Censorship of information and the Nigerian society

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Censorship is based on the fact that every society has customs, taboos or laws by which speech, dress, religious observance, and sexual expressions are regulated in order to protect the family, the church and the state. This work therefore discussed censorship; it brought to the fore, its historical development, various conceptions, purpose, various methods by which it may be carried out, challenges, controversies, legal guidelines, and its relation to the Nigerian society.

Key words: Censorship, information resources, information explosion, information overload, library, library materials, library resources, education, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Statistically, the amount of information produced in Nigeria, like every other country in the world, increases by 30% every year. Every day, with the invention of the printing press, telephone and computers, Nigerians are bombarded with plethora of information in all forms. In the morning, we pick up the paper; watch the news; we listen to the radio, and as we step out of the house, there are advertisements on billboards and on buses. Also, at the workplace, there are mass e-mails, papers, work orders, forms to fill out, there is the web to surf; and in the library, there are different types of information materials to read.

A study conducted by the University of California at Berkeley showed that 800 mega bytes of stored information are produced per person, per year. Even in recent years, the production of information has increased to a very great extent. It is overwhelming, it is mind boggling, it is information explosion and overload. In Nigeria, we are faced with the challenge of digesting it all, processing and making some sense of it. Information explosion and overload (that is, information without adequate control) has serious implications / threats to the Nigerian environment, workplace, academy, library, and our own peace of mind, anywhere in the world.

Reichman (1988) asserted that books are so prolific and tends to be “turning against human kind”. He added “we might be informing ourselves to death”. He concluded that information flow does not have to be negative; there is hope. Just as technology is evolving, so is our ability to cope with it, information is not an exception either”. The hope here, in this age of information explosion and overload in Nigeria, is inevitably “censorship”; else, some information disseminated would do more harm than good.

Every ethnic group in Nigeria has its own unique cultural heritage and stories of where its ancestors came from. These vary from tales of people descending from the sky to stories of migration from far-off places. This, to a very great extent, regulates the kind of information that is allowed to circulate in the Nigerian society, as there is need for tolerance of all cultures for the purpose of peaceful co-existence.

MEANING OF CENSORSHIP

Censorship is seen as the control of the information and ideas circulated within a society. Reichman (1988) sees censorship as “the removal, suppression or restricted circulation of literary, artistic or educational materials on the grounds that they are morally or otherwise objectionable in the light of standards applied by the censor”. Yet, as he points out, ”virtually any decision made by school board members concerning what is taught, used and learned in school can be viewed as censorship”. It could also be seen as the examination of books, plays, films, television and radio programs, news reports, and other forms of communication for the purpose of altering or suppressing ideas found to be objectionable, harmful, or offensive. Censorship can be prior or post.
Prior censorship

This is when an information material is being banned or censored before publication. This may be done by publishers, government and its agencies, organizations, individuals, religious or other associations, etc. and may be done by force or negotiations.

Post censorship

This is when an information material is banned or censored after it has been published. A good example is the banning of Idris Abdukareem’ Nigeria djagha djagha by the then President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Types of censorships in the Nigerian society

Moral censorship: This is the banning of materials because they are morally objectionable to the various/some of the cultural norms in the Nigerian society, knowing that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society, having numerous sets of norms and values.

Military censorship: In Nigeria, this is the banning of information materials that tend to expose military tactics and national information; for security reasons.

Political censorship: This occurs when the Nigerian government needs to keep secrets from its civilians in order to prevent disruption. Though democracy does not support this, yet in some circumstance, it is necessary for the saving of the state, calling to mind that Nigeria has always have the tendency of splitting.

Religious censorship: In Nigeria, two major religions dominate: Christianity and Islam. Religious censorship is therefore the banning of materials because they are religiously questionable.

Corporate censorship: Corporations can ban (by negotiation, unless it has monopoly) materials unfitting to them or their partners. In Nigeria, this kind of censorship is very rare as there are no much corporations with monopoly. Many of the public corporations are yet under government control. Hence the only monopoly is the government, but fortunately to say, it is democracy.

THE CENSOR

A censor is one that condemns or censures. He could be seen as an officer trained to undertake the job of censorship. He is also one who uses certain criteria, as may be determined by the society or community, to condemn or censor ideas found to be objectionable, harmful or offensive. In the Nigerian settings, the governments at various levels, through their agencies could be regarded as censors. Clergymen in Nigeria also major censors, over 90% of the Nigerian population is loyal to one religion or the other. Individuals, at their own levels also act censors.

Historical development of censorship

Censorship and the ideology supporting it could be traced back to ancient times, and to the fact that every society has customs, taboos, or laws by which speech, dress, religious observance, and sexual expression are regulated. In Athens for instance, where democracy first emerged, censorship was well known as a means of enforcing the prevailing orthodoxy (orthodoxy means a generally accepted way of life). Indeed, Plato was the first recorded thinker to formulate a rationale for intellectual, religious, and artistic censorship. In his ideal state outlined in “The Republic”, official censors would prohibit mothers and nurses from relating tales deemed bad or evil. Plato also proposed that unorthodox notions about God or the hereafter be treated as crimes and that formal procedures be established to suppress heresy. Freedom of speech in Ancient Rome was reserved for those in positions of authority. The poets Ovid and Juvenal were both banished, and authors of seditious writings were punished severely. The emperor Nero deported his critics and burned their books.

Unique historical considerations, beliefs, culture, religion and other related factors have originated the idea of censorship in any society. Perhaps the best example is the "Haßsprache" (hate speech) law in Germany. It states that it is illegal, under German law, to depict any kind of glorification of the Nazis or even to display the emblem of the swastika. The law is enforced to the point where even historical battle simulations may not use the actual emblems that were used during World War II. Significantly, almost all of Germany's close neighbors and allies have similar laws.

Purpose of censorship in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the purpose of censorship has varied, with some censors targeting material deemed to be indecent or obscene; heretical or blasphemous; or seditious or treasonous. Thus, ideas have been suppressed under the guise of protecting three basic social institutions: the family, the church, and the Nigerian governments.
Protection of religious beliefs in Nigeria

The organized church soon joined the Nigerian government as an active censor. The Biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain" is clearly an early attempt to set limits on what would be acceptable theological discourse. Likewise, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" is an attempt to set limits on how the Divine may or may not be represented. (And no one, in any land, should think this is anachronistic. Across the world today, appeals to divinity are common reasons for banning the dissemination of a broad range of materials). In Nigeria, censorship is no more acceptable for being practiced in the name of religion than for national security, as protecting the church is protecting the state because the government is comprised of the church members.

Protection of the State

Nigerian national security and defense runs a very close to the religious impulse as a rationale for suppression of information. While nowhere near as old as the religious impulse to censor, in its more modern form it has been even more pervasive. And while the influence of religion on secular affairs is muted in Nigeria, the influence of governments usually is not. It is difficult to think of any government that would forego the power, in perceived extreme circumstances, to censor all media, not simply those that appear online. The question, asked in a real world scenario, is what could be considered extreme enough circumstances to justify such action? In the Nigerian context, governments have used a powerful array of techniques and arguments to marshal support for their censorship efforts. One of the earliest, as noted, is the religious argument. Certain things are deemed to be offensive in the eyes of the Deity. These things vary from country to country, religion to religion, even sect to sect. They are mostly, though not always, sexual in nature. The commentaries on the nature of the impulse to be censorious towards sexual expression are too numerous even for a wide ranging project like this. The curious reader is urged to read far and wide in the classic texts to see that the problem of Nigerian governments and her citizens reacting in this way is not a new one. What's new is the potential global consequence(s).

Protection of the family

In Nigeria, parental claims certainly have a place in the dialogue, but they can cut across meaningful lines of discourse as well. Despite the presence of a widespread and deadly worldwide epidemic Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), there are parents who object to the teaching of safe sex models in Nigerian public schools. Such objections pose an obvious problem: do their rights as the parents of their own children supersede the rights of all children in a classroom (or library, or online community) to have access to information that could save their lives? In Nigeria, the legal precedents, which usually provide clear guidelines in such matters, are mixed here. Courts have ordered operations and vaccinations in the public health interest, but courts have also ruled that religious beliefs are a compelling answer to public concerns. The question is not whether there are legitimate parental claims, but rather at what point is there a public interest that overrides them? Is it only in matters of imminent and life-threatening danger or does it extend beyond that clearly delineated realm?

METHODS OF CENSORSHIP IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, not all censorship arises from government or external force. There are various ways materials are being censored. Some of this ways are:

Self-censorship

People self-censor all the time; such restraint can be part of the price of rational dialogue. The artist Ben Shahn's poster illustration reads: "You have not converted a man because you have silenced him." Silence can indicate a forced assent, or conversely, it can be contemplative, a necessary part of dialogue that rises above the din of quotidian life.

Censorship through consensus

In Nigerian, there is the adherence to a shared social, though not religious, code as a fact of life. Understanding that entails discerning where the boundaries of expression are, and where they might be interfered with in a consensus situation.

Economic/political censorship

In Nigeria, individuals tend to censor information for economic or political reasons. Economic censorship has its roots in the Roman essayist Cicero's immortal phrase "Cui bono?" (Who Profits? "Follow the money"). In a
situation where there is economic censorship, is it isolated or undertaken in conjunction with some type of political censorship? Is there a monopoly within Nigeria that is threatened by competition, or a class of oligarchs that is threatened by the emergence of real economic opportunity for smaller firms? Is the economy in a locale in Nigeria more prone to monopolistic arrangements than to genuine competition and innovation? These are questions to be answered if the economic censorship is necessary in Nigeria.

Internet censorship

On a different level, the actions and reactions of large corporations to the Internet has to be factored into any discussion of economic censorship. Some firms have paid search engine companies for preferential placement in particular subject categories when a user submits an online search inquiry. Is the information tainted because someone has paid for it to be "found," or should the standard be that so long as all responsive information is displayed to the user, placement is irrelevant?

So many nations of the world are now considering the filtering system known as PICS (Platform for Internet Content Selections) as an answer to their concerns, thus the question of parental controls also must be addressed. In many countries, the state justifies censorship with the claim that it is acting in loco parentis. Such claims, whether interpreted as "state as parent" or "state as Big Brother," are responsible for many of the restrictions on information distribution found today across the world.

Usually, that question is most clearly seen in the restriction of the so-called "obscene" or "pornographic" material online. This is probably the most pervasive type of censorship around the world, even though the behavior it seeks to limit is, almost by definition, private and personal in the most fundamental way. "I know it when I see it," a U.S. Supreme Court Justice once said of obscene material. The judge spoke more truth than he realized: different nations across the world have different thresholds for what they consider pornographic material. In some locales, it is a bare male torso that crosses the line, while in others, any depiction of pubic hair, whereas still others permit any activity between consenting adults.

Censorship through intimidation in Nigeria

In Nigeria, there is also a form/method of censorship that is not so obtrusive, and that have to be examined very carefully to define. This is referred to "censorship through intimidation". It can be anything from threats against individuals to a government proposing to monitor all activities online. If citizens feel their activities will be screened by governmental agencies in Nigeria, their inclination to engage in expression will be much less than if their governments stay away.

Censorship by curriculum in Nigeria

What schools should teach and what materials they should use are fundamental questions that cannot be answered easily in a democracy in Nigeria. For example, Reichman (1988) argues that censors "produce a sterile conformity and a lack of intellectual and emotional growth in students." Others see a need for a censorship process in education and believe "children are being harmed from our failure to protect them from the tension of premature adulthood" (Wynne, 1985).

Challenges of censorship in Nigeria

A comprehensive report published by the National School Boards Association (Chion-Kenney, 1987) indicates that censorship challenges are widespread in Nigeria (occurring in almost every state) and effective (almost one-third of them resulted in materials being removed from schools or their use restricted). Ultimately, Chion-Kenney (1987) asserts, "the challenge is not to avoid censorship, but to meet it head on with adequate policies and procedures that provide an open forum for deciding what should -- or should not -- take place in Nigerian public schools."

Another major challenge of censorship is obvious in question "how can those who hold to minority viewpoints seek to have their concerns addressed by the schools without being labeled ‘censors’?" Likewise, how is the professional judgment (and at the secondary level, academic freedom) of educators to be weighed against the desires of the Nigerian community and parents that their children not to be exposed to certain materials or experiences?

CONTROVERSIES IN CENSORSHIP IN NIGERIA

Controversies in censorship could be avoided, or if has already occurred, can be handled.

Avoiding controversy in censorship issues

Good internal communications and public relations offer the best way to avoid unnecessary controversy. Districts need sound written policies, procedures, and criteria that
are "developed cooperatively by teachers, administrators and school board members, with formal approval given by the Board".

The district must specify criteria for making curriculum judgments, identify personnel to make those decisions, and provide written rationales for including or excluding potentially controversial materials. These policies should be reviewed yearly. Broad support should be sought from local, state, and national organizations that are committed to academic freedom. In Nigeria, Mikulecky (1981) suggests several strategies:

(a) Work to dispel the idea that only one text can be used for a specific skill or theme.
(b) Invite parents to participate in developing school reading programs.
(c) Give suggested, rather than required, reading lists.
(d) Develop files of professional reviews for the support of materials.
(e) Ask for clauses in collective bargaining agreements that protect academic freedom and require agreed-on selection policies and procedures.

Handling controversies on censorship issues

In Nigeria, a school board might win a case legally, "but lose it in the court of public opinion" (Chion-Kenney, 1987). Censorship officials need to "keep a distance" from their personal beliefs, concentrate on what is "educationally sound," and not get lost in trying to avoid legal problems. "You cannot avoid lawsuits," Gregory says, "but you can avoid losing them." To do so, school boards need to gather the real facts in each situation: "Listen to people's complaints, follow up, do not accept as truth the conclusions of others, understand where they are coming from, and investigate."

Educators should follow clearly defined procedures from their initial response to the complaint through to its resolution:

(a) Meet with the complainant and try to resolve the issue informally.
(b) Failing that, ask for a written complaint specifying in detail (page citations, quotes, and so forth) the questionable material, the negative effects that material is believed to have on students, and what replacement materials are recommended.
(c) Provide a copy of published district policies for controversial materials and explain the procedures to be followed.
(d) Assign a review committee to provide the school board with a final report.
(e) Inform the complainant of the review process and when committee meetings are scheduled.
(f) Provide for an appeals process.
(g) While the complaint is being investigated, the controversial material should remain available, except possibly to the student whose family has filed an objection.

The courts have made it clear that the school board has the ultimate legal responsibility for the district (Haiman, 1987). School officials operate only with powers delegated to them by the board. Accordingly, school boards must stand ready to receive appeals in a careful and defined manner. Handling complaints can help schools gain a balanced view on controversial issues. "As a check both on unavoidable human error and on the occasionally arbitrary exercise of authority, such challenges may be viewed as an essential element in the overall selection process."

LEGAL GUIDELINES FOR CENSORSHIP IN NIGERIA

The legal trends in censorship issues, as they can be deduced from Supreme Court cases in Nigeria, are very broad and tend to support the schools, but they embody a stern warning to educators to stay in touch with the communities they are supposed to be serving.

The First Amendment applies to both "the students' rights to know and the teachers' rights to academic freedom," says Jenkinson (1986). But parents also, he argues, "have the right to protest," particularly regarding materials they consider detrimental to their children or unsuitable for students in general.

In the landmark case Island Trees Union Free High School v. Pico (1982), the Court ruled that the school board had to give a legitimate reason for removing a number of books from its library. Six years and three court battles later, the banned books were returned to the shelves after the Court declared that the "Constitution does not permit the official suppression of ideas" (Parker and Weiss, 1983; Jenkinson, 1986).

While the courts appear to be allowing schools broad discretion with respect to curriculum materials, methods, and programs, Haiman (1987) points out that "there are limits to this discretion. It is not permissible to promote politically partisan or narrow ideological views, it must not violate contractual obligations, and it must basically respect due process rights of both students and teachers." Thus, in the Pico case, Justice Brennan's plurality opinion indicated that the use of "established, regular, and facially unbiased procedures for the review of controversial materials" would help to provide a basis for resolving such conflicts both locally and, when need be, in the courts.
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CENSORSHIP AND ACQUISITION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS IN NIGERIA

According to one point of view, censorship cannot be clearly distinguished from the gate keeping function that is exercised by those who select materials for use in libraries. One of the goals of selection, say adherents of this position, is that of protecting patrons from materials judged to be inappropriate. "It is right," argues Wynne, "for us to restrict their choices among media materials or prohibit self-seeking publishers from selling certain harmful materials." Others question the wisdom of excluding topics from the library, when it is obvious that users are also exposed to a barrage of these excluded topics through other sources, such as the media.

To prevent selection decisions from becoming synonymous with endorsement of content, selection should be guided by policies. According to Reichman (1988), "selection policies" should balance the concerns of a wide variety of groups and be carried out by trained professionals who "take into account, and work with the library community, and goals and objectives of the parent body" and maintain "a high tolerance for our national diversity."

METHODOLOGY

Research question
1. Is there censorship of information in the Nigerian society?
2. How effective is censorship of information in the Nigerian society?
3. How is censorship of information carried out in the Nigerian society?

Design
The design used for this study is the descriptive survey method. Winner and Dominic (1988), cited in Egbule (2007:19) stated that descriptive survey research method attempts to picture or document current conditions or attitudes... it describes what exists at the moment. Egbule (2007) concur that the descriptive survey examines the opinions, attitudes or feelings of individuals about a particular problem, condition or situation. Also, according to Peretomode (1992), it deals with the present and oriented towards the determination of current status of a situation/condition.

Research population
The population of the study include all librarians, information experts, cyber café operators, managers/directors of media houses, journalist, news reporters, and any body that collects, organises and/or disseminates information in the Nigerian society.

Sample and sampling procedure
As a result of various constraints, only 3,600 subjects were selected at random, 100 from each of the 36 states of Nigeria. Abuja which is the capital was neglected as it is regarded as no-man's land by Nigerians. The randomness was to ensure equal opportunity of being selected for the study (Peretomode, 1992).

Research instrument
The instrument used for the study was the questionnaire. It was titled A Questionnaire on the Censorship of Information in the Nigerian Society. The questionnaire comprised Sections A, which dealt with the demographic factors of the respondents, and B, which dealt with the contained items that are well constructed and graduated to elicit the opinions and responses of the respondents on the subject matter. Their responses were simply in a scale of Agree (A) and Disagree (D).

Validity of the instrument
To ensure validity of the questionnaire, it was subjected to scrutiny and criticism both in face and content by the researchers and experts in the field of education and research.

Reliability of the Instrument
To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, ten (100) copies of the constructed questionnaire were administered to selected respondents outside the sampled subjects. After a period of two weeks, the instrument was re-administered on the same persons after which the reliability index was calculated to be r=0.76 using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

Administration of the instrument
For effect and efficiency, the researcher personally administered some copies of the questionnaire while he was aided by assistants in areas not so close to him. The instruments were retrieved immediately after completion to avoid loss or misplacement of the instrument.

Data analysis
The simple percentage method was used to analyse the data gathered.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data presentation and analyses
From Table 1, it is obvious that there is censorship of information in the Nigerian society as depicted by "100% agree" response to the statement. The table also shows that censorship of information in the Nigerian society is moderately effective as depicted by the "58.75% agree" response to the statement. It is further shown in the table that there is self-censorship of information; censorship through intimidation; censorship by curriculum and other methods of censorship of information in the Nigerian
Table 1. Data presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Agree (A) (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (D) (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is censorship of information in the Nigerian society.</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship of information in the Nigerian society is very effective.</td>
<td>653(18.14)</td>
<td>2,947(81.86)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship of information in the Nigerian society is moderately effective.</td>
<td>2,115(58.75)</td>
<td>1,485(41.25)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship of information in the Nigerian society is not effective.</td>
<td>832(23.22)</td>
<td>2,768(76.88)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-censorship of information is carried out in Nigerian.</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet-censorship of information is carried out in Nigerian.</td>
<td>1,554(43.17)</td>
<td>2,046(56.83)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Nigerian society, there is censorship through intimidation.</td>
<td>1,789(49.70)</td>
<td>1,811(50.30)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is censorship by curriculum in the Nigerian society.</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are other methods of censorship in the Nigerian society.</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3,600(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

society this is depicted by the “100, 49.70 and 100% agree” responses respectively, but there is almost like no internet-censorship of information in Nigeria as indicated by the “56.83% disagree” response.

Discussion of findings

The purpose of this study has been to find out:

1. If there is censorship of information in the Nigerian society.
2. How effective is censorship of information in the Nigerian society?
3. Methods by which censorship of information is carried out in the Nigerian society.

To these questions, as deduced from the data presentation and analyses, it was found out that there is censorship of information in the Nigerian society; it is moderately effective; and the methods by which it is carried out include self-censorship of information; censorship through intimidation; censorship by curriculum and other methods.

Conclusion

This study succeeded in reviewing the concept of censorship as relating to the Nigerian society. The major social institutions in Nigeria are the family, church and government. Censorship is meant to protect these institutions as any effect on any would definitely affect the others because they go hand-in-hand. Though there are numerous challenges on censorship, it is recommended therefore that it should be given priority, as the wrong information digested could cause a lot of havoc to the Nigerian society, and so is any other society in the world. Unlike any other time, censorship is more needed now than never before, especially with the internet in place and the concept of intellectual freedom gaining weight. It is not every information that is needed thus censorship, when carried out adequately would help focus individuals’ attention on necessary information rather than volume of information. With censorship, the focus therefore shifts from quantity to quality of information in the Nigerian society, thus helping the society to develop, better, faster, more.

REFERENCES