



## Media and the National Security: Preference of Television Stations During the Coverage of Yar'adua's Sickness.

### An evaluation of Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka students.

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#### ABSTRACT

*The study centered on the evaluation of UNIZIK student's preference of television stations during the coverage of late president Yar' Adua's ill-health. The major goal of the study was to assess media preference and the influence of such preferences on the perception of students. In the study, survey research method was adopted, just as questionnaire was used for the collection of primary data for the study. Four research questions were asked and analyzed. From a population of 15,000, a representative sample size of 390 was taken, using Taro Yamane's statistical formula. From the data collected and analyzed, it was discovered that the ill-health of the late president was given much prominence. Also, despite the high dose of sensationalism of the coverage, there was some element of objectivity in their reports. Based on the findings, six recommendations were made. Chief among them is the need for making NUJ have a stake in national security, by evolving a synergy between it and security agencies, as it will provide a good interchange of information as it relates to national security when reporting some sensitive issues like the health of a president.*

**Keywords:** Media, National security, Television stations, Coverage, Yar' adua

## 1. Introduction

The ill-health of late President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua generated a lot of reactions among Nigerians, most especially the 93-day sick absence from his duty post. While away in faraway King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Saudi Arabia, only the mass media were able to feed Nigeria with little or nothing about the true state of health of the late president. African Independent Television (AIT) being one of the private television stations in Nigeria gave coverage to the political logjam resulting from the ill-health of Yar' Adua.

Consequently, it was of interest investigating how the Nigerian people, particularly UNIZIK students, perceived the coverage AIT gave to the whole drama associated with the ill-health and subsequent death of the late Nigerian leader. The unceremonious evacuation of the late President Umaru Yar' Adua to Saudi Arabia on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 on the account of a medical emergency, resulted in a power vacuum at the presidency, a situation that has generated furor in the country. The melodrama began on Wednesday, November 18<sup>th</sup> 2009, with the conflict between the Senate and the House of Representatives on the venue for their joint sitting to receive the 2010 budget proposal from President Umaru Yar' Adua. Both chambers had been locked in an ego battle, which broke out on January 16, 2009, when they parted ways at Minna, Niger State, over the designation of co-chairman for the National Assembly Joint Committee on Constitution Review (JCCR)

A ten- year old convention of holding a joint sitting in the more spacious chamber of the House of Representatives came under real threat. There was no retreat, nor was there surrender. Yar' Adua in a bid to resolve the dilemma, was prepared to lay the budget separately on the table of both houses. (Thisday, Vol.15, No.541, p.56). But the elaborate arrangement of Thursday, November 19, had to be curiously put off. It was amid the ensuing confusion, occasioned by the gritty supremacy battle between both chambers that the news of Yar' Adua's degenerating health filtered out. A week after Yar' Adua's departure to Saudi Arabia, a group of over 50 prominent Nigerians called on him to resign. Members of the group included Alhaji Balarabe Musa, Second Republic governor of Kaduna state; Chief Olu Falae, a former presidential candidate; Ken Nnamani, former Senate President; Gen. Alani Akinrinade, former Chief of Army Staff; and Alhaji Aminu Masari, former Speaker of the House of Representatives, among others. The Nation (Saturday Feb.13, 2010: p.4)

The presidency, perhaps in a bid to nip in the bud the rash of speculations that would trail the state of his health long treated like a state secret, had announced to the nation that he (Yar' Adua) was diagnosed as having acute pericarditis. But as his absence began to prolong, the issue of leadership vacuum surfaced. (Thisday, Vol.15, No.5410, p.56). Apparently owing to lack of time, perhaps President Yar' Adua failed to observe a crucial provision of the 1999 constitution which obliges him to transmit a written letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate as contained in section 145 of the constitution. This would have enabled the vice president to act as the president of the country pending when he returns and reverses the situation vide a contrary letter to the National Assembly. This failure created a leadership vacuum in the country which many people found difficult to feel comfortable with. Their position was predicated on the fact that so many things which required the attention of the president were allowed to remain untouched. And where the vice president for the sake of exigencies like the deployment of soldiers to quell the Jos crisis, he seemed to have acted in breach of the constitution. So strong was the cry for the president to do the right thing that three or four notable law suits were filed in the courts in Abuja with the Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, Abuja, Justice Dan Abutu, giving two judgments that have left many Nigerians wondering where the country was heading to. The Nation (Sat. Feb.,13,2010, p.2). Worse still, the Federal Executive Council (FEC), which Nigerians have looked up to for solution, dismissed their cry as unfounded, adding that the vice president had actually been performing the functions expected of him creditably well. Nigeria was moving steadily but dangerously towards a political and constitutional precipice. Many were of the opinion that Nigeria was experiencing a constitutional crisis.

For the first time in the history of the nation, a retiring Chief Justice of the federation swore in his in-coming successor, allowing those who dismissed the importance of tradition to have their way. For the first time in the history of the nation, a supplementary budget was signed by the ailing president on his hospital bed in far-away Saudi Arabia. Unfazed, the Federal Executive Council (FEC), through the former Attorney-General and the Minister

of Justice, Michael Aondoaka, submitted that the president was not in any way incapacitated and he could exercise his powers from anywhere in the world. Of course, many have said that the president never signed the document; they alleged that his signature was forged.

Soon, a Save Nigeria Group (SNG) sprang up and held many rallies across the nation, calling on the president to do the right thing and empower Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to act as president. He could not do it. (The Nation Sat. Feb.13,2010, p.2) the Federal Executive Council (FEC) became divided following the memo of the Information and Communications Minister, Prof. Dora Akunyili. Before then, many other groups, like former heads of state had also thrown their weights behind Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan becoming acting president. According to Tinubu Asiwaju in (Guardian; Tuesday Feb.9,2010: p.9) "Time to put Nigeria first", "it is not in the interest of anyone to make president Yar' Adua look like a man desperate for power in his sick bed. The man is not in good health. This should be the concern of his family and friends at the moment. It should be our concern as a nation, but not in the atmosphere of recrimination, wrangling, power fixation. He went further to say that the main reason why Yar' Adua's health has become a national obsession is the constitutional snafu it has engendered".

At the end of the day, it was the National Assembly that came to the rescue of the sinking ship of the nation. After a marathon meeting, the senate passed a resolution, hinging its action on the "Doctrine of Necessity" which says that in the absence of a written letter to it by the president and in the face of obvious evidence that he has been very sick and which he confirmed in a broadcast interview with the BBC, the vice president should exercise full presidential powers. Though condemned in some quarters, many Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief, saying that the uncommon ingenuity inherent in all Nigerians has again been demonstrated by the National Assembly. The Nation (Sat. Feb.13,2010, p.2).

### Statement of Problem

In the wake of Yar' Adua's ill-health, various media of mass communication gave coverage to it as well as the ensuing drama that played in King Faisal Specialist hospital in Saudi Arabia, the Federal Executive Council stand on Yar' Adua's sickness, the pressure from various quarters like the Save Nigeria Group, spearheaded by Nobel Laureate professor Wole Soyinka. The African Independent Television (AIT) gave coverage to the Yar' Adua's ill-health and the constitutional logjam it birthed. If indeed AIT gave coverage to the ill-health of Yar' Adua from his previous treatments in the United States, Germany and Saudi Arabia hospitals, what manner of coverage did it give to his ill-health vis-à-vis power vacuum in the presidency? Could it be possible that AIT sensationalized its reportage of the sickness of Yar' Adua? The researcher is not in doubt about the fact that AIT actually gave coverage to the absence of Yar' Adua from the seat of power, but how the Nigerian people, particularly the students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University perceived such coverage in relation to power vacuum has become a source of concern, not only to the researcher, but to all people with critical minds.

Such a scenario has not been envisaged in Nigeria's political scene and therefore triggers off research interest of this nature. A sitting president has never been so incapacitated by ill-health to create a vacuum which the political class refused to fill through constitutional means. Could this equally call for a new manner of reportage by the press? If that is the case, how does the youth/elite population view such reportage? This, the study will unravel.

### Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to evaluate Nnamdi Azikiwe University students' perception of AIT coverage of late President Yar' Adua's ill-health, with a view to access the direction and the influence of such coverage on the students.

This work is aimed at achieving the following:

1. To ascertain if students in NAU actually watch AIT programmes.
2. To establish if the AIT coverage of the Yar' Adua's ill-health was sensationalized and blown out of proportion.
3. To establish if AIT gave preeminence to the coverage of Yar' Adua's sickness leading to power vacuum in the presidency.
4. To ascertain the perception of the students as it concerns AIT's coverage of the president's ill-health.

### Research Questions

The following are the research questions raised to guide the study:

1. Do students in NAU watch AIT?
2. Was the coverage of Yar' Adua's ill-health sensationalized and blown out of proportion?
3. Did AIT give preeminence to the coverage of Yar' Adua's state of health?
4. How do the students perceive media coverage of the president's sickness and subsequent power vacuum in Nigeria then?

### Scope of the Study

Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates' students from various levels of study were taken for this study. The researcher did not go to the extent of examining all the AIT viewers in Awka. Among all the AIT viewers in Awka, the researcher centered on the Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates' students' only. This is however informed by their perceived access to AIT station and their literate background.

### Mass Media Influence

Mass media plays a crucial role in forming and reflecting public opinion, connecting the world to individuals and reproducing the self-image of society. Critiques in the early-to-mid twentieth century suggested that media weaken or delimit the individual's capacity to act autonomously — sometimes being ascribed an influence reminiscent of the telescreens of the dystopian novel *1984*. Mid-20th-century empirical studies, however, suggested more moderate effects of the media. Current scholars present a more complex interaction between the media and society, with the media on generating information from a network of relations and influences and with the individual interpretations and evaluations of the information provided, as well as generating information outside of media contexts. The consequences and ramifications of the mass media relate not merely to the way newsworthy events are perceived (and which are reported at all), but also to a multitude of cultural influences that operate through the media.

The media have a strong social and cultural impact upon society. This is predicated upon their ability to reach a wide audience with a strong and influential message. Marshall McLuhan uses the phrase, "the medium is the message" as a means of explaining how the distribution of a message can often be more important than content of the message itself (McLuhan, Marshall and Fiore Quentin, 1964, pp.8-9). It is through the persuasiveness of media such as television, radio and print media that messages reach their target audiences. These have been influential media as they have been largely responsible for structuring people's daily lives and routines (O'Reagan, 1993. Pp.98). Television broadcasting has a large amount of control over the content society watches and the times in which it is viewed. This is a distinguishing feature of traditional media which New media have challenged by altering the participation habits of the public. "The internet creates a space for more diverse political opinions, social and cultural viewpoints and a heightened level of consumer participation" (Flew, Terry and Humphreys, 2005, pp.101-114). There have been suggestions that allowing consumers to produce information through the internet will lead to an overload of information.

"In the new media the potential to become a mass communicator exist for everybody, Joseph R. Dominick (2009, pp.15-17), a new arrangement makes possible several different levels of communication: one source communicating with one receiver (e-mail), one source communicating with many receivers (cnn.com), a few sources communicating with a few receivers (chat rooms, blogs), and many sources communicating with many receivers (eBay). "note that in this simplified model content is produced not only by organizations but also by individuals, there are no organizational gatekeepers. Communication doesn't proceed from left to right but flows inward". Traditional mass communicators no longer initiate the process. Instead it is possible for the receiver to choose the time and of the interaction.

### Role of Media in a Political Crisis

The mass media form the backbone of a democratic system of governance, the world over; hence it is referred to as the "Fourth Estate" – fourth organ of the Government. Crises are unpredictable events which impact on issues such as viability, credibility and reputation.

Today, political crises are a prominent feature of the environment, and every nation has the potential to experience one, as the late President Yar' Adua's sickness on the Nigerian polity. "The manner in which mass media frame and cover crises can alter a nation's reputation, affect organizational profitability, and ultimately the way the world perceives that nation" (Dalei and Mishra, 2009, pp.18). Television, radio and the print media are pathways of information dissemination and filter public demands. It is how most citizens learn about crises. According to Dalei and Mishra, 2009, pp.18), debate on the Role of Media in a Crisis had raged for a long time now. While some support the absolute freedom of press, after much debate, a consensus was arrived at, which basically outlined two roles, which a responsible, vibrant media like AIT can and should play during a political crisis. They are:

The mass media should act as a watchdog: It should survey the environment by collecting and distributing information quickly and accurately. They must also act as watchdogs on which people can rely, for uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those who have power.

### **Obstacles Faced by the Media**

It is indeed true and unfortunate that media face herculean challenges and hurdles when it comes to objectively reporting a political crisis. The politically interested quarters may exert influence to dictate the policy of the newspapers through owners and the newsmen. The journalists, if over politicized, will also take side with the concept of their likings. The basic principle of objectivity is then lost and the media may play a divisive role during the political crisis. Media have to contend not only with physical danger, while grappling with the demands of their code of ethics on specific unfolding events, but also with regulatory agencies like NBC with strong protective instincts for a government during a political crisis like the Yar'adua's lacuna.

Furthermore, various interest groups and politicians seek to promote their agenda and try to influence the media in their favour. Sometimes, the coverage of the media of a crisis tends to be more in favour of particular section. While such a one-sided coverage is justifiable during political crises precipitated due to religious, ethnic or terrorism related issues, in other cases it might not be the case. Though not a perpetually present problem with a vibrant media, it might not and maybe unwittingly as well, not present both sides of a crisis. As media cannot easily change the opinions of the people but sure can reinforce existing ones, this one-sided coverage may convey a wrong image and help form a wrong perception of the situation.

### **Responsible Journalism and National Security**

The media in a democratic dispensation is the most powerful institution for checks and balances. In modern context, it is even powerful than the executive and the judiciary, when viewed from the perspective of the masses. In recent times however, the media in developing countries especially Nigeria, is coming across as powerless and sycophantic in our democratic environment. Some media houses have been reduced to government/opposition propaganda machines, thereby reneging on their core functions. The media as an institution is responsible for checking the government and its agencies, the judiciary, public officials, civil society groups and the general public. The primary function of educating, informing and entertaining is to ensure cohesion, co-existence and national integration with the end product being development, national unity, peace and happiness. In fact, the media are very important institutions for the protection of civil liberties and human rights. In order to promote this fundamental function, article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". This declaration is unambiguous as it considers the media as the voice of the public and the disadvantaged in society.

However, there is a complex problem to the independence of the media, and as an institution that is supposed to check on the abuse of power by the government and its analogous institution; and also, by politicians. This problem arises when politicians establish media outlets for themselves and use it for their own interest, thus the core role as watchdogs is narrowed; in an election they can use it to shape public opinion to their advantage because the media is an effective tool during elections. What is more, the media are not supposed to covertly or overtly be directed and controlled by private individuals or government for their interests. It must be one that is open, with editorial independence that serves the public interests. The most important responsibility of the media in a democracy is to ensure that elected representatives uphold their oath of office by carrying out the wishes of the electorate. When

the media are seen to be on side of the elected or opposition, it breeds mistrust, suspicions, rightly or wrongly, and leads to credibility problems. There are some communications experts who believe that an antagonistic relationship between the government and the media will be a recipe and healthy element of a functioning democracy.

This is true of the British media which will go to any length to expose the government and corrupt officials. A recent example is the “cash for honours” scandal which nearly rocked the boat for the Labour government. When it comes to the media playing a watchdog role, British media comes second to none. When prime minister (former) Gordon Brown was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was seen as not being media friendly. But today, he rushes to the media at the least opportunity. He is using the media to project his image, though it is difficult for him, he is now full of smiles for the cameras. That is the power of the media. One may ask why the British media are vibrant. The answer is very simple; they protect the public and ensure elected members uphold ethics of their offices. In return, the British public has given protective and control powers to the media. The media therefore mediate between the state and civil society. The British media like all human institutions have their shortcomings; but the public overlooks it because of the trust the people have in it. It is sad to say that the Nigerian media cannot be seen in the same light.

### Press Responsibility

The question has been asked for decades by intellectuals and professionals in media practice. No generally agreeable definition has been reached. And as long as societies differ, none may be reached. The four-part categorization of Hodges (1986) may provide a working definition. The writer sees press responsibility as comprising political, educational, utility and cultural functions. Here, the mass media are expected to inform the citizenry of what goes on in government, which, in a way, keeps rulers in check. Also, the media should be reporting on and promoting discussion of ideas, opinions and truths toward the end of social refinement”; acting as a nation’s “bulletin board” for information and mirroring the society and its peoples just the way they are, thus exposing the heroes and the villains.

These functions should normally be spread across the mass media, ...whether the media are privately or governmentally owned, whether or not the controlling news judgments are made within the news organization itself or by an outside agency (Elliott 1986, pp.34). It is a sincere hope, therefore, to expect the mass media to present wide-ranging accurate information on the polity, educative items adjudged to be in the interest of their audiences and mirror, as accurately as they can, the society of which they are part. Providing exhaustive information does not compel the mass media to give news on everything that happens daily. This is not possible and is not a measure of journalistic responsibility. Every media outlet has its limitations in terms of volume of output. What is judgment of the editors on what should be used and what should not. For as Denton and Woodward (1985) say, *It would be naive to assume that what is reported in any medium represents all the news. The sheer number of events that would qualify as newsworthy will always outstrip the capacity of any number of channels available at any given time.*

Ultimately, fair judgment in the news selection process is the yardstick for measuring responsibility rather than degree of coverage of total news content. It is part of the news judgment criteria that subtly guides what issues dominate public agenda, as Lippmann (1930) accurately observed many years ago: the Press is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. The “episodes” in this case are not discovered; they are only being highlighted or brought to the fore of public consciousness. The beam of a searchlight is guided by the sincere aim of letting audiences of the mass media know what is adjudged right for them to know. This is in keeping with audience expectations of the press as the conscience of the mass audience, Ekpu (1990): Journalism is an endeavour in service of the public good; journalists must be just as dedicated to that good as they are to high professional standards. The question of the degree of success in the performance of these roles also leads to a diversity of answers. No society is perfect and no press anywhere in the world adequately fulfils these expectations without a fault. But most democratic societies are appropriate environments for the press to aspire unto certain heights in the discharge of their responsibilities. Even countries like India, Israel and Pakistan have created environments for their mass media systems to thrive. This is however lacking in most African countries, including Nigeria. Egbon (1988:56) observes that one deduction that can be drawn here is that most of these Nigerian newspapers are incapable of giving adequate service to the masses of this nation because of the hounding fear of molestation from the government if they overstepped their bounds. So,



instead of the press acting like the watchdog of the people as the case should normally be, it remains a chained dog which can only bark but cannot bite.

The Nigerian press, it is clear, has certain unwritten limitations in the discharge of their responsibilities to the audience. So, while on one hand views are expressed for the “unchaining” of the press, counter views are expressed that Nigeria has the “freest press in Africa”. This often-amusing debate has not improved the performance of the Nigerian press in their responsibility to the Nigerian audience. Instead, practitioners seem to live in fear and therefore exercise utmost caution at incurring the wrath of regulators of mass media practice. The Nigerian environment is not ideal for unreserved press commitment to the standards and ethics of the profession, more so in a military system of government. Ekpu (1990) observes: *Journalism is a dangerous venture in the developing world especially where military governments rule. No method of reprisal seems too severe to use against a press that dares to adopt an independent and critical stance. The arbitrary treatment meted out to Newswatch is a case in point. The magazine was “convicted” – without benefit of anything even resembling due process – of an “offence” (sic) which did not even exist at the time it was supposedly committed. The decree of proscription was promulgated after the ban was announced and then backdated – a flagrant example of ex-post de facto legislation.*

This lamentation pictures an aspect of the kind of numerous sanctions that could be faced in developing nations. It clearly shows that some media organizations may seem to have genuine reasons to play safe, at the expense of their professional obligations. It indicates why some practitioners would compromise their stand on issues, or publish slanted news. In such a crisis or professional conflict, the way out always seems to be to give in to the legislative and extra-legislative sanctions, which also include increases in tariffs on production materials, as well as withdrawal of advertisements by government bodies. But the questions would be: Are mass media professional standards and ethics negotiable? In the face of the multiple restrictions of mass media practice in developing countries are they justified in parading themselves as society’s watchdog, the fourth estate of the realm?

### 3. Research Methodology

Survey research method was used to achieve the goal of this study because of its appropriateness as it relates to the nature of the study. Going by the 2009/2010 admission statistics of students in UNIZIK, the population is 15,000. Therefore, the population for this study is 15,000, comprising students from first year to the final year of the school. The researcher took a representative sample to ease the research process. The Taro Yamane’s statistical formula was used to determine the sample size of 390. Stratified random sampling technique was used in the administration of the questionnaire instrument. The generated data from the respondents were presented on tables and analyzed mathematically with the use of simple percentages, to check the relationship or otherwise of the observed and expected frequencies.

### 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 390 copies of questionnaire administered, 384 were returned, and 6 copies got lost, making the mortality rate to be 1.5%. Out of the 384 copies returned, 2 were not properly filled.

These data have been computed on the table below:

**Table 4.1 Access to Television**

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	366	95.8%
No	16	4.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>

In table 4.1, 366 respondents claimed to have access to television. Access here may mean having a domestic television set at home or watching television programmes in one’s neighbor’s house.

**Table 4.2 Frequency of Watching AIT**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Frequently</i>	205	53.7%
<i>Occasionally</i>	161	42.1%
<i>Rarely</i>	0	0%
<i>Not at all</i>	16	4.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>

Presentation on table 4.2 shows that 205 or 53.7% of the respondents claimed to be watching AIT programmes frequently. 161 or 42.1% watch the programmes occasionally, while 16 or 4.2% of them do not watch at all.

**Table 4.3 Abreast with Yar'adua's Sickness on AIT**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Yes</i>	337	88.2%
<i>No</i>	45	11.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>

Data presented on table 4.3 above indicates that 337 or 88.2% of the respondents followed the Yar' Adua's ill-health on AIT.

**Table 4.4 Sensationalization of Yar'adua's Sickness**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Strongly agree</i>	99	25.9%
<i>Agree</i>	184	48.1%
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	51	13.4%
<i>Disagree</i>	48	12.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data computed on table 4.4 reveals that 99 or 25.9% of the respondents agree strongly that AIT sensationalized her coverage of Yar' Adua's ill-health. 184 or 48.1% merely agreed. 51 or 13.4% of them disagreed strongly, while 48 representing 12.6% merely disagreed.

**Table 4.5 Preeminence Given to the Ill-Health by AIT**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Yes</i>	198	51.8%
<i>No</i>	54	14.1%
<i>To some extent</i>	122	32%
<i>Can't say</i>	8	2.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>

Presentation on table 4.5 shows that 198 or 51.8% of the respondents agreed that AIT's coverage of Yar Adua's ill-health were objective. 54 or 14.1% disagreed. 122 or 32% says they are objective to some extent, while 8 or 2.1% of them were indifferent.

**Table 4.6 National Assembly Actions as a Result of Media Hype**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Yes</i>	269	70.4%
<i>No</i>	68	17.8%
<i>I don't know</i>	45	11.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>



Presentation on table 4.6 indicates that 269 or 70.4% of the respondents agreed that the National assembly empowerment of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as Acting President then was as a result of media hype of Yar' Adua's sickness. 68 representing 17.8% of them think otherwise, while 45 or 11.8% of them were indifferent.

**Table 4.7 Medium of Knowledge of his Death**

<b>Medium</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Internet</i>	16	4.2%
<i>Radio</i>	36	9.4%
<i>Tv (ait)</i>	74	19.4%
<i>Nta, mbi &amp; silverbird tv</i>	51	13.4%
<i>Interpersonal medium</i>	205	53.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>

The presentation on table 4.7 indicates that 16 or 4.2% of the respondents got the news of Yar' Adua's sickness through the internet. 36 or 9.4% got it through the radio, 74 or 19.5% got it through AIT while 51 or 13.4% got it through NTA, MBI, and Silverbird television stations. But majority of them (205 or 53.6%) got it through the interpersonal channels.

**Table 4.8 Rating of AIT Performance**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Very high</i>	194	50.8%
<i>High</i>	168	43.9%
<i>Poor</i>	6	1.6%
<i>Can't say</i>	14	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.8 shows that 194 or 50.8% of the respondents rated AIT very high in her professional duties. 168 or 43.9% of them rated AIT high. But 6 or 1.6% of the respondents rated AIT low, while 14 representing 3.7% were indifferent.

### Analysis of Research Questions

The data collected as presented on the tables have been used in analyzing the research questions

#### Research Question 1

Do students of Nnamdi Azikiwe university watch AIT?

Data collected from question 5 as computed on table 4.1.6 was used in analyzing the research question one.

In table 4.6, the data collected as presented indicated that 337 or 88.2% of the respondents do watch AIT programmes. Although many alternative television stations are receivable within the Awka metropolis, almost all the students watching AIT programmes.

As shown in table 4.9, 266 or 69.6% of the respondents also watch other television stations like NTA, Silverbird Tv, ABS Tv, and Minaj. Despite the fact that they have several television stations, they selectively expose themselves to the programmes of AIT. This is in conformity with the selective exposure principle of access to the media. On the same table 4.1.9, none of the respondents claimed not to be watching other stations. In terms of frequency of watch, table 4.1.7 gave a good picture in that regard. From the table, 205 or 53.7% of the respondents do watch AIT programmes frequently, while 161 representing 42.1% claimed to be watching the programmes occasionally. Except 16 or 4.2% who were indifferent, nobody claimed to rarely watch AIT programmes. The implication here is that the collected data gave statistical support to the research question one, and this means that students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka do watch AIT programmes.

#### Research Question 2

Was the coverage of Yar' adua's ill-health sensationalized?

Data collected from question 9 as computed on table 4.1.10 was used in the analysis of this research question.

The data as presented on table 4.1.10 gave strong statistical support to this research question. From the table, 99 representing 25.9% of the respondents agreed strongly that AIT sensationalized their reports of the Yar' Adua's ill-health, while 184 or 48.1% equally agreed but not strongly. The import of this is that although AIT tried her best in the coverage of Yar' Adua's absence, there was high rate of sensationalism of the reports that attended the absence from office, his inability to transmit letter to the National Assembly, in line with sections 144 and 145 of the 1999 constitution, as well as the manner with which his aides handled the health information. It was as a result of this sensational coverage that put the entire polity under fire that eventually made the National Assembly to empower the then Vice-President to act in the capacity of President.

### Research question 3

Did AIT give preeminence to the coverage of Yar' adua's state of health above other issues then?

The data as collected from question 10, and presented on table 4.1.11 was used in analyzing this research question. In table 4.1.11, only 54 or 14.1% disagreed that AIT did not give preeminence to its coverage of the late president's ill-health above other issues then. But 198 or 51.8% and 122 or 32% of the respondents answered Yes and to some extent respectively. This research question also got statistical support from the data collected as tested.

Taking a look at the data collected, it became obvious that AIT placed the late president's sickness and the attendant power vacuum high and above every other story in their reports then. There was a high degree of preeminence in AIT's reports of the Yar'Adua's ill-health.

### Research Question 4

How do the students perceive media coverage of the president's sickness and subsequent power vacuum in Nigeria then?

Data collected from question 13 as computed on table 4.1.14 was used in analyzing this research question.

Students of NAU (respondents) gave credit to the Nigerian mass media (AIT in particular) for the manner they handled the political logjam in Nigeria then. In response to question 13 as computed on table 4.1.14, 239 or 62.6% of the respondents agreed that the mass media did a good job then, while 105 or 27.4% also agreed that, to some extent, the mass media did a good job by taking Nigeria out of the woods. Only 38, representing 10%, did not agree that the mass media did a good job. But the bottom line was that, the mass media did well by managing the events in such a way that Nigeria scaled through the troubled sea with their coverage of the late Yar' Adua's sickness. The collected data, here, gave statistical support to this research question also.

### Summary of Findings

The major findings of this study are as summarized below.

1. The study revealed that undergraduate students of NAU and by extension Nigerian youths do watch AIT programmes. Those who have access to Television will prefer AIT against other television stations.
2. To a great extent, the coverage of Yar'Adua's ill-health was given much preeminence above other issues then by the Nigerian media, most especially the broadcast media.
3. Despite the high dosage of sensationalism in the coverage, there was some element of objectivity in their reports, despite the population notion of subjectivity. Here, the study upturned the inglorious view of the media as highly subjective.
4. The outcome of the analysis equally revealed that the media coverage of the late president's sickness almost made the military to take over because the reports over-heated the polity.
5. That the action of the National Assembly in empowering Goodluck Jonathan as Acting-President then, in the name of "principle of necessity" was informed by media report. Here, the media set agenda even for law makers.
6. Nigerians have a renewed belief and hope in the media as good agents of an emerging democratic society like Nigeria. The Nigerian people rated the media very high in the performance of their professional and social responsibility roles.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research work, the researcher concludes that the mass media, particularly Television, is a pillar of any society, Nigeria inclusive. No society can stay together without the cooperation of the journalists in such societies.

The researcher also concludes that we must learn from the mistakes of the past, by not trivializing the power of the media. That Nigeria, as a political entity is still standing today is as a result of the media people. The centrality and all-important roles of the media cannot be down-played in any society.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

1. Media practitioners must understand the central position they occupy in any democratic dispensation or in any society. In this guise, they must re-dedicate themselves to the consolidation of the Nigerian democratic structure.
2. Nigerian government must as a matter of necessity prevail on the National Assembly to pass the Freedom of Information Bill. This will prevent the secrecy that attended the management of information on late Yar'Adua's sickness.
3. The National Assembly should urgently enact a law forbidding government from owning any broadcast media (Radio and Television) in Nigeria. NTA as a government owned TV station failed woefully during the 2009/2010 political logjam that attended the Yar'Adua's sickness.
4. The NUJ should be made to have a stake in National Security. In this regard, the union must be represented in all the security agencies like; the Army, Police, State Security Service, Immigration, Air force, Navy and the rest. This will provide a good interchange of information as it relates to National Security when reporting some sensitive issues like the health of a sick president.
5. Journalists must brace up to the challenges of investigative journalism as quickly as possible.
6. Future researchers are encouraged to re-study this research problem. But in doing this, they should take a broader scope of study, so as to refute or replicate the outcome of this research.

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