

## **News Commercialisation and Implication in the Coverage of 2019 Rivers State Governorship Election by Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigerian Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the implication of commercialization of news in the coverage of 2019 Rivers State Governorship election by Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigeria Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM. The objectives of this study were to look at the impact of news commercialisation and objectivity in journalism practice and how commercialisation of political news by Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigeria Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM affected the conduct of the 2019 Rivers State Governorship election. The study was anchored on the social responsibility and gate-keeping theories. Research design adopted was survey. The study found out that the commercialisation of campaign news contradicted the Nigerian Broadcasting Code and denied candidates with no financial capacity access to the media, a situation that poses serious threat to the nation's democratic growth. The researchers recommended that radio broadcast should refrain from news commercialisation to promote sound ethics and objectivity in journalism practice and ensure the media meet their obligation to the society.

**Key words: Radio, Journalism, News Commercialisation, Objectivity, and Democracy**

### **Introduction**

Broadcasting in Nigeria has a long and rich history in its contribution to the political and socio-economic development of the country. It is a creative platform that is characterised by true professionalism, choice and innovation to serve the interest of the general public. Radio, being the oldest in the broadcasting industry is strategic, cheap and fast with wider reach for information dissemination. Like other media, radio sets agenda for socio-economic, political, and technological development for public good. The cardinal responsibility of radio broadcasting is to inform, educate and entertain with a view to promoting national unity and cohesion. Asogwa & Asemah (2012) note that information sharing is a critical element in the practice of modern democracy. There should be accurate and free flow of information to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the people. Radio remains a great democratic tool for political mobilization and campaigns, hence, the services should provide equal opportunities to all stakeholders during electioneering campaigns, irrespective of political leanings. This is at the core to ensure undeniable access to the media and freedom of information as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The media have clear obligations and responsibility as outlined in Section 22 of Chapter 2 of the Constitution which states that "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people". Regrettably, the mass media and radio in particular seem to have lost their essence as they have gradually departed from their social responsibility to selling of news items to the highest bidder. Omenugha & Oji (2008) note that the implication of news commercialisation is of grave concern as it involves cheap selling of the integrity of the newscast and newscasters by attesting to the "truth" of the claims of the so-called "sponsor". Unfortunately, radio no longer seems to perform the critical social and political functions as issues that set agenda for national development may be easily compromised for "naira and kobo".

News commercialisation started with partial commercialisation of broadcasting in 1986 by the Military Government of General Ibrahim Babangida. Rohdewohld (1993) recalls that the three media outfits of the Federal Government (Radio Nigeria, Nigerian Television Authority and News Agency of Nigeria) were among the

government-owned establishments put up for partial commercialisation. The policy at the time emphasised that partially commercialised enterprises can still expect government funds for investment but must devise means of economic survival and so, they introduced payment for certain services including news coverage. Commercialisation of broadcasting became socio-economic factor with the eventual deregulation of the sector in 1992. This gave birth to establishment of commercially oriented private broadcast stations. The media space thrown wide by privatisation, ordinarily should add value to electoral process and democratic governance but the reverse seems the case in Nigeria.

Radio broadcasting has been part of the nation's general election for decades, particularly since the return to civil rule in 1999. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), as the broadcast regulatory agency has emphasised that all stations shall provide equal opportunity and airtime to all political parties or views with particular regards to amount of time and belts during electioneering. The Nigerian broadcasting code discourages political news commercialisation and specifically, challenges all broadcasting stations to avoid the monetisation of political broadcast as any form of commercialisation of political news coverage is prohibited in the interest of fairness and balance (NBC Code, 2006). But this appears not to be the case as most of the radio stations over the years have turned political news as source of revenue closing up the broadcast space to political parties and candidates who cannot pay huge fees to be heard. Clearly, the choices in the elections are often narrowed to candidates who have the money to 'buy' slots in the news bulletins to spread their agenda and manifestoes. The bulk of the voters could be denied the right to information from all political parties participating in elections. This is the basis for this study, which has to do with the commercialisation of news and its implication in the coverage of 2019 Rivers State Governorship Election by Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigerian Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM. Sixty three political parties presented governorship candidates in the 2019 election in Rivers State and it is of interest to find out how the commercialisation policy of the three stations affected news coverage involving the 63 candidates.

#### **List of Governorship Candidates and their Political Parties**

There were 63 political parties that presented governorship candidates in the 2019 election in Rivers State and they are as follows: Accord (Dumo Lulu-Briggs), Action Alliance (Allison Larry Tamunotonye), AAC (Awara Biokpomabo), AAP (Wokekoro Dike), ABP (Prince Kalada Wilson), ACD (Echelon Nweke), ACPN (Chinemike Orgwu Miller), AD (Ichenwo Uchekukwu), ADC (Braide Eniyen), ADP (Victor Fingesi), AGAP (Inye Dokubo), ANDP (Kemka Stanley Elenwo), ANP (Cornelius Ngedo), APA (Napoleon Chibuzor), APDA (Zebulum Warighbani Ezekiel), APGA (Ohia Prince Obi), APM (Kukawg Barine Ken), APP (Leesi Gabriel Gborogbosi), ASD (Deekae Kiadum), BNPP (Brown Rebecca), C4C (Nwanze Ogbogu Michael), CAP (Emesiobi Moses), CNP (Yellowe Ipalibo Horatio), DA (Obresua JohnBull), DPC (Achira Ukachukwu), DPP (Emmanuel Nwabrije), FJP (Chukwuladi Ahiakwo), GNP (Alaso Young), HDP (Chinweike Elem), and ID (Ihunwo Samuel).

Others are: JMPP (Ezekiel Ayenwegwe), KP (Igbaniho Prince Bele), LP (Isaac Wonwu), LPN (Samson Leader), MAJA (Uchegbu Charles Chimele), MPN (Joseph Princewill), MRDD (Enefaa Amachree), NAC (Onyema Onyekachi), NCMP (Igbechi Isaac), NCP (Temkor Anastasia), NDLP (Ibibote Tamuno Oruwari), NEPP (Ugochika Ogbo), NNPP (Enyi Princewill), NPC (Robinson Henry), NRM (Ayo-Oladapo Sobomabo), NUP (Frankline Nwabochi), PDC (Jumbo God's Gift), PDP (Nyesom Wike), PPA (Boma Jacks), PPC (Collins Ndegwe), PPN (Nwidobie Lebari), PRP (Rowland Opusunju), PT (Briggs Snithers), RBNP (Tamunokuro Robinson), RP (Gimbe Monday), SDP (Elekima Precious), SNC (Chimeka Nnemikini), UPN (Ngoye Benebo), UPP (Deacon Prince Onumbu), WTPN (Owhondah Confidence), YES (Tomi Henry), YPP (Omangima Obu), and ZLP (Ben Ogbobula).

#### **Statement of the problem**

Media organisations are established for various reasons but principally to serve the public. Some are set up to perform social functions of reflecting society and setting agenda for national discourse. Recent happenings in the nation's media sphere have shown clearly that some of the broadcast stations show more interest in generating income. It is a statement of fact that no one sets up a business without the aim of making profits from the investments. It must, however, be noted that the establishment of radio stations is not anchored on capitalist

philosophy since they must serve the society in line with their social responsibility. Radio has that responsibility to provide information in the right quantity and quality that modern society requires to function effectively. In recent times, journalism practice in Nigeria seems to be plagued with the malady of news commercialisation. The implication is that only the rich will get their ideas communicated to the public at the expense of those without economic power.

Radio stations in Nigeria no doubt are expected to protect the public interest, more so, during elections by providing equal opportunities and broadcast platforms to candidates in the election. This is an obligation they owe the people to freely access relevant information that would guide their decisions on the best choice to make towards deepening the nation's democracy. In light of the above, this study tends to look at the extent at which news commercialisation in Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigerian Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM, affected the participation of political parties and the electorate in the 2019 Governorship Election in Rivers State.

### **Research questions**

The following are research questions which guided the study.

1. What percentage of access did the political parties and candidates in the 2019 Rivers State Governorship Election have to Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigerian Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM?
2. To what extent did the three radio stations jettison their social responsibility for income generation as against NBC regulations during the 2019 Governorship Election campaigns in Rivers State?
3. What were the specific instances where the three radio stations declined to provide coverage to political parties because of payment for news coverage during the 2019 Governorship Election campaign in Rivers State?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Gate keeping is a long term practice in the news operation between reporters and editors while giving treatment to news items. The theory implies that media contents are made to pass through different processes before they eventually get to the readers. Kurt Lewin was apparently the first one to use the term "gate keeping", which he used to describe a wife or mother as the person who decides which food ends up on the family's dinner table (Lewin, 1947). According to McQuail & Windahl (1996), information must always flow along certain channels, which contain gate areas (the reporters and editors), where decisions are made whether to allow the news report enter the channel for further processes and to include it for publication or broadcast. Gate keeping theory is applied to the current study because of the tendencies by the gate keepers to act based on news items paid for by the sponsors. Because of commercialisation as factor, the reporter decides what political news that will eventually make it to the news bulletins of the three radio stations. The theory raises the concerns about objectivity in the news package and as to why certain political parties and their candidates enjoy news mention than the others.

#### **Social responsibility theory**

The social responsibility theory, which sprang up in the middle of 20th century, is an extension of the libertarian theory propounded by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956. The theory is an American initiative in the late 1940s which stated that the market had failed to fulfil the promise that press freedom would reveal the truth (Hasan, 2013). The theory places emphasis on the moral and social responsibility of institutions and persons operating the mass media. The Commission on Freedom of Press in the United States provided a model in which the media had certain obligations to society. These obligations were as expressed in the following words: informative, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance.

The proposition of the theory is very applicable to this study as it emphasises the need for fair media that should provide a level field to all participants in the electoral process during major elections. It is instructive to note that the media have the responsibility to regulate themselves within the frame work of the law and established institutions to be able to carry out their activities. Based on these principles, the society has the right to expect

high standard of performance from the media and that very media organisation should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct. That brings to questions the disturbing trend of commercialisation of political news on radio stations denying a lot of key actors in an election media space to air their views, manifestoes and agenda, a development not in tandem with democratic principles, press freedom and freedom of information. This is the relevance of this theory to the study as the "outright selling of news" negates every principles of social responsibility of the media.

### **News Commercialisation**

News over the years has changed in structure and form as it is now dictated by money which is eroding its objectivity. Back in 1980, a final report of a Commission headed by Sean McBride and set up by UNESCO, concluded that news had since become commercial commodity and that news about important events are put aside for trivial issues to dominate the news bulletins. Regrettably, activities involving people of high social class and rich personalities are given prominence and regularity by the nations' mass media (Udomisor & Kenneth, 2013). News commercialization, according to Onoja (2009), is a situation where radio stations attempt to generate revenue by charging fees for news reports that should ordinarily make it to their bulletins free. There is a lot of deceits involved where the audience is given the impression that the news is fair, objective and socially responsible. Similarly, Ekwo (1996) quotes Nnorom, (1994) who defines news commercialisation as "a phenomenon whereby the electronic media report as news or news analysis a commercial message by an unidentified or unidentifiable sponsor, giving the audience the impression that news is fair, objective and socially responsible"(p.36). Although, this definition does not expressly include the newspaper, news commercialisation does also thrive in print media (Oso, 2000).

Omenugha and Oji (2008) note that news commercialisation operates at two levels in Nigeria. The first being at the institutional level, where the stations officially fix approved rates for sponsored news programmes while the second is at the individual level, where the reporters obtain money and other gifts as "brown envelopes" to facilitate the usage of the news and so, they become biased and subjective. For instance, and as far back as 2008, Delta Broadcasting Service, Warri, charged N20,000 for religious programme, N36,000 for corporate coverage and N25,000 for social event, while Radio Nigeria Enugu charges N47,000,for commercial news and N52,000 for political news (Ogbuoshi, 2005). In Rivers State, the official charges for political coverage by the three stations under study are N45,000 (Rhythm 93.7 FM), N30,000 (Nigerian Info 92.3 FM) and N20,000 (Radio Rivers 99.1 FM). News commercialisation at the institutional level is thriving because editors, publishers and owners of the broadcast stations see the outfits as profit making organisation. The ethical implications of news commercialisation has remained topical at the growing concern about the misnomer, which may have negated all fundamental principles of objectivity, equity, fairness, and balance required in journalism practice. Clearly so, the commercialisation of news violates the ethics and code of conduct of journalists. Omenugha & Oji (2008) posit that the encroachment of news commercialisation upon the radio broadcasting has affected a great deal information flow among the people.

### **Radio as a Medium for Political Campaign**

The participation of every citizen in political activities and democratic process is at the heart of citizenship of any nation. Citizens often participate in political activities during electoral campaign and voting on the day of election. According to Falade (2014), the level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine to some extent, the success of the political system. The citizens can be involved in the political system through such activities as selection/election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements.

Today, the mass media are all around to help the people spread information to every segment of the society. Radio remains a very strategic tool in any democratic setting as reflected in the news they transmit about political parties and their candidates, manifestoes of candidates and the general electoral process, which assist voters in making informed choices (Aririguzoh, 2014). To engage the citizens of a nation or the public, radio as a strategic tool for mass mobilisation is deployed to cover a wide range of campaign activities to mobilise, inform and influence the

public. Key actors also engage different radio stations for their campaign messages in form of jingles to influence and woo supporters.

Radio is truly strategic because of its affordability and availability and serve the interest of all social class including educated and uneducated listeners. Radio has played major roles in greasing the wheels of a country's political economy. Radio makes unbeatable contributions to the enhancement of a country's political growth as exemplified in its massive political education, enlightenment, awareness, consciousness and provision of fora for discussion, debates and presentations. Onabajo (1992) posits the fact that radio is a veritable channel to spread message to large number of people at the same time. Radio is indeed a powerful instrument in the area of public enlightenment because it reaches heterogeneous and mass audience at the same time.

### **Methodology**

Survey design was used in the study. Register of voters in Rivers State was used to determine the total number of voters in the state. The number of registered voters in the state was 3,215,273. This represented the population of the study. The study was based on 414 respondents who were sampled using both purposive and convenience techniques. As a result, 30 respondents were purposively selected as identified target groups who were key participants in the 2019 Rivers State Governorship Election. Those sampled were the Head of Voter Education and Publicity, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Rivers State, 8 party leaders or candidates, 2 officials of Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) and Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP), State Director of National Orientation Agency (NOA), Public Rations officer of the Rivers State Police Command, 6 political analysts/public commentators, 2 election monitors/observers, and 9 reporters from the 3 radio stations.

Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, a sample of 384 members of the public who participated in the election was used and questionnaire administered to respondents across the three senatorial districts of the state, namely: Rivers East, Rivers West and Rivers South East. Using random sampling procedure, three Local Government Areas, namely: Obio/Akpor (Rivers East), Ahoada-East (Rivers West) and Khana (Rivers South East) were selected from each senatorial district and the sample size was shared on equal basis of 128 each.

While the questionnaire was administered to 384 respondents, 30 other respondents who were key stakeholders in the 2019 Rivers State Governorship Election were selected for telephone interviews.

### **Results from Questionnaire**

Most of the respondents agreed that news commercialisation gave undue advantage to financially buoyant political parties during the 2019 campaigns in Rivers state while few of the respondents did not feel payment for news gave any advantage to the financially buoyant parties.

Also, it was established that many electorate were denied opportunities to be aware of the agenda and manifestoes of the candidates in the election because most of their campaign activities could not make it to the bulletins of the radio station. The political news commercialisation posed a lot of hindrances to the candidates in freely reaching out to the people.

### **Data from Interview**

Out of the 30 selected respondents, 25 of them granted the interview and they are: INEC's Head of Voter Education and Publicity, Acting State Director of National Orientation Agency (NOA), 5 political analysts/public commentators, 5 party leaders or candidates, 1 official of IPAC, 1 official of CNPP, 2 election monitors/observers, and 9 reporters from the three radio stations. And from the survey conducted on the eligible voters in Rivers State, out of the 384 questionnaire distributed, 324 respondents completed and returned the questionnaire.

### **Responses from Telephone Interview**

Most of the respondents acknowledged the regular interaction and interface between identified key stakeholders and the three radio stations during 2019 Rivers State Governorship campaign. Among the eight party leaders or

candidates scheduled for interviews, only five granted the interview and they all confirmed that they requested for coverage of their campaigns by Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigerian Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM. The five respondents also said that the radio stations demanded payment for use of their campaign news. One of the respondents said his political party got some free coverage. Another respondent from the political parties and candidates while reacting to the issue went further to state as follows: "commercialisation is a big business for radio and TV stations especially in Port Harcourt. The media houses insisted on full payment of higher rates because they see it as opportunity to rake in income to run their stations". Two of the respondents said they saw news commercialisation as a normal practice. Other respondents INEC, NOA, Election monitor/Observer, who also requested coverage said they were not asked to pay for their news items on the 2019 governorship election. Out of the 25 respondents including the reporters, 15 were aware of the NBC regulations against commercialisation of political news coverage while 10 were not aware. Regrettably, four of the political parties and candidates interviewed were not aware just as two reporters were equally not aware of the regulation. Most of the 25 respondents stated that they were worried at the trend of political news commercialisation as it did not encourage equal platform to all candidates. They noted that over 80 % of the news bulletins went to the highest bidders and added to the cost of political campaign. One of them said, "I get angry the way they give massive coverage to the party in power". Another respondent said, "I am worried that when there is no money to pay for the news that means that our party won't be in the news". Another respondent said, "I am in a dilemma. A particular head of one of the stations categorically told me that he had asked NBC management where they expected them to get funds to pay their statutory fees if they didn't exploit the political parties".

On the question on the implications of news commercialisation on the electoral process and democracy, most of the respondents noted that small political parties were not given any chance, thereby denying the people the opportunities to carefully assess the candidates. The respondents also observed that political news commercialisation on radio stations put huge financial burden on small political parties and made the much talk-about balance reportage impossible. One of the respondents clearly said, "commercialisation of political news is undemocratic and against the right to fair hearing. Political news should be free". One of the respondents also stated that "with commercialisation, the news becomes deceptive, not balanced and for the rich to hijack". He added that "such a situation will be discouraging, embarrassing and shameful to the electoral process and nation's democracy". The consensus was that political news commercialisation constituted a threat to democracy.

For the 9 reporters interviewed, seven of them confirmed that their respective radio stations had commercial rates for political news coverage. One of the reporters went ahead to make a blanket answer to the effect that "all radio and TV stations in Nigeria have political commercial rates". Another interesting revelation was that two reporters from a particular radio station disagreed on the question as one confirmed the existence of a commercial political rate, the other was in clear denial. This was against the preliminary findings that have captured the different political commercial rates for the three stations under study. Six of the reporters also said there was never a time they declined coverage of news for failure of the political parties and candidates to pay while three confirmed they had deliberately not covered campaigns because the group refused to pay up. Majority of the reporters were aware of the regulations by NBC against political news commercialisation. Again, almost all the reporters claimed they understood the negative implications of news commercialisation on the nation's electoral process and democratic growth. One of them with over 20 years practice experience said though news commercialisation improves the revenue of the station, it however, denies the listening public the proper information to guide the democratic process.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study were discussed based on the set objectives for this study.

**RQ1: What percentage of access did the political parties and candidates in the 2019 Rivers State Governorship Election have to Rhythm 93.7 FM, Nigerian Info 92.3 FM and Radio Rivers 99.1 FM?**

From the respondents, it was clear that stakeholders with no political aspirations and interest (INEC, NOA, Public Affairs Analysts) had free access to the three radio stations while political parties and their candidates had access tied to how much they would pay. This no doubt is a challenge to the democratic process because the electorate are invariably denied access to information with which to freely assess the candidates. The three radio stations operated in contrast to democratic principles where the people were denied access to relevant political information they should ordinarily have during campaigns. That some political parties and candidates were denied access to the media because they could not pay negated every principles of social responsibility of the media. Okoro and Nnaji (2012) had noted that the media should reflect the society's plurality and most importantly give access to various points of views. This clearly, was not the case with the three radio stations during the campaigns as key actors were denied access. Regrettably, some respondents, including reporters who should ordinarily be aware of the NBC regulations against commercialisation of political news coverage were not aware. So, they lacked information with which they could legally demand free political coverage from the three radio stations. It was sad to note that some key stakeholders in elections did not know their rights to access the media freely as enshrined in the broadcasting code. The radio stations which had seen political campaign period as a season to make money capitalised on the ignorance of some of the key players who lacked information on the stand of NBC against sponsorship of news items. The stakeholders appear to have contributed to the challenges facing democracy for not applying the enabling laws that empower them to freely access the media. The political parties and candidates must therefore, stand firm to demand effective coverage from the radio stations as backed by the NBC regulations. That is when the media can effectively contribute to democratic growth.

**RQ2: To what extent did the three radio stations jettison their social responsibility for income generation as against NBC regulations during the 2019 Governorship Election campaigns in Rivers State?**

Some respondents particularly the political parties and candidates revealed that the three radio stations demanded payment for use of their campaign news. Other respondents INEC, NOA, Election monitor/Observer, who also requested coverage said they were not asked to pay for their news items. Another respondent from the political parties and candidates while reacting to the issue went further to state as follows: "commercialisation is a big business for radio and TV stations especially in Port Harcourt. The media houses clearly jettisoned their social responsibilities and only saw the campaign period as opportunity to rake in income to run their stations. Omenugha & Oji (2008) indeed highlighted that the introduction of news commercialisation in radio broadcasting has over the years affected a great deal information flow among the people. Clearly, it is regrettable that over 80 % of the news bulletins went to the highest bidders and consequently increased the cost of political campaigns. It is even more worrisome to note that some of the reporters have abandoned their primary assignment of sourcing for news to become advertisement canvassers. The media suddenly forgot that they represent the conscience of the society. Most of the respondents expressed their worries at the trend of political news commercialisation as it did not encourage equal platform to all candidates. Political news commercialisation remains an ethical issues in the media and that such practices have negated all fundamental principles of objectivity and fairness.

**RQ3: Was there any time the three radio stations declined to provide coverage on the premise of payment for news coverage?**

With responses from party leaders, representatives of IPAC and CNPP as well as some of the reporters, the media houses insisted on full payment before coverage of the campaigns. Most of the party leaders and candidates had claimed that they were denied coverage for failure to make payment to the radio stations. With high level of awareness among the reporters, one still wonder why the practice has continued. Ironically, at both individual level with the reporters and corporate level with management of the radio stations, exchange of news patronage for money is at the centre stage and clearly at the expense of the social responsibility to the people and the consequences are very evident in the low political education and awareness among the people. Almost all the respondents understood the implications of political news commercialisation. Some of the implications of the activities of the three radio stations as outlined by respondents included denying small parties from being heard

and then placed huge financial burden on them. It indeed reduced ability to reach the voters as the campaign messages practically died with the political parties and their candidates ahead of the 2019 Governorship Election. Omenugha & Oji (2008) had noted the implication of news commercialisation as of grave concern because it involves the cheap selling of the integrity of the newscast and newscasters by attesting to the "truth" of the claims of the so-called "sponsor". Again, such practice is clearly a threat to democracy as the people are often denied information required to make the best choice in an election. It also kills professionalism, reduces objectivity and denies the people the rights to public information. One of the respondents described the action as "undemocratic" on the part of the broadcast outfits who had abdicated their social responsibility on the altar of "money".

### **Conclusion**

The study has brought to focus on how much contributions the media generally can make to democratic growth. It has been established that the radio remains very crucial to the dissemination of information towards the sustenance and development of democracy across the globe. Key stakeholders in this study were of the resolve that the media have fallen short in their support to the nation's young democracy and that abdicating their social responsibility on the altar of commercialisation was a great disservice to society who should freely access relevant information about political actors during campaigns.

Political parties and candidates in Rivers State lacked useful information on how to effectively engage the media as they were not abreast with the relevant sections of the NBC regulations against political news commercialisation. Regrettably, some of them have been shortchanged. It is important they know that the laws of the land protect them from any payment for political news coverage. Both Rhythm 93.7 FM and Nigerian Info 92.3 FM, apparently deployed their reporters after candidates who could afford to pay relegating campaign activities of most of the Governorship candidates who were not financially buoyant to pay for their news items. Political news commercialisation is a great threat to objective journalism practice and by extension to democracy when the people are denied access to freely given information because of money. It is more worrisome that the NBC had not been able to enforce its regulations by meting out appropriate sanctions to these violators, particularly the errant radio stations. Efforts must therefore, be made to stop this disturbing and anti-democratic practice in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

This following recommendations may be useful:

1. Radio stations in Nigeria should make their airwaves available to all political parties and candidates for coverage and ensure equitable media access.
2. Radio stations should consciously desist from political news commercialisation.
3. Relevant government agents should sensitise key actors on the role of radio as agent of mass mobilisation and their rights to freely access the media.
4. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) must enforce regulations against political news commercialisation and must ensure appropriate sanctions to errant radio stations.
5. Regular training and retraining of journalists and their role in supporting the electoral process and deepening the democratic culture, must be carried out and sustained by key political actors.

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