

The News Reporter in Nigeria's Electoral Process

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Abstract

Mass media professionals are increasingly involved in the education of electorates on election matters in the time leading to, the actual election and post-election periods in different media ecosystems. This article examines the outstanding role of the news reporter as a field journalist in Nigeria's bid for democratic consolidation. Using historical-analytic and direct observation methods, it identifies different categories of reporters according to different approaches to news gathering and reporting. It looks further at the extent of reporters' commitment to their responsibilities in the Nigerian media ecosystem. In doing this, it highlights the communication techniques news reporters employ to subtly influence the meaning of messages in the news and the election reporter's competency indices. The study makes critical suggestions aimed at guiding reporters towards wholesomeness in news reporting. That is, scrupulousness with the application of the different approaches that generate equally different implications on the news consumers or members of society. This emphasis is against the backdrop of the reporters' pivotal role in journalism in the context of an information and communication technology (ICT) culture juxtaposed with the challenges associated with election reporting in the Nigerian polity.

Keywords: Election reporting, Framing, Nigerian media ecosystem, Accountability, Responsibility, Communication techniques, News reporters

Introduction

There are demonstrable evidences of the fact that society's trust in the media for pertinent information dissemination during democratic elections is not misplaced (Omoera, 2010; Omoera & Okhakhu, 2010; Aghamelu, 2013; Omoera & Ake, 2016; Omoera & Aiwuyo, 2017; Etete, 2021). Media scholars and sociologists posit that information dissemination and public enlightenment are the burden duties the public ascribes to the mass media/media professionals in contemporary society. It follows that through insightful reportage, the media bring to public domain the actions and inactions of the various actors (individuals and groups) in the electoral processes and of the three realms of authority in governance (the executive,

legislature and judiciary). In doing this, the media disseminate critical information about topical issues in the polity and set the agenda for public discourse. Interestingly, this agenda is preponderated by political matters daily, given that the core political issues notwithstanding, every news story (economic, social, environmental, public health) has politicians behind it as government officials initiating or implementing policies and, as heads of institutions and agencies contributing to the process of governance. Just as news is made when politicians implement policies, commission projects, enforce regulations, initiate programmes, etc., their failure or inability to do the needful equally makes news once uncovered by news men or women.

With regard to politics, the media serve as the strategic link between leaders and the populace or the electorate in the electioneering process. *They raise and cause principal actors in the electoral processes to answer pertinent questions that help to elucidate confusing issues about politicians, party manifestoes and the electoral umpire.* When elections are conducted to replace the leadership of the polity, the role of the media as watchdogs and the fact that they influence decision-making, especially during campaigns, is indispensable to democratic consolidation (Omoera, 2009; Omoera, 2010; Omoera & Ake, 2021). By keeping close watch on the activities of politicians, the electoral umpire, political parties, government officials, election tribunals, among others, the media safeguard the electoral process towards the democratic ideals of fairness, transparency and credibility. The media double as sites of contestation in which diverse positions are advanced, significant opinions are heard, interests and inner-working are exposed, and input is received (Bamidele, 2015). Put differently, the media provide a fair ground for the exhibition of a plethora of opinions which eventually coalesce in a relatively few ideas that guide voting actions. This is realized through public enlightenment, which generates public debates that produce informed public opinion about political issues and trends in any society. The ability of the media to shape public opinion by providing content and context to discourse has serious implications for the electoral process, with both positive and negative consequences (Yakubu, 2018). Yakubu (2018) adds that while a free and objective media can foster transparency by disseminating important electoral information, a stifled or compromised media is capable of undermining the electoral process and ultimately undermining democracy.

Conceptually, democratic processes are gradually taking a foothold in Nigeria, with successful presidential elections conducted in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and relative successes at other electoral levels across the country. Nevertheless, Bamidele (2015) prefers an election to be adjudged free, fair and credible only when all elements central and peripheral to the electoral process are concertedly managed to produce the best among all contestants for political office. The exercise will in turn birth a virile and vibrant democracy where the citizenry enjoys real or tangible 'fruits' of democracy and not sour grapes as most elected authorities in Nigeria feed their people with or the perennial building of castles in the air (Omoera, 2009). Bamidele (2015) adds that the Nigerian mass media are central to the process of ensuring the institutionalization, operationalization and sustenance of a credible electoral process. This study corroborates this position with the joinder that, more central and

specifically so in the gamut of ‘actors’ in the media to enhance the electoral process are the reporters who are the ‘foot soldiers’ of the mass media. Their role during the countdown to voting is to enlighten and educate the public by providing access to media platforms where all shades of opinions could be freely heard, through their reportage (Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies, 2010; Orji, 2014). During voting, the reporter makes a point-by-point coverage of the election to keep the electorate posted on the goings-on in the process. And, of course, reporters do postmortem analyses after elections are conducted. Ostensibly, these efforts are aimed at opening up the democratic space and deepening credible and free electoral culture in Nigeria.

The electoral process is the fulcrum of democracy and apparently, if those reporting it do not get it right, half-truths and outright falsehood would get the compounded process further involved and the electorate would be denied the benefit of making well-informed choice of leaders or leadership (Plaisance & Skews, 2003). The individual reporter is thus expected to have requisite knowledge of the composition of the electorate; the workings of the institutions responsible for the conduct of democratic elections as well as basic principles of journalism given that creditable reportage of elections come with challenges that squarely put the straight news reporter’s mettle to test. It is in this regard that this article examines the exceptional role of the news reporter as a field journalist in Nigeria’s bid for democratic consolidation. Methodologically, the study employs historical-analytic and direct observation research modalities. It uses the techniques to identify different categories of reporters according to different approaches to news gathering and reporting in the Nigerian media ecosystem. Furthermore, it examines the extent of reporters’ commitment to their responsibilities. As well, it highlights the communication techniques news reporters employ to skillfully or ingeniously influence the meaning of messages in the news towards contributing to the improvement or fortification of the electoral processes for national development.

Reporting and journalism

The reporter’s obligations in ensuring democratic growth is best appreciated when his or her distinctive contributions and challenges are given due recognition in contrast to the responsibilities of his or her associates in the journalism profession. Journalism in essence is the communication of current events or issues to an audience in a structured way. It entails news gathering, organizing or editing and presentation to the public. It is an activity that engages quite a number of professional hands in media organizations that churn out information as straight news reports, feature stories, investigative and interpretative reports, among others. Professionals in the journalism industry go by such titles as editors, photographers, videographers, reporters, columnists, correspondents, among others, but are collectively called journalists provided they acquire some requisite professional qualifications. However, considering the job description of the different categories of professionals, it is germane to note that the term ‘reporting’ is restrictive and does not have exactly the same connotation with the encompassing term ‘journalism’.

The reporter gathers newsworthy information from reliable sources and presents it without bias or injecting his or her opinion (Plaisance & Skews, 2003). His/her work is a direct narrative that is the factual description of an event providing first-hand information from the scene. He/she is expected to truthfully give an account of events, issues, personalities, among others, that matter to his or her society since the news eventually transmitted, based on which members of the public make value judgments, is compiled from his/her jottings in the field. Khan (2019) describes the reporter as one who reports the bare facts of an occurrence keeping his/her own emotions in check so the public is given the unvarnished truth and allowed to individually evaluate the situation reported. While the reporter makes a dispassionate and disinterested presentation Khan (2019) claims that journalists go under or beneath the news to investigate and analyze events and come up with well-thought-out commentaries, editorials or analyses. The personality of the journalist is involved in several journalistic writings but the straight news reporter is detached from the report and is governed by the guiding principles and approaches to straight news reporting.

Reporters in most cases are generalists except those consigned to spheres such as the subject beat. Beats are special interest areas to which reporters are assigned for the purpose of continuous coverage (Nwodu, 2006). Beat reporting comes in different forms, including the place beat (government house, house of assembly, police headquarters, ministry of agriculture, sports ministry, the judiciary, etc.) while other beats are built around subjects or issues such as Niger Delta, Boko Haram insurgency, public health, Covid-19, politics, environment, among others (Stovall, 2015). Apart from place beats that require a generalist approach for effective media coverage of a particular geographical area, political entity, other institutions, etc., some beat reporters translate to specialists of sorts with continuous reportage of a particular subject matter. Even so, what is known, as special correspondents are reporters who by virtue of training and reportage of a particular beat over the years, have built an impressive knowledge base and gained familiarity with their beat. For example, Femi Okewo is the special correspondent on judiciary for the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in the Nigerian media ecosystem for many years. They are specialists in such subject matters or geographical areas and can report the news with or without informed insightful input or analysis of the facts. Another is Joy Osiagwu who is NTA's foreign correspondent in Canada. Foreign correspondents typify this category and the leverage they have to permeate the reports with their perceptions, differentiate them from the straight news reporter. They are versed in international relations, often attached to diplomatic missions abroad and report to their media houses therefrom.

Succinctly put, a reporter is the journalist at the coalface of journalism. He/she untiringly records all information from the environment for news but does not infuse his or her opinion or analysis in the report. On the other hand, journalists (columnists, editorial writers, correspondents, etc.) do investigation, make pertinent analysis and offer opinion in their reports or write-ups on topical societal issues. Khan (2019) affirms that journalism is a universal term of which reporting is just a subset and that it is possible for a journalist to act as a reporter but a reporter in the strict application of the term cannot in actual fact act as a journalist. The

reporter is an itinerant journalist. He/she is the eye of his/her media house or outfit and the link with its clientele who would provide the media house with the raw materials garnered from the field, which the in-house journalists process for the news. Except in relatively small and understaffed media organizations where roles are not strictly defined, the reporter's work ends there while the in-house journalists determine its inclusion or otherwise in the news bulletin. This role definition discloses that even though the two terms (journalist and reporter) are frequently used interchangeably they do not always co-equal to each other when news gathering and reporting as a genre is in question. The reporter is more connected and that explains why he or she is given particular attention in this study, with reference to the Nigerian media ecosystem.

Individualizing news reporters

Journalism refers mainly to the activity of reporting events, issues or happenings and explaining the significance of such happenings to society responsibly and accountably. Its primordial role is information management for the well being of the citizens to whom it owes its first allegiance and that it is expected to do responsibly and accountably. The Committee of Concerned Journalists (CCJ) stresses that journalism's first loyalty is to the citizens no matter the subdivision or profession in society any of these citizens belong to. Issues of responsibility involve social needs society expects journalists to respond to (Hodges, 1986). In contrast, issues related to accountability in journalism arise when the reporter is called to account for consequences of his actions or reports, in the line of duty (McQuail, 2009). The accountability process is principally demonstrable in the operations of the mass media when confronted with the legitimate expectations of society in relation to consequences of the reporter's reports or quality of output as it affects the referents (Prichard, 2003). The reporter is distinguished as a journalist who habitually collates and delivers news to the public with a presumable religious objectivity. However, the myriad of challenges in the field of journalism has forged neutral and participant stamps of journalists as reporters actively or passively pursue set goals in furtherance of "the people's right to know". The journalist that qualifies as a neutral reporter in McQuail's (2009) assumption, functions as an informer, interpreter and instrument of government while the participant acts as a representative of the public, critic of government, advocate of policy and general watchdog in society.

Even though the original journalistic sense of objectivity required the reporter to keep his or her emotions, opinions and biases entirely out of his/her report, the call to interpret or explain some moot points in the issues reported for the benefit of the masses, preclude the possibility of candid objectivity. This position follows the assumption by some authorities that, objectivity is an elusive and simply unsustainable concept. Such authorities would rather, reporters strive to be neutral in their reports on controversial issues than aspire to be objective. This position leads to the idea of neutral reporters (Pelege, 2007). As well, there are situations where reporters cannot simply sit on the fence in order to remain absolutely neutral given that journalism is not just a matter of reporting the facts. There is a moral imperative involved, and an obligation to defend certain universal principles, which would not allow the journalist to be

neutral always (Thomas, 2017). These moral imperatives are the reason we have a set of journalistic principles and ethical code that serve as moral guideposts. The fact that the press/journalist/reporter is conceived as an interpreter, disseminator or an adversary (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986) tend to debunk the applicability of the neutrality concept or strengthens Thomas's (2017) aversion for absolute neutrality in news reporting. Thomas maintains that if the reporter's efforts are to improve and protect society, offer voice to the voiceless, hold the powerful accountable, etc., journalism must be fair. It has to be fair to alternative views, fair to diverse perspectives and fair to new ideas. But 'fair' does not mean 'neutral.' He poses that when faced with defending a moral imperative of tolerance or promoting hate, the reporter's decision just has to be ethical. This article considers that in journalistic practice 'fair' equates to honesty to which most reporters subscribe today instead of objectivity. Honesty by itself could only be achieved through the reporters' enterprise towards finding out the truth and not merely attempting to be neutral in controversial situations.

The reporter who exhibits personal values of courage, self-reliance, integrity and impartiality in reporting, is associated with adversarial journalism (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). He/she is likely to be courageous and persistent in fact finding and often has to contend with uncooperative and punitive tendencies of bureaucrats and government regulatory agencies. In a sense, this is Weaver and Wilhoit's impression of those McQuail (2009) identifies as participant journalism practitioners. Again, the interpretation or clarifications the reporter makes in his or her report yields to further evaluation by party members expecting him/her to project their vested interests or downplay their opponents. In consequence, the election reporter is always, either a villain or an ally depending on the political divide the message consumer belongs to. Plaisance and Skews (2003) claim that those supporting the disseminator role, adopting self-control, which normally distances them from possible harm since they can afford to be neutral. However, posing as a mere disseminator of news/information is almost a disservice to society because much of the essence of the message would be lost on a major portion of the electorate lacking the mental aptitude to deconstruct information to understand convoluted political matters. In all of this, the big question is what brand of journalism would be advisable in society in the face of heightened curiosity in the minds of the electorate that must be soothed? Whatever position the election reporter takes, he/she should commit to memory that he/she is responsible to the citizens *ab initio*, his/her profession has charged him/her to enforce 'the people's right to know' and yet, he/she could be called to account for the effects of his/her report on his/her referents in the citizenry.

Communication techniques in news reporting

Communication is a purpose-driven exercise whose essence manifests only when parties involved are able to make sense or share meaning of the message. In effect, knowing the right techniques to adopt for impactful communication is a fundamental task on the message sender and so, the phrasing of the communication message must be purposeful enough to register appropriate impact and generate the right response. The news reporter's effort in this respect has birthed such journalism terminologies as bias reporting, slanting, priming, framing,

etc. (Nicholas-Gavillan, 2011). Much as extant journalism principles tend to forbid these elements in the straight news report, there is hardly any report on newsworthy political issues that is absolutely 'purged' of all of them.

As mentioned earlier, the pristine concept of objectivity obligated the reporter to keep his emotions, personal opinions and biases out of the news report (Ali, 2013). This is almost impossible since contemporary ideas of journalism indulge the reporter's explanation of issues reported, thus he/she consciously or unconsciously infuses his or her personal understanding of the issue while couching the story. That is the reason for instance; a newspaper's position on a contentious national issue could often be inferred from the editor's choice of word in the headline. Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines bias as an inclination of temperament or outlook, especially a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment. It is synonymous with bent, disposition, partiality, etc. Being biased is a kind of lopsidedness in disposition where a person favours one aspect of a two-sided issue or demonstrates preference for one out of two or more issues to be decided. Media bias manifests inter alia in the preferential coverage of events, preferential selection of reports and presentation in the news bulletin. The same dictionary records that once an issue is interpreted or presented in line with special interest, the report is slanted and reckons that slanting entails malicious or dishonest distortions in reporting. Agreed that political news reports are usually permeated with liberal biases, the fact remains that if a report deliberately enhances the viewpoint of a group through distortion of facts, it becomes a slant but where it is perceived to be merely sympathetic to a particular group among others in coverage or phrasing, it is deemed biased. Slanted news, therefore, applies to news that is ingeniously distorted or falsified reality.

Under the agenda-setting function, the media fall short of telling us *what* to think but rather present us with what to think *about*. Agenda setting only confers significance on an issue through the frequency of media reportage that draws and sustains public attention on it. In contrast, priming suggests that as people receive information from the media, other ideas in memory that have similar meaning are activated. Those thoughts then activate other thoughts and action tendencies related to the words associated with what was read, seen, or heard, causing a spreading activation (Jo & Berkowitz cited in Meredith, 2013). The priming concept details how one thought generated by media content may further generate associated thoughts there by providing a context for public discussion of an issue and setting the stage for audience understanding. It suggests that media conjured images stimulate related schemas in the minds of audience members that aid decision-making. Media priming refers to the effects of the content of the media on people's later behavior or judgments related to the content.

Framing on the other hand is the process of gleaning a few elements of perceived reality and emphasizing a relationship among them to advance a particular construal (Nicholas-Gavillan, 2011). It is an unavoidable part of human communication, given that to convince message recipients everybody presents ideas in desirable frames now and again. Framing could be construed as the second level of agenda-setting where the media influences the audience on how to think about an issue (Entman, 2004) and not just what to think about. Political media frames originate from the journalist/reporter and their beliefs about what constitutes news

topics and political reality, with the activities of people and groups who sponsor specific interpretation of issues (Weaver, 2007). Frames are described as the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is, through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Tankard et al. cited in Weaver, 2015). In other words, couching the report in a manner intended to influence people's perception of an event or issue amounts to framing (Ewoldsen & Rhodes, 2020). Since media frames are thought to influence the perception of the news by the audience, political media frames cannot be nonaligned but constructed to enhance some partisan democratic goals just as Entman (2010) remarks that despite reporters' best efforts at objectivity or neutrality, framing often favour one side over another in political matters.

This gives rise to the idea of slanted frames which results from the interaction of real world developments, cultural norms, and journalistic decision rules with the sometimes proficient and other times ungainly efforts of competing elites to manage the news (Entman, 2010). Slanted frames, therefore, aim at presenting a concept in a way that communicates or induces a value judgment biased towards a referent in the choice of words in a news report. The framing and priming literature relates to agenda-setting theory as it suggests that all external influences over what people think derives from telling them what to think about (Entman, 2004). Furthermore, framing attempts to find a suitable narrative to project a position or viewpoint using certain words or phrases and making certain contextual references that suggest how one should think about an issue. It is noteworthy that in Nigeria; violence, banditry, rigging, deprivation, vote buying, bribery frames are mostly used in election reporting. What is needful here is that the conscientious reporter should ensure that frames used are healthful to the nation's democratic life. Weaver (2015) claims that it is not clear why framing *has become so much more popular* with communication scholars than either agenda setting or priming in recent times and suggests that this may have something to do with the comprehensive nature of the term 'frame' that can be applied to many different aspects of messages.

The election reporters' competency indices

Elections are characterized by astonishments, and some foreseeable incidents stemming from contestations, absorbing intrigues, intra-party alignments and realignments. Moreover, the inevitable horse-trading and stalk horsing in partisan politics turns elections into somewhat unusual genus of drama. Election reporting entails a series of actions embedded in the realm of political communication where the political actors and their interactions are identified and attended (Esser & Pfetsch, 2017). The modes of information gathering, message packaging and dissemination patterns that must give consideration to the possible effects of political information both on the actors and the electorate make this genre of journalism quite distinctive. To be able to address the inevitable but unpredictable nerve-racking episodes of the campaigns alone, the election reporter must be an unmistakably enterprising journalism practitioner.

Patriotic Nigerians expect the media during political campaigns to get all political actors to accept the rules made to guide the elections and truly believe in one Nigeria (Agba, 2007). Other roles include interest in the electorates in political participation and actual mobilization of the electorate to vote. To satisfactorily perform this role, the media is expected to clarify issues during campaigns, bring political office aspirants closer to the electorate and highlight significant dissimilarities between parties as illustrated in their ideologies, party symbols, fronted candidates and party manifestoes to provide the potential voter with a sense of direction towards the right candidate. In all of this the buck rests on the table of the reporter who is duty-bound to seek out the relevant truths and escapades of stakeholders and report to people who cannot witness or comprehend events that affect their lives in the polity (Nwaozuzu, 1999) and direct the process towards responsible democratic principles that recognize the sovereignty of the people's votes (Aghamelu, 2013). This underlines the opinion of a good reporter as an asset to his community and nation just like any other professional or government official (Kasoma cited in Udoudo & Bassey, 2011).

The electoral process in Nigeria is bedeviled by many challenges. The series of challenges that International Media Support, Réseau Liberté and Media and Democracy Group (2006) identify with the electoral process in Nigeria comprise: tardiness on the part of the electoral body INEC regarding late arrival of election materials at polling stations, or some stations not having election materials at all, unscrupulous officers absconding with election materials or voters' names missing in the voters lists, among others. Political parties and their agents also compound the problem by engaging in ballot box snatching or stuffing or disruption of the voting exercise. There also is the issue of hostile and aggressive oppositions, which see nothing good in the electoral process and denigrate it as such unless they win elections. Vote buying, connivance in whatever form of the ruling party and the electoral umpire are other very critical issues. These and other problems confronting the electoral process in Nigeria constitute daunting challenges to the reporter who has a responsibility of putting them in the right perspective and lucidly reporting them to get the electorate properly informed.

Since the word politics derived from another Greek word 'politico' meaning 'for the people' it follows that anything concerning elections into political office must give attention to the masses or people's interest intrinsically. In other words, citizens' issues matter most in elections. Therefore, professional election coverage for any reporter must find out what the needs of the people are and what issues matter to them mostly (Hansen & Albadri, 2016). The reporter should find out voters' top concerns and make public such concerns for political parties or their flag bearers' attention. The reverse, though also important, should not occupy the foreground of the reporter's focus. The people are the crucial players in elections because they vote. The reporter should know the election laws, which provide the road map concerning the elections. He should track how the election is being funded, where candidates and parties are getting their financial support, whether election laws on party and candidate financing are being followed and whether regulations about financial inducement on voters around polling booths are respected.

The reporter is expected to guide himself/herself with the following questions and report the answers as news (1) Were electoral materials distributed timely and equitably? (2) Are government officials neutral in the discharge of electoral duties? (3) Is police protection extended to all parties in the election and election officials? (4) Are the election materials and polling booths or voting stations secure? (5) Who is guiding the ballot boxes and who will count the votes fairly? (International Media Support, Réseau Liberté and Media and Democracy Group, 2006). The reporter should know the voter accreditation time frame and procedure. He/she should know how lists of accredited voters are drawn up and if voters left off can get on the list with proper identification. Compare procedures to international standards. Investigate whether restrictions have been placed because of a citizen's gender, race, family or religion. He/she should examine the ballot to determine if voters who cannot read have ballots with party logos to help them vote and whether all contesting political parties are captured in the ballot paper. Confirm statistical details with election officials before reporting. The election reporter is not merely watching the brief, he prods those waiting to vote, people with valid voting papers being turned away and others coming out of the polling stations to know if they were pressured to vote a certain way. He should be curious about adequacy of ballots, ballot boxes and officials to observe the voting and ballot counting processes. Know how ballots are being tallied and transported and if this is being monitored by nonpartisan election monitors (Sullivan, 2015).

Given that language is the strongest tool of journalism, the reporter is expected to choose his words carefully in his reportage so he does not disparage or unduly promote a course. The phrasing of reports determines if news reports foster understanding or reinforce misconceptions and fear. This is very critical during elections when political parties and their candidates strive for attention through incitement to violence or at best, emotion-laden statements. Note that the media are the machinery for representation in any modern society and the representation they make of anybody shapes the public opinion about him, which remains valid to the public. Therefore, the reporter must be circumspect in his or her choice of words and do no less than sound reportage so as not harm the government, the electoral umpire or political actors and their parties willfully or through inadvertence in their reportage of election.

International Media Support, Réseau Liberté and Media and Democracy Group (2006) expect reporters to avoid the use of imprecise, accusatory and above all, inflammatory words such as massacre, assassination, execute, etc., which provoke more than inform. If politicians use these words they should be directly attributed to the political candidates and not reported as facts in the news. Such a creative or resourceful professional attitude would help reporters to avoid catch-22s wherein the society might begin to see them as Franksteins. In their own report, reporters should avoid descriptive words such as: terrorized, brutalized, devastating, etc., because these are words of people who feel victimized. Since reporters are supposed to be dispassionate, they should avoid the use of such words lest they be perceived as representing a particular interest. The reporter should avoid putting labels on groups (Lynch, 2006). Using epithets such as thugs, bandits, area boys, fundamentalists, extremists, etc., to refer to individuals or groups suggest he or she is reporting his/her opinion contrary to his/her

obligation to eschew tendencies to editorialize. Of course, these types of labels or tags conjure connotations that are humiliating or discourteous. As a reporter, it is safest to use the label or name such groups call themselves for instance, 'Vanguard for Good Governance,' 'Champions of Democracy,' 'Coalition for Peaceful Election,' etc., not minding their attitude and actions that portray what they truly are. But if the reporter is reporting what someone says, let the words be directly attributed to the candidate and not reported as facts. Essentially, the media have the responsibility to ensure that the wheel of the electoral process grinds smoothly such that there is good and responsible political performance in the land. What the reporter needs to ensure at all times is that no possible distraction in the electoral process should be traceable to slapdash or ill-considered journalism.

Conclusion

The reporter's distinctive responsibility among journalists is to be the actual watchdog that collates and disseminates information from the field to meet the information needs in society. As key stakeholders in the conduct of democratic elections, reporters double as the voice of the voter who through their reportage, provoke lawful public interactions and provide worthwhile opportunities for political discourse. The reporter also keeps the electorate posted on the goings-on during the elections to foster transparency, thereby strengthening the democratic process as observed in the Nigerian situation. However, to adequately fulfill these responsibilities, it is recommended that reporters should be equipped with requisite knowledge and skills needed to carry out insightful election reporting. They must always be aware of their duty to mitigate in their reports, untoward utterances, inordinate conducts and incitement to violence that too often arise in Nigeria's election environments. In so doing, the reporter would have succeeded in contributing his or her quota to the sustenance and growth of democracy in Nigeria.

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