'s intra-media agenda-setting which says agenda-setting also is a phenomenon that affects media people, who constantly monitor one another. Vivian captures the professional reality that reporters and editors many times are concerned more with how their peers are handing a story than with what the audience wants. According to Vivian, "sometimes the media harp on one topic, making it seems more important than it really is, until it becomes tedious."

However, the modern reality of media convergence seems to challenge this assumption. Perse (2001: 100), for instance, argues that the assumption that the conventional mass media do share the same set of news priorities is being challenged by the emergence and availability of many new online news services which provide opportunities for a 'news user' to seek news according to a personal agenda.

Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008: 89) on their part, uphold the validity of Dearing and Rogers' second inference when they reason that the mass media such as the press may not actually reflect social reality "because news is filtered, chosen and shaped by newsroom staff or broadcaster." They also agree that the agenda-setting theory proposes that the facts which the people get to know about issues of public concern tend to be those which the mass media have presented to them, while the significance people ascribe to any issue is proportionate to the amount of attention given to the same issue in the media.

McCombs and Shaw had earlier argued in this direction when they submitted that:
In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in sharing political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.... The mass media may well determine the important issues – that is the media may set the "agenda" of the campaign. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972: 176)

Scholars have also raised the issue of who actually owns or sets the agenda that the media present to the public. Opinions on this issue vary depending on who is saying what. Vivian (1993: 356) believes in the reciprocal principle which suggests that "the mass media both exert leadership in agenda-setting and mirror the agendas of their audiences." Vivian insists that:
... Journalists and other creators of media messages cannot automatically impose their agendas on individuals. If people are not interested, an issue won't become part of their agendas. The individual values at work in the processes of selective exposure, perception and retention can thwart media leadership in agenda-setting.

Straubhaar and LaRose (2002: 66) list opinion leaders from government, businesses, and political interest groups as among groups that try to influence what the media cover and consequently set as an agenda for the society. They maintain that within the media themselves

exist a variety of professionals who make decisions at different levels to decide what goes into and what stays out of news and entertainment media. Through these gatekeepers, it is argued that the media help to set the agenda for society at large by virtue of the amount of coverage they give to different issues.

4. Do the Mass Media still set Agenda?

Opinions are divided especially among media scholars on whether the mass media still set agenda of public discourse in the light of the current technological realities. For instance, Straubhaar and LaRose subscribe to the assumption that the dominant class in society uses its ownership of the media to influence their content. According to this reasoning, the media ownership class creates a consensus, or hegemony of ideas that reinforce its position of dominance and thereby continuously keep media content within the bounds of this hegemonic set of ideas.

However, as stressed earlier, the emergence of the new media symbolised in the Internet seems to call to question the assertion that the conventional media, including their owners, now set the agenda of public discourse. A major feature of the interactive elements of the new media such as the Internet, e-mail, blogs, social media and citizen journalism is the increasing trend of User-Generated Content (UGC) as the latest identity of contemporary media practice (Banda, 2010; Ross & Cormier, 2010; and Gilmor: 2006).
Williams and Carpini (2004) sum up the argument thus:

By providing virtually unlimited sources of political information, the new media environment undermines the idea that there are discrete gates through which political information passes. If there are no gates, there can be no gate-keepers.

Writing against the backdrop of the Americans' experience during the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, Williams and Carpini attribute the difficulty of the elites (political and media) and academics in understanding the scandal to the failure to recognise the increasingly limited ability of journalists to act as gatekeepers. The new media with their interactive elements have not only widened access to the cyber sphere, they have equally brought about some fundamental changes in the traditional roles of the media with grave implications to the principles and assumptions of media agenda-setting.

While it is indeed true that the interactive media typified in *Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn* etc. have widened the public sphere to accommodate all shades of opinions, the real questions are: whose agenda are still being pushed to the public forum by these social platforms?, How effectively are the social media promoting the cause of social and political inclusiveness?. A deep study of conversations on *Facebook* and *Twitter* among others still suggests that the political elite are still dictating the pace by projecting their agenda into the emergent digital sphere through their carefully chosen Online and Social Media demagogues. Hence, while the unsuspecting public erroneously believes they are actually having nice times expressing their views on social media platforms, the actual reality is that they are unsuspecting megaphones of sponsored agenda adroitly smuggled and woven into public conversations and engagements. Besides, the nature and tenor of public communications and engagements on many social media platforms portray hostility to and intolerance of opposing views and opinions. Responses to oppositional and divergent opinions are often met with insults and unprintable swear words on some chats which negate the principles of inclusive public engagements.

The emergence of the new media notwithstanding, the mass media still generate a plurality of understandings that enable individuals to reinterpret their social experience, and question the assumptions and ideas of the dominant culture. On this Lambe (2012:125) submits, although increase in audience power, occasioned by the new media technologies offers great challenges to media effects researchers, findings thus far reassured that the

media will continue to play significant roles in the public's perception of the ever- fleeting environment. As observed by Curran (1991:130) the mass media will give subordinate classes increased access to ideas and arguments opposing ideological representations that legitimize their subordination, and enable them to explore more fully ways of changing the structure of society to their advantage.

5. Agenda-Setting and Framing

In an attempt to solve the many mysteries concerning the processes and effects of media agenda-setting, communication scholars have extended their curiosity beyond the traditional scope of agenda-setting. Consequently, two lines of inquiry have emerged (Zhu & Blood, 1997: 136). These are the antecedents of media agenda-setting (also known as media agenda-building), and the consequences of media agenda-setting (policy agenda-setting). Media agenda-building is regarded by agenda-setting scholars like Semetko *et al* (1991), Reese (1991) and Zhu and Blood (1997: op. cit) as more exciting from communication research angle because it provides a framework for integrating several important domains of research including media organisational behaviour, news content (Shoemaker & Reese: 1991) and framing (Kosocki: 1993).

Agenda-building presupposes that the media play up newsworthy issues in order to arouse public attention, interest and action. Cobb and Elder (1971: 892-915) explain that the first process of forming a media agenda is agenda building while the second process of forming a public agenda is regarded as agenda-setting. According to Sheafer and Weimann (2005: 349), empirical agenda building studies usually focus on two major independent variables. These include: real-world conditions and events, and the activities of political actors.

Sheafer and Weimann explain further that the first correlates changes in real-world indicators and events and the hierarchy of issues on the media agenda. They note, for instance, that as the environment sends signals of worsening conditions in a specific area, the media would be expected to accord greater attention to this area. The second correlates agenda or strategies of certain political actors like parties or candidates, and the media agenda (Aririguzoh, 2010: 95).

Framing, according to McQuail (2010: *Op cit*) is conceptualised in two ways. On the one hand, framing is interpreted as the ways in which news content is typically shaped and contextualised by journalists within some familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning. The second interpretation has to do with the effect of framing on the public. Here the audience is thought to adopt the frames of reference offered by journalists and to see the world in a similar way. This is similar to priming and agenda-setting. Fourie (2007) writes that framing as a media effect:
describes the influence on the public of the news angles used by journalists, the interpretative and ideological frameworks from which journalists report an issue and the contextualisation of news reports within a specific (ideological) framework.

Fourie explains that whereas the emphasis in agenda-setting is on the media's selection of topics/issues/events, the emphasis in the framing theory is more on the media's representation, treatment and even production of issues.

Tankard, Handerson, Sillberman, Bliss and Gharem (1991: 3) describe a media frame as "the central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration."

Naturally, writers or journalists decide what to include within the view or frame, of a story as well as what to leave out much as a painter chooses what to put in the frame of a painting (Straubhaar & LaRose, *op. cit).*

Tracing the source of frames, Bourdieu (1998), a French media critic, contends that even countries that profess freedom of expression, there is a form of invisible self-censorship. Journalists, writers, and producers, Bourdieu argues, realise what is permissible in the media, and they pre-edit their own work to be consistent with those

perceived norms "all in the interest of remaining employed in media companies." Entman (1993: 52) stresses that:

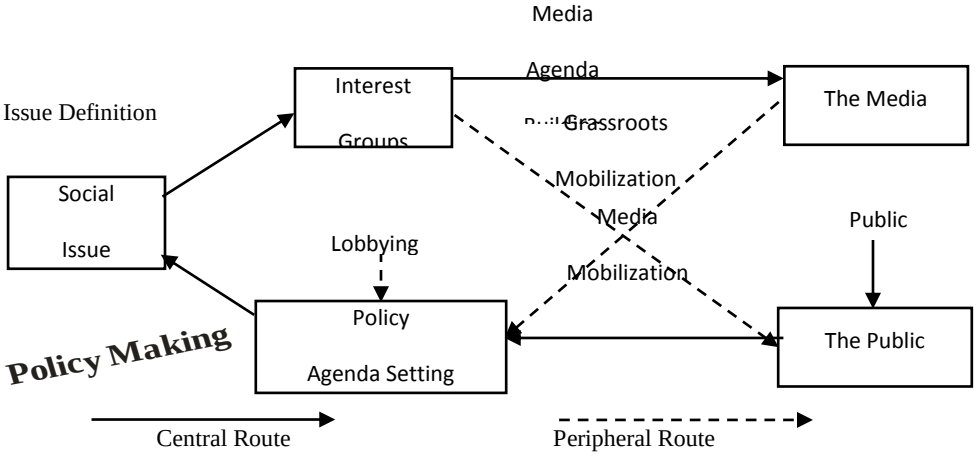
To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

Commenting on the inherent dangers of framing to public opinion, Eric Louw (2005: 32) contends that public opinion-driven politics is at heart 'media-ized' politics – where the media machine, and the demagogue's arts of manipulating mass media output, have become central to governance. Entman (1989) argues that "this manipulation (framing) has produced democracy without citizens. In place of active citizens, we have publics – 'publics' who are 'herded' and 'steered' by skilled media operators."

This observation is the genesis of the accusation that the media 'bastardise' the political process by shifting the focus of political debate from Parliaments to television studios (Riddel, 1998: 8).

The criticism notwithstanding, Zhu & Blood (1997) proposes an additional line of inquiry to situate agenda-setting in the broader context of the democratic process. In their proposal illustrated in Figure 1, four major players (interest groups, the media, the public, and the government) are connected through various routes in terms of their respective roles in the social issue process, while agenda-setting becomes only one piece of the big picture. Three routes are considered as central. These include: media agenda-building, public agenda-setting, and policy agenda-setting. The remaining routes as the foregoing illustration shows are peripheral such as direct lobbying, grassroots mobilisation, and media direct intervention. The researchers argue that while there may be little disagreement about the inclusion of these players in the political process, there certainly are different views about the causal direction and the relative importance of these routes.

Figure 1
Issue Process in Democratic Society



Source: Adapted from Zhu, J.J. & Blood, D. (1997)

The implication of this is that a proper knowledge and understanding of the principles of agenda setting will aid people's idea of the dynamics of social issues in a democratic process. Besides, such knowledge can be utilized in the understanding of the individuals' exposure to media and how this can be of benefit to other critical uses like consensus building and the regulation of their political knowledge and behaviour.

6. From Agenda-Setting to Agenda Building

Knowledge is not static. Proponents of Agenda Setting theory have extended the frontiers of inquiry to a new realm that is now labelled: 'agenda-melding'. This new approach, according to Shaw, McCombs, Weaver and Hamm (1999), focuses on the receivers of media messages – that is, the various publics – and their motivations for adopting agenda and affiliating with other persons.

To 'meld', literally implies to combine with something else. And true to this meaning, Agenda melding presupposes that "there is a strong impulse to affiliate with others in groups as one leaves the original family setting, and that one often joins these groups via other people and various media (Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 204: 273-274). Just as Elihu Katz redirected the focus of Uses and Gratifications researchers from what media do to the people to "what the people do with the media", Agenda melding reverses the traditional arrow from media to public.

Agenda melding has its roots in psychology because the motivation to meld with various groups is often explained by a theory of social dissonance as propounded by psychologist Leon Festinger (1957)'s theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Theoretically, agenda melding is an elaboration of the concept of "need orientation" (Weaver: 1977) that tries to explain why some individuals are more interested in certain issues (and agenda) from others through a combination of perceived relevance and uncertainty.

As Weaver, McCombs and Shaw postulate, Agenda Melding explains why some persons might find some agenda more relevant than others through a felt need to affiliate with certain groups. The theory predicts that those who desire to join a group or community, but who have little information about it, will be most likely to seek information about its agenda from other persons or from various media such as newspapers and magazines. When this information-seeking behaviour persists, it is predicted to lead, over time, to both:

Level 1: Agenda setting, (i.e. what issues the media emphasise and the public cares about); to

Level 2: Agenda setting (i.e. how issues and political actors are reported and perceived).

Explaining the concept of agenda melding, Shaw *et al* (1999) argue that:
Individuals seek affiliation with groups for many reasons, and those who join a group match their own priorities to those of the group even if they do not always agree with the dominant position of the group regarding the various issues.

This is the same theoretical premise for the Cognitive Dissonance and "Dis-equilibration" (that is, the seeking or avoiding information that significantly alters views (Chaffee & McDevitt: 1996, Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman (1984)'s spiral of silence, including Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Hence, while agenda-setting research concentrates, mostly, on what people learn from the media, agenda melding incorporates media agenda-setting as a part of a larger on-going social learning process from various media, including other persons (Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004: *op. cit*).

7. The Media, Agenda- Setting and Inclusive Governance

The concept of social inclusion or inclusive governance is gaining traction globally. This was at the instance of United Nations' emphasis on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially its preachment of the "Leave No One Behind" dictum. Social Inclusion, according to the World Bank Group, is conceptualised as "The process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society". In other words, as a concept, Social Inclusion, involves the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity to take part in society.

Since democracy thrives on the cross-fertilization of ideas and the principle of collective bargaining, every issue or opinion matters. While it is true that democracy allows

the majority to always have their way and the minority - their say, the mobilisation and involvement of all stakeholders and citizens of any given society in the decision – making process and consensus – building will not only enhance effective implementation and understanding of such policies, it will also attenuate the evil effects of political cynicism, apathy and the "We " and " Them" syndrome. Expatiating on the dangers of social exclusion the World Bank Group observes thus:

In every country, certain groups—whether migrants, Indigenous Peoples, or other minorities—confront barriers that prevent them from fully participating in their nation's political, economic, and social life. These groups are excluded through a number of practices ranging from stereotypes, stigmas, and superstitions based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, or disability status. Such practices can rob them of dignity, security, and the opportunity to lead a better life. (WBG 2018)

According to the World Bank Group, there is a moral imperative to address social exclusion. If and when left unaddressed, the exclusion of disadvantaged groups is very costly. The whole world is a witness to the growing political, economic and social costs of exclusion. For instance, it was found that exclusion of the ethnic minority Roma cost Romania 887 million euros in lost productivity! This is notwithstanding the fact that exclusion also has damaging consequences for human capital development world-wide. In Nigeria, for instance, most of the issues which constitute potential fault-lines of national disintegration arise out of agitations by her sub-nationalities bothering on alleged marginalisation and exclusion. Consequently, the wisdom in the growing awareness of the principle of inclusiveness globally consists in the logic that citizen engagement through inclusive governance will empower members of the society to participate in the development process and infuse their voices in development programmes and issues emanating there-from in order to help speed up the attainment of set goals.

The mass media are the vehicles for the simultaneous transmission of messages across large, scattered and heterogeneous audiences. Although the unfolding reality of the new and digital media has necessitated a shift from the mass to the individual, the fact remains that most human conflicts arise out of the intrusion of noise at any point in the communication process which disconnects the flow in the semantic interpretation of the intended meaning of the message from the sender. The goal of the source / sender in any communication event is to ensure that his or her intended message approximates the perceived message by the receiver through the creation of the right physical and psychological atmosphere necessary for effective communication. Every human being, organization, or society is a participant in the race to have meaning, and the mass media are the chief agents to mediate and transmit the exchanges of meanings .The technological evolution of the mass media from Gutenberg to Bill Gates and Time Warner makes the constant appraisal of communication strategies imperative in the galvanizing of public opinion, conflict resolution and consensus building especially in a diverse country like Nigeria.

8. The New Media and the Challenge of Inclusiveness

The attempt in this paper was to examine the concepts of media agenda-setting inclusiveness in a diverse nation like Nigeria. By her nature, Nigeria is a complex nation with diverse sub-nationalities. This explains the high incidences of news turn-overs which most times bother on conflicts and other dysfunctional communications. The mass media in Nigeria have often been accused of heating up the nation's polity in their coverage of volatile issues without considering their peculiar nature and seemingly complex political economy. As in other parts of the world, the mass media are tools for the imposition and legitimisation of the agenda of the ruling and political elite on the masses. This is line with the Marxist's postulate that those who control the means and resources of production in any given society also control the ruling ideas and the cultural productions therein. If the conventional media are implicated

in the allegation of foisting the ideas and agenda of politicians and the ruling class on the society, the new media typified in social platforms like *Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Imo, 2go, LinkedIn* etc. appear not to have fared better. Beside the fact of the opening up of the access extended to the audience thereby transforming them from media content consumers to producers as in the case of User Generated Content (UGC) and Citizen Journalists, many of the emergent social media platforms still fall prey to the manipulation of the digital media consultants of the same ruling class alleged to have hijacked the conventional mass media.

Besides, the liberalisation of media access that the new media provide to people hitherto neglected by the mass media does not conduce to a robust and all inclusive citizen engagement as the tone and nature of communication on the so-called new media appear in the main hostile to oppositional opinions and ideas. A content analysis of media engagements of conversations on many of the social platforms are rife with abusive words, hate speeches and other hostile cues which rob the digital public sphere the benefits of rich civil discourses and engagements. Nothing better illustrates this major weakness of the new media than the growing incidences of hate speeches and ethnic profiling amplified by these media platforms under the guise of freedom of expression.

Perhaps one of the major challenges of the new media which mitigate their usefulness as veritable tools for inclusive governance and agenda-setting is the uncoordinated nature and operations of social media platforms. Many members of chat groups often flout or pretend to be ignorant of the ground rules which govern such groups by posting messages at variance with the ideals of the groups. Most times, the administrators of the groups make feeble attempts to control or protect discourses by imposing sanctions on erring members often to no avail. This is aside from the fact that most conversations on the new media lack the concept of social presence or the observable visual cues which provide empirical background that could enhance a meaningful appreciation of the context of communication. Consequently, the conversational trend, in most of the social media platforms, seems to echo the biblical Babel with no meaningful direction and prospect of the vibrancy of inclusive stakeholders' / citizens engagement.

9. Recommendations and Conclusion

In spite of the identified challenges, the mass media if they work in synergy with their digital counterparts still hold the ace in galvanising public opinion for a robust and all inclusive agenda – setting for societal development. Media scholar, government and policy makers alike need to fashion out an integrated approach that would enable a seamless adoption of digital media innovations to boost the content and operations of the mass media in order to widen their access by a generality of the audience unlike its present status as the exclusive preserve of the rich, politicians and the ruling elite.

A major observation of the operation of the new media is the need for intense media /digital literacy to empower the teeming audience of new media outlets with the requisite skills needed to operate, access and evaluate the contents on offer through the digital sphere. A proper education and enlightenment on digital literacy when properly contextualized and hyped in the digital environment would equip and inure the people against the deleterious effects of the growing incidence of fake news in Nigeria thereby providing a good take-off for effective all inclusive agenda-setting mechanism in the society.

In conclusion if the new media are to be fully exploited as instrument of societal development and inclusive governance, deliberate and concerted massive public education and campaigns must be initiated by the mass media, assisted by all stakeholders including government to conscientize the audience especially youths across the various ethnic nationalities in the country on a proper and progressive use of social media. The social media must be truly embraced as the democratic voice of the people, it takes adequate and effective public education and enlightenment to

utilise them as genuine agents for societal growth and development through all inclusive participation.

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