The Nigerian Press and the Political Class: Identifying Linkages to Overcome Challenges of the Current Democratic Dispensation

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Abstract

The challenge most contemporary societies, especially democratic nations, often face is how to integrate and harmonize the different components of the society in the quest for maintaining and sustaining the entire system. The press and the political class form the heartbeat of every political structure, and the two institutions, as a matter of fact, should cooperate and complement each other in the process of establishing an enduring democratic culture. As a result of professionalism, the press and the political class have become differentiated in functions and responsibilities. They perform divergent functions which, at times, are complementary and overlapping. In view of the seemingly complementarities of their functions, it has become a matter of necessity for the Nigerian press and the political class to integrate and harmonize their potentials to overcome the challenges of the current democratic dispensation in the process of sustaining the nascent democratic experience as well as enhancing the development of the citizenry and the society at large. The paper submits that, the two institutions should forge endurable platforms and linkages of cooperation and collaboration to overcome their professional, constitutional and institutional challenges, especially as it has become imperative for them to co-exist in a mutually beneficial and rewarding manner.

Keywords: Nigerian Press, Political Class, Linkages, Challenges, Democratic Dispensation

Introduction

The current wave of democratization across the globe has compelled socio-political institutions to work assiduously together towards the institutionalization and preservation of democratic tenets. The 20th and 21st centuries’ developments across the globe, especially the disintegration of the socialist and communist systems in Europe and the recent uprising in North Africa (the Arab Springs), have given vent to the desirability and adoptability of democratic form of government. Thus, institutions, stakeholders and political players in the polity are required to strengthen their consolidation and tap into available potentials for cooperation and collaboration to defend democracy.

The Nigerian press, since inception, has been involved in political permutations and manipulations even before the coming into being of the Nigerian nation. The Nigerian press has been at the forefront of virtually all the major developments - political, social, economic etc, in the country since its inauguration in 1859. The Nigerian press involvement in politics
started in the late 19th century when anti-colonialist newspapers sprang up, especially in Lagos. The newspapers fought tooth and nail to achieve better representation in the colonial government for Nigerians, and later, political autonomy for the country. The early newspapers provided information for the politicians and also provided platforms for robust political discourses. There was a fusion between the political class and the thenearly newspapers. The co-operation and collaboration between the press and the political actors assisted greatly in achieving the ‘Nigerian Dream’ of political independence in 1960.

However, the modern journalism practice that emphasizes objectivity, neutrality, facticity, etc., has clearly distinguished the role of the press from that of the political class. As a result of professionalism, the Nigerian press has been stripped from the apron of the political juggernauts, and allowed to operate as a neutral and impartial player in the polity. Although, this postulation has been criticized by the political economy theorists, the new trend requires the couching of a paradigm of convergence between the press and the political class to foster the development of a framework for co-operation and collaboration of the two while substantially retaining their autonomy.

**Theoretical foundation**

This article is hinged on two communication theories. The theories are specifically selected to provide foundational information and knowledge as well as contextualize the discourse for better understanding of the subsequent discussions on the subject. The two communication theories are:

1. Media Systems Dependency Theory (MSD), and
2. Communication Accommodation Theory

i. Media Systems Dependency Theory: Media Systems Dependency theory (MSD) was developed in reaction to the prominent role ascribed to the media institution in the 1970s as a result of the urbanization and industrialization phenomena. The theory, developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur, could characteristically be classified as one of the theories detailing the relationship between the mass media and society. According to Miller (2002), the MSD theory “has as its heart a tripartite system in which media, audience and society are seen to have dependency relationships with each other” (p.247). Each of the components of the society depends on other components in the system by drawing on the resources of others to satisfy goals. Miller (2002), while paraphrasing Ball-Rokeach and Defleur (1976), sees dependency as a relationship in which the satisfaction of needs or the attainment of goals by one party is contingent upon the resources of another party. For example, media organizations depend on the political class for information or news stories to
broadcast or publish while individuals depend on newspapers for information to be able to make informed and rational decisions.

Thus, in the contemporary society, the press has come to play an increasingly important role as a result of urbanization and industrialization. According to Miller (2002), “the media control many informational resources through their capacity to create, process, and disseminate information to audiences on a national or even global scale” (p.247). As a result of this, individuals, groups, organizations and institutions have come to develop some dependency relationships on the media. This, of course, underscores the fact that individuals and institutions depend on one another in one form or another to function effectively in the society. Thus, it has become necessary in the contemporary society to fashion out some concrete platforms for linkages and convergences among societal socio-political institutions like the press and the political class for better performance.

ii. Communication Accommodation Theory: The Theory was formulated in reaction to the discovery by researchers of the existence of areas of divergence and convergence among human actors and institutions. The theory, developed in the 1970s by Howard Giles and his colleagues, explains the ways in which interactants influence each other in the course of interaction (Miller, 2002). The theory underpins the fact that interactions between people, organizations, and institutions usually require adjustments and modifications for goals to be achieved. It underscores the assumption that there are situations where and when accommodating communicative behaviours in the course of interaction becomes inevitable. Thus, communication becomes useful when communicators attune their communication activities to the characteristics and needs of the audience as well as forge mutual convergence and understanding. The theory gives primacy to the issue of divergence, convergence and maintenance in communication interactions.

**Evolution and Characteristics of the Nigerian Press**

It is important to state that the Nigerian press predates the Nigerian nation. It is, however, a fact that the Nigerian nation later, to a great extent, determined the structure, features and workings of the Nigerian press. The history of the Nigerian press cannot be dissociated from the activities of the European Missionaries in Nigeria, and in West Africa as a whole. The abolition of the slave trade and the inauguration of the legitimate trade in the 16th century facilitated the influx of the Europeans to the Coast of West Africa. The Europeans, motivated mainly by the economic gains of the legitimate trade, lent credence to their ‘purported’ humanitarian mission and the desire to evangelize the ‘primitive’ populace of Africa by evolving two potent weapons to accomplish their goals. The weapons – schools
and journalism, were perfectly deplored to achieve their economic and evangelism missions. The Europeans were motivated by the success story of journalism in other British colonies and established newspapers to assist their operations in their colonies especially in West Africa. Thus, according to Omu (1978):

> The prevailing situation evidently made a strong impression on British Missionaries going to Africa and the emphasis which the humanitarians place upon pamphlets and newspaper publicity and propaganda elevated the printing press into an important engine of missionary enterprise. It is not surprising therefore, that printing presses and mission inspired newspapers proliferated in West Africa during the first half of the nineteenth century. (p.6)

History has it that, the Europeans embarked on programmes to foster Western education and general enlightenment in their colonies along the coast of West Africa. Schools were established to train Africans and to initiate them into western education and culture. Also, attention was equally directed to journalism, especially because of the role it played as a potent instrument in accomplishing their (Europeans’) goals in other British Colonies. This precipitated the establishment of printing presses and the eventual publication of newspapers in the British West African Colonies of Sierra-Leone, Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria, etc. Thus, the journey that eventually led to the publication of the first newspaper in Nigeria started in 1854 when Rev. Henry Townsend established a printing press and a printing school in the mission compound in Abeokuta. However, in 1859 what could be regarded as the first newspaper in Nigeria, *Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba*, hit the newsstands in Abeokuta. Although, Rev. Townsend’s printing press was not the first in Nigeria because a printing press had earlier been established in Calabar by Rev. Hope Waddell of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission, Waddell, however, did not commence newspaper publication until 1886. The missionary newspapers contributed significantly in two ways to the development of the newspaper industry in Nigeria. According to Ajibade (2003), the newspapers “provided avenue for the printing of newspapers that were to be established later, and, also provided training ground for the first set of Nigerian printers who became instrumental later in the newspaper publishing business” (p.1). Other religious newspapers established by the missionaries included the *Calabar Observer*, the *Unwana Efik*, and the *Obukpong Efik* established by Rev. Waddell of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. These religious newspapers, although had some ‘debit’ connotations, provided the platform for the template for the take-off of modern journalism in Nigeria. According to Barton (1979):

> On the debit side was the generations of lost technical expertise which the Europeans would have brought to the African press. On
Iwe Irohin to a large extent, especially at inception, was not a political newspaper, as it mostly contained religious sermons, postings, social advertisements, etc. and some items of local politics. According to Duyile (2004), the newspaper “published a wide range of news-births, deaths, movement of religious ministers, parish news, baptismal and confirmation news, political news, especially those concerning Abeokuta and environ (sic)” (p.12). The second newspaper to be established in Nigeria, the Anglo-African, was established in 1863; although not by a religious publisher but was friendly with the colonial government, and enjoyed massive advertising patronage (Duyile, 2004).

However, while Iwe Irohin devoted its pages to issues of Christianity, education and information; the Anglo-African which carried hard news and ran editorials was devoted to critical appraisals of problems of that period (Duyile, 2004). Anglo-African newspaper went out of circulation in December 1865 (that is, it lasted for 2 years and 6 months), while Iwe Irohin stopped publication in 1867. The demise of Iwe Irohin was largely connected with its involvement in the politics of Abeokuta. Iwe Irohin fizzled out of circulation in October, 1867, eight years after it hit the newsstands. The sudden death of Iwe Irohin was attributed to the popular uprising (Ifole) which led to the expulsion of all Europeans from Abeokuta and the subsequent destruction of the mission printing press. Duyile (2004), while reiterating Ade Ajayi’s lamentation of the destruction of the printing press during the anti-European Ifole riots of 1867, states that, “it was a spontaneous uprising… libraries were destroyed, harmonium broken down, and the printing works where the Iwe Irohin had so often proclaimed the Egba point of view was destroyed” (p.13).

**Early Nigerian Press and Politics: Linkages and Fusion**

In spite of the short lifespan of the first two early newspapers, it is imperative to note that the newspapers provided the needed inspiration for nationalists to establish their own newspapers in the closing years of the nineteenth century (Ajibade, 2003). The newspapers provided stimuli for political awareness and consciousness that gave birth to nationalist newspapers and political actors and agitators of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Again, in spite of the ecumenical origin of the early Nigerian press, it could not be said that both Iwe Irohin and the Anglo-African newspapers were apolitical. While Campbell’s Anglo-African was pro-government and maintained cordial relationship with the
colonial administration and enjoyed advertisement patronage (Duyile, 2004) till it stopped publication in 1865, *Iwe Irohin* dabbled into politics in the later part of its existence. In the 1860s, there were many local rivalries and wars in Egbaland, such as the Egba-Ibadan war of 1862, the Egba-European war of 1867 in which the Egbas protested the British policy of annexation of Lagos which led to the ceding of some towns and villages hitherto under the tutelage of Egba to the Europeans. It is important to note that Rev. Townsend had always used his newspaper to proclaim the Egba point of view in political issues, and according to Duyile (2004), “the newspaper apparently got involved in all the crises and could not escape from the local hostility which accompanied the riot” (p.13).

It is important to note that the period following the “blank period” (Coker, 1968, p.7), witnessed the emergence of another set of newspapers that were characteristically radically different from the earlier ones. The 1880s saw the establishment of politically-motivated and politically conscious newspapers. The newspapers were mainly established by descendants of African freed slaves. The newspapers established in the late 19th century included, *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser* which was established in 1880 by Richard Beale Blaize, the *Lagos Observer* established in 1882 by Mr. Bagan Benjamin, the *Eagle and Lagos Critic* of 1883 by Mr. Owen Macaulay, the *Mirror* of 1887 by Mr. Adolphous Marke and the *Lagos WeeklyRecord* of 1890 established by Mr. John Payne Jackson. This epoch was characterized by owner-editor newspaper format. Proprietors were motivated to establish newspapers for purpose(s) they believed in and subscribed to. The newspapers were started to propagate the views of certain schools of thought. According to Duyile (2004), newspapers at the period were established “to propagate political ideas, to fight colonial injustice, to seek and demand freedom, to protect the peoples’ interests, and to educate them about the present and the future” (p.4). The press of the period was politically active and conscious of the activities of the colonial administration. Some of the newspapers were used as platforms for evaluating policies of the colonial government. The newspapers clamoured for justice and equality as well as better representation in the colonial administration. Coker (1968), while citing an editorial of the *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser* of March 9, 1881, states:

> We are not clamouring for immediate independence, but it should always be borne in mind that the present order of things will not last forever…. A time will come when the colonies on the West Coast will be left to regulate their own internal and external affairs. (p.9)
The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a remarkable upsurge in the number of nationalist newspapers in Nigeria. This period, popularly referred to as the period of newspaper proliferation in Nigeria was characterized by the return of many educated professionals to the country. These returnees who were educated in the Western world—Europe and America, became discontented with the prevailing socio-political and economic structures in the country and started agitating for a restructuring of the existing structure. Thus, Musa and Mohammed (n.d) corroborated this by stating that, “…the contradiction between the colonial capitalist class and the indigenous petite bourgeoisie nurtured the seed of the nationalist struggles from the 1920s” (p.230).

It must be recalled that since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Nigerian intelligentsia who had initially cooperated with the colonialists became frustrated, disillusioned, and found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the humanitarian and missionary proclamations of the colonialists with evidence of glaring hypocrisy and racial discrimination. Thus, this regurgitated the nationalist fervour in the educated class who wanted to enjoy the rights and privileges due to their contemporaries in Europe, such as equality of opportunities, freedom against discrimination, freedom of speech, institutionalization of democratic values, and so on. According to Omu (1978),

The frustrations of educated Africans which had been gathering momentum from the 1860s, and the keen competition which became a feature of commerce from the 1870s was added to the growing circulation of learning and the eruption of nationalist and intellectual fervour in the 1880s and after. (p.21)

It is, therefore, instructive to point out that the early press was actively involved in the politics of the land. Reflecting on the motivation and character of the early press in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, Akinfeleye (2003) underscores the political undercurrents of the practices of journalism by concluding that “most of these early African mass media were papers of protest, agitational in nature and often militant in approach” (p.5). Thus, this confirms the submission of Omu (1978) that “the early press was inevitably a political press” (p.11).

The partisanship of the Nigerian press became pronounced in the 20th century, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. During these years, most newspapers were specifically established for political rather than economic considerations. Record has it that, majority of the newspaper proprietors of the period were either accomplished professionals—Lawyers, Doctors, etc, or successful businessmen who established newspapers not because of the economic gain but to propagate and foster certain political ideologies. The political activities
of the period, especially after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates and the introduction of democratic elections by the 1922 Clifford constitution, heightened political agitation and attracted many educated Nigerians into politics. Thus, Akalugo (2001) captures the phenomenon with the submission that, “the role of newspapers as instruments of political development was heightened with the introduction of democratic elections following the Clifford constitution of 1922. Many Nigerians established newspapers in order to express their political opinions”. (p.15)

This phase of the Nigerian press history marked the emergence of private newspapers. Most of the newspaper proprietors, who were motivated by the unfolding political drama, established newspapers to promote nationalist movement, project their political ideas or thoughts, and scramble for political positions. Prominent among such newspapers and political actors were the Lagos Daily News (1925) by Herbert Macaulay, The African Messenger (1921) by Ernest Ikoli, The Commet (1933) by Dutse Mohammed Ali, the West African Pilot (1937) by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Gaskiya Ta fi Kwabo (1939) sponsored by the government for the Northern Region, the Nigerian Tribune (1949) by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, among others.

In spite of the presumption and assumption of plurality and objectivity of the press when private participation is allowed or encouraged, the press of this era became partisan, and apologists of their owners. Thus, issues were seen, discussed, analyzed and presented from the point of view of their owners. Although, this development, according to critics, could court some professional abuses, it must be noted that it made the line of separation between the political class and journalists to thin out. The development led to a convergence of purpose between the two groups, and they became inseparable. Having identified that they have a common goal, that is, to wrestle power from the colonial government, the two groups (politicians and journalists) worked together to achieve the goal. The press, as the mouthpiece of the politicians, according to Jibo (2003), helped “the elites (sic) and the broad masses to articulate their views and positions on political issues and policy” (p.4). Corroborating the fusion of the political class and the press, especially as the two had cooperated and collaborated in the pursuit of national goal, Oso (2012) submits that, “there is a lot of emphasis on the role played by the press in Nigerian politics from the colonial days when politics and journalism were more or less fused together. It has been difficult to separate them”. (p.12)

The cooperation between the political class and the press continued after independence, although, with some modifications. According to Okenwa (1993), “… at the
threshold of self government, partisan politics began to dominate the Nigerian press and the distinct flavour of each newspaper revealed the political leaning and orientations of the owners” (p.52). At this stage, Nigerian journalism became visibly polarized along the three major regions (North, East and West) and political parties in the country. Each of the regions had a dominant political party which was also supported by, at least, a newspaper for its communications and propaganda strategies. The political developments of the time opened a new vista in media ownership structure in Nigeria. The period witnessed a dramatic departure from the lackadaisical attitude of the colonial administration towards owning and running newspapers. Government involvement and ownership of newspapers, having realized the potency of newspapers in political mobilization and goal attainment, became visible and pronounced. Thus, shortly after independence, both the federal government and the three regional governments joined the mad rush for newspaper publication, thereby breaking the monopoly of the private sector. Federal government and all the regional governments namely, Northern, Eastern and Western, entered newspaper business and each established its newspaper to present their viewpoint on issues ranging from political, social, economic and the defense of their programmes. According to Okenwa (1993),

By 1960, the Eastern Regional Government converted the weekly Eastern Nigerian Outlook into a daily, renamed it the Nigerian Outlook. In 1961, the Federal Government established the Morning Post and Sunday Post as its first official mouthpieces. Three years later, the Daily Sketch founded by the Government of Western Nigeria, came into being. The New Nigerian Newspapers Limited, owned by the Northern Nigeria Government, started the publication of the New Nigeria in 1966 and also incorporated the vernacular newspaper Gaskiya Ta fi Kabo hitherto published by the Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria. (p.53)

Thus, the newspapers of the period were politically polarized, and were grouped in line with party and regional affiliations. Each of the regions established and operated, at least, a loyal newspaper. According to Tador (1996) cited by Okoro (2012):

At independence, most newspapers in the country were local in outlook and owned by political parties. Each of the three regions in Nigeria had a dominant party with a loyal newspaper or newspapers. The Northern Region came under the jurisdiction of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). The Nigerian Citizen was its official party organ. In the Western Region, the Nigerian Tribune was the official party paper of the Action Group (AG) while the party had substantial holdings in the Daily Service. In the Eastern Region, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe’s chain of newspapers projected the image of the party, NCNC. The party also had the Nigerian Outlook. (p.7)
Although, critics had criticized the seeming lack of separation between the press and the politicians (Coker, 1968) during this period; it is nevertheless important to state that the benefits derivable from such cooperation and collaboration can never be underestimated. In respect of the press of the post-independence period, critics say that, one obvious flaw of the newspapers owned by the government in the years after independence was the inability to distinguish between the ruling party and the government, as the newspapers were practically, party organs financed by the public (Coker, 1968).

In spite of the criticisms levelled against government ownership of newspapers, it must be reiterated that the dual ownership structure provided the template for healthy competition which turned out to make, according to Okenwa (1993), the “nation’s press one of the freest and most vibrant in Africa” (p.53). This was made possible in that as the government-owned newspapers presented government’s viewpoints, the newspapers owned by individuals also presented the other side of the story, thereby enabling the citizenry to take informed decisions. Apart from this, the then fusion between the political class and the press was beneficial to the two parties and to the society at large. The collaboration led to the consolidation of the government, the ruling party and the ideology of the ruling party in each of the regions. The convergence accelerated political consciousness, mobilization and participation of the citizenry as well as established relative peace and tranquility in the regions.

It is obvious that the cooperation between the political class and the press is fundamental to the progress of any nation. The role played by the press in the achievements and progress made so far in Nigeria cannot be wished away. History has it that during the military interregnum, especially after the civil war, the Nigerian press was instrumental to the successes achieved in the federal government’s reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. Although, the military government promulgated decrees to gag, harass and intimidate the press, especially when the press criticized their administration (Olughoji, Aigbogun and Nwankwo, 1994), the press, however, refused to be intimidated. It is imperative to note that the press was at the forefront of the democratic struggles of the 1980’s and 1990’s. The press, according Kalejaiye, Afofojomo and Odunlami (2006), worked in conjunction with other stakeholders such as “the human rights groups and democracy campaigners for the mobilization of the masses in support of the democratic struggle. It also provided the people the medium to express their anger and frustration against the military” (p.36). Thus, the press became a veritable weapon for fighting the military, and in
The late 1990’s, the military “unwillingly” left the stage and a democratic government was installed.

**The Political Class and the Press: The Paradigms of Relationship**

The type of relationship between the political class and the press is of paramount importance in any society, if the aspirations of such an entity must be achieved. Press construction of issues is usually shaped and influenced by the type of subsisting relationship between media practitioners and political actors. The two groups are inextricably intertwined. Although, this does not suggest that they merge to form a unified entity in which their identities are lost; the two institutions work together and still retain their autonomies, identities and purposes (Adaja, 2012).

There are two models for understanding and explaining the relationship between the press and the politicians. The models are - the adversarial model and the exchange model. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) state that the adversarial model ascribes to journalists the responsibility to scrutinize politicians’ conduct and rhetoric with the motive of unearthing the real story that politicians may want to hide. The model is premised on the principle that wielders of political powers have the potentials and propensities, if not carefully watched, to abuse power, exceed their mandate and commit blunders. This thus bestowed on the press the role of the watchdog of the society, the power to protect the public from the powers of the rulers, and the responsibility to dig out evidence of abuse and error. Thus, adopting this paradigm will pitch the press against the political class, such that, the relationship between the two will be like that of the cat and the mouse. Although, the model vividly prescribes the kind of relationship that should exist between the political class and the press, especially in liberal democracies, the postulation has been flawed in that, it presumes that the press only becomes functional by always publishing mistakes and wrongdoings of the politicians without giving credit where it is due. Also, it must be understood that the production of political communication for the advancement of the polity is a joint enterprise between the press and the political class.

The second model, the exchange model, presumes that the relationship between the political class and the press persists as long as the two groups benefit or meet their needs in the relationship. This reflects the anticipatory mutual gratifications usually referred to as ‘you scratch my back, I scratch yours’ phenomenon. It underscores the consensual agreement between politicians and journalists or news organizations to strike a bargain after thoroughly considering the advantages and disadvantages of the deal to both of them. However, the
model derives its strengths from the cooperation between the political class and the media in the process of generating political news that will benefit the two groups and at the same time sustain the polity. It emphasizes the ability of the two groups to downplay their differences and possible fluctuations in their relationships, and cultivate possible areas of collaboration and convergence in a bid to sustain the relationship amid the many tensions that are inherent in the relationship.

Although, the two models-adversarial and exchange, explain the kind of relationship between the press and the political class, none of the models adequately captures how such a relationship can be regulated and sustained in view of the different and dynamic professional responsibilities ascribed to each of them. It is imperative, therefore, to propose a typology that is mid-way (that is, not totally adversarial and not totally exchange). The ‘middle-point’ model is to sensitize the two players to the fact that they both have stakes in maintaining the polity in a mutually beneficial and rewarding way.

**Forging a Platform of Cooperation to Overcome Challenges**

It is imperative to point out that the relationships between the press and the political class, especially in liberal democracies, could always generate conflicts. This is because the two institutions are exposed to different pull of ideologies which in some cases could be complementary, overlapping or incompatible. However, they are, at the same time, expected to repair, sustain and maintain continuous interactions, such that, at one level, they are pulled apart in divergent directions, and at another, they are hauled back together toward a joint course (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995). The relationships between the two players allow for potential disagreements and struggles which result in disputes and conflicts that are role-related, role-inclined and role-based. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), however, identify three sources of conflicts between the press and the political class.

First, conflict could occur as a result of differing organizational and professional role commitments. The two players belong to different organizations with different goals and aspirations, while at the same time, are expected by the society to render some distinct professional responsibilities. Second, there could be disagreement in terms of the position and role of each in the production of political messages that will set the agenda of the political discourse. Politicians see themselves as agenda-setters, and argue that nobody elected the media to determine or set agenda, rather they should only transmit the statement and decisions of the political actors. And thirdly, that conflict could arise in the process of interpreting each other’s role as well as in the ‘fixing-of-responsibility’. Accusing fingers
are usually pointed at each other, especially, when things go wrong. Blames are apportioned in line with the role each played, and the expected role of each other.

However, it must be emphasized that, nothing is unusual about the conflicts between the political class and the press. Conflicts are endemic in human organizations and institutions. Relationships and interactions are bound to generate conflicts and frictions. What is important is for the actors to realize that every relationship requires a measure of predictability and shared understanding. Each group must be able to anticipate and predict the actions and reactions of each other, as well as tap into the potentials of each other to facilitate the continuity of the system.

It is important to state that, the two institutions have been legitimately empowered to participate actively in the process of political message generation, preparation and dissemination. The power of the political class manifests in its capability to act as articulators of interests and mobilizers of social power for the purposes of political action. As a corollary, the power of the press is anchored on its responsibility as the disseminator of news and opinions (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). However, it must be pointed out that in the political communication process, much attention must be placed on the power of the press in influencing public opinions, attitudes and political decisions as well as its capability to be employed for manipulative purposes. The legitimacy enjoyed by the press has made the press capable of restructuring the timing and character of political events as well as defining crisis situation to which politicians are obliged to react to or comment on issues identified as important by the press.

Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) identify three sources of the legitimacy of the power of the press to which the politicians can effectively tap into to consolidate their cooperation and collaboration for the survival and continuity of the political structure. The sources are structural, psychological and normative. First, the structural root of the power of the media is entrenched in the media’s unique capacity to deliver to the politicians an audience which, in size and composition, is unavailable to them through other means. This, of course, will enlarge the receiver base of the political institution by overcoming constraints like low level of education, weak political interest, etc. Second, there is the psychological root of media power which is anchored on the credibility and trust the media have succeeded in establishing with their audiences over-time. The politicians can build on this credibility to validate or revalidate their legitimacy with their audiences. And thirdly, there is the normative root which springs from the principles of liberal philosophy subscribed to by the media. The tenets include freedom of expression, freedom of association, protection of citizens against possible
abuses by political actors, etc. This is vividly expressed in the role of the media in preventing political opportunists from blatant disregard to the rule of the game.

It is evident that the political class and the press have become inseparable as a result of their overlapping and complementary roles in the power configuration of any political system. Although, the two, are to some extent, independent in their functions, it is important to note that the relationship between them is symbiotic. They relate both vertically and horizontally, such that, as they are mutually exclusive, they are equally mutually interdependent. Thus, in most political systems, the two groups perform some complementary functions for the upkeep and sustainability of the polity. Some of the complementary roles played by the two groups are: first, while journalists primarily aim at holding the attention of the target audience through some mixture of alerting, informing and entertaining them, politicians are mainly concerned with persuading audience to adopt a certain view expressed by the politicians, their party’s principles or what they propose to achieve in politics. Secondly, communication outlets needed by the politicians in sending their messages are controlled by the press. Thus, in the production of political messages, politicians adapt their messages to suit the formats created by journalists as well as their media organizations. Likewise, journalists need access to politicians for news, information, interviews, comments, etc. to function effectively. Thirdly, the press offers politicians access to the audience by providing credible outlets, while politicians offer journalists information presumed to be relevant and significant for audience consumption. Fourthly, politicians have the power to determine the quantity of informational raw materials made available to journalists. This means that, politicians can ration the quantity of newsprint, airwaves, ICT resources, etc. available for the use of journalists. Also, they can regulate the quality and quantity of information they make available to journalists. Likewise, journalists reserve the prerogative of deciding the newsworthiness as well as the relevance of the information the politicians made available to them. And lastly, it is important to note that politicians vary in their needs for media attention and coverage. Likewise, journalists vary the attention they give to certain events and politicians (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995).

Thus, from the above, the two institutions- press and political class, exist simultaneously in any given polity, with each performing different, but at times, overlapping and complementary functions. They co-exist, especially in liberal democratic societies. And, as a result, it has become imperative for the two institutions to devise some mechanisms for managing their relationships so as to preserve the polity. However, Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) suggest that the following actions needed to be taken to sustain and maintain the
relationship between the press and the political class. First, the two institutions should develop an in-built mechanism or procedure for airing and dealing with complaints about any violation of the ground rules by any of the two parties. Even, if the procedure is hierarchically structured, it must be fair to all. Second, the two groups should create forums (fora) for the review of existing ground rules and to consider proposals for modifying them, such that, the proposals are discussed at formal settings first, so that areas of differences or disagreements could be resolved or ironed out. Third, institutions should be established to socialize the members of one group with the other as well as sensitize each group to the needs and demands of the other. Such institutions would also create awareness about the strengths and shortcomings of each group in order to minimize areas of conflict in their relationships. And fourth, forums or platforms could be created to foster, promote and secure the continuing cooperation of the two institutions in a joint task of entrenching and sustaining the polity.

In view of the fact that the two institutions have to work together to sustain the polity, the following recommendations should guide their relationships to minimize areas of disagreement and conflict and to enhance and promote cooperation and collaboration. First, to overcome inherent disagreements and conflicts, the two institutions should develop and adopt positive orientation towards one another. Rather than being guided by the adversarial concept, a ‘mid-point paradigm’ between adversarial and exchange models should be adopted. Even though, the press has been commissioned as the watchdog of the society, the press should regard the political class as a partner-in-progress and vice-versa. Second, for the two institutions to exist side by side with minimum conflict and disagreement, they should identify and key into the society’s dominant cultural norms and values. Journalists should not always react to all issues via news value criteria and judgment, but according to the interpretation of such issues in respect of the dominant social and political value system. Third, both the press and the political class should allow the over-all interest of the society to be paramount in their actions. When the two institutions are engrossed in the defence of the common good of the society, there is the tendency that potential areas of conflict or disagreement motivated probably by selfish interest would be minimized since they will be working towards achieving same or similar goals. Thus, allegiance of each group to the core values of the society will lead to convergence of purpose. Again, it is imperative for the two institutions to stick to their professional callings. Although, they occupy different positions and perform different functions in the political structure; they, however, complement one another in the generation, production and dissemination of political messages in the society. Thus, each group should appreciate its professional responsibilities
and ethical requirements as a player in the political and power configurations in the society. Furthermore, flagrant abuse or misuse of power should be avoided by the two institutions. If each group operates within the limit of its constitutional as well as institutional powers, it will reduce incidences of conflicts and disagreements. Thus, there will be mutual respect for one another, and this will encourage cooperation and collaboration among the two institutions.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The functions performed by the press and the political class, especially, in democratically organized societies, have become inseparably interwoven to the extent that one can hardly exist and function effectively without the other. Political messages for sustaining and maintaining the polity are co-produced by the two groups. Although, the relationships between the two are potentially veritable grounds for generating role-related and role-induced conflicts, the two institutions are compelled to co-exist and complement one another in the attainment of each institution’s goals as well as the over-all goals of the society. Thus, it has become a matter of necessity for the press and the political class to fashion out platforms that can promote the cooperation and collaboration of the two institutions over and above their professional and institutional challenges in the process of sustaining and maintaining the polity. This view was corroborated by Oso (2012) while citing Golding and Elliot (1979) by stating that, “the separation of politics and journalism has remained incomplete and the dual allegiances of journalists to professional and political goals have created conflicts whose resolution in daily practice underpins much of contemporary Nigerian journalism” (p.12). Nigerian journalists and the political class should construct bridges and platforms of cooperation and collaboration that will make them overcome the differences and challenges created as a result of professional responsibilities of the current democratic dispensation and make the interest of the society paramount in all their actions and undertakings.

**References**

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